Launching dedicated efforts to help farmers with uptake of improved varieties and technologies, a series of agriculture input fairs were inaugurated that bring together input suppliers, distributors and farmers and provides a platform for strengthening partnerships.

The agriculture input fairs in Sikasso region create awareness about new sorghum and millet varieties and hybrids, new technologies for enhancing and sustaining increased productivity and provide opportunities to farmers to make best choices for the cropping season. Thus, they become a critical event at the beginning of the cropping season in this region.

“The objective of these fairs is to link quality input suppliers and distributors to farmers in an efficient and timely manner for the cropping season. Also, they promote the establishment of exchange and partnership platform between producers, agro dealers and input suppliers,” said Mrs Aminata Coulibaly Tangara, National Director, Mali Agricultural Market Development Trust (MALIMARK) during the launch.

The agricultural input fairs are being held as part of Africa RISING large-scale Diffusion of Technologies for Sorghum and Millet Systems (ARDT_SMS) project communication strategy towards improving awareness of targeted rural communities on:

- Availability and potential benefits of new improved sorghum and millet varieties and hybrids;
- Availability and benefits of seed treatment technology for enhancing seedling vigor and reducing risk of disease attack;
- Potential benefits of integrated cereal-legume cropping systems such as groundnut and cowpea with sorghum and pearl millet.

“It has been established that quality and well-treated seeds alone increases productivity by about 30%. We think that inputs have a prominent role in the success of the cropping season and in 2015-2016 special attention is being given to this,” said Mr Paul Dembélé, Agricultural Director of Sikasso region on the occasion of the launch in Bougouni district on 11 June.

“For agriculture to be profitable our farmers should be offered opportunities to learn and master the appropriate technologies. One thing is to acquire fertilizer, another is..."
Reaching quality inputs... from page 1

their efficient use,” said the Representative of the Mayor of Bougouni.

After the launch in Bougouni, the fairs were organized by MALIMARK in five other locations, Koutiala, Kléla, Sikasso, Niéna, and Zantiébougou.

“The fairs help us to achieve our goals, especially with regard to improving farmers awareness and access to new technologies of millet and sorghum and strengthening of agricultural inputs traders networks”, said Dr John Nzungize, Technology Uptake Specialist, ICRISAT and Coordinator, ARDT_SMS project.

Mr Dembélé invited farmers to use the quality inputs, “The agricultural directorate of Sikasso region is working with partners and this year will emphasize on new technologies aimed at judicious use of inputs, especially seeds and fertilizer to help farmers produce more at lower cost.”

“I am happy to be of help in providing quality inputs to producers, thus preventing the utilization of counterfeit products found in the markets that may affect the quality of farmers, production and their health,” said Mr Nonon Diarra, Representative of Crop Life in Mali.

ARDT_SMS project focuses on diffusion of proven technologies for raising the productivity and profitability of sorghum and pearl millet, principal cereals of Mali, thereby raising incomes of farmers. The government of Mali puts emphasis on quality seeds and good fertilizer supply as well as their efficient usage.

The project will build on existing institutional capacities, bringing together many different partners to pursue technology diffusion through multiple, contrasting approaches to meet the needs and opportunities of men and women farmers.

Bhoo Samrudhi Workshop

A planning meeting was held for the project “Improving Rural Livelihoods through Innovative Scaling-up of Science-led Participatory Research for Development” for the state of Karnataka, India. The Government of Karnataka (GoK) has decided to scale-up the integrated systems approach to eight districts by adding four new districts.

The workplans for all eight districts across four departments: agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and sericulture were deliberated and finalized based on discussions and suggestions. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Latha Krishna Rao, Additional Chief Secretary cum Development Commissioner, Government of Karnataka and was attended by 60 participants.

The project is termed Bhoo Samrudhi, meaning ‘Land Prosperity’, and was earlier known as Bhoochetana Plus. The state level coordination meeting-cum-planning workshop was held at ICRISAT headquarters on 22 June. This project is an initiative of GoK and various CGIAR institutes.
A strong trend of people moving out of agriculture, women playing a greater role, increasing trend in average age of farmers, declining landholding per capita, and increasing tenancy farming are different elements of the mosaic of agricultural transformation in Bangladesh.

Below are some insights gained from surveys of more than 500 households in 12 villages across 11 districts. A wide range of data collected since 1988 shows a range of trends.

**Broad trends**
The annual per capita income in these villages increased 2.4 times between 1988 and 2013 to about US$ 450, with the share of agriculture in primary occupation going down by more than 50%. Overall poverty nearly halved to 30%, but the figures vary widely between villages.

These improvements were associated with increased employment in farm and non-farm sector, an expansion of irrigation, adoption of modern varieties, accumulation of agricultural and non-agricultural capital, access to agricultural credit, market access through better roads and infrastructure, education attainment and expansion of the rural non-farm economy. Migration within and outside the country also played an important role.

**Village views**
When asked in 2013 what were some of their biggest challenges, the main issues identified by the farmers were: lack of good quality seeds and improved technologies (100%), higher prices of inputs and cost of production (100%), low prices of outputs and low profit in agriculture (92%), scarcity and cost of labor (92%), requirement of high inputs and adulteration of fertilizer and pesticides (82%) and poor transport system and market access (75%).

**Special insights**
Special purpose surveys have also examined gender dynamics of agricultural diversification, livelihood diversification, rice technology adoption and impact, and groundwater markets.

A recent survey on use of rice hybrids by 510 farmers provided information on adoption level, productivity and profitability, along with the advantages and constraints faced by the farmers with a view to articulating the technology need and policy intervention for sustainable intensification.

Crop diversification remains low in Bangladesh, with rice covering 76% of the cropped area. In the last 25 years the share of Aus (pre-wet season) rice declined from 27% to 9% of the area, with Boro (dry season) rice more than doubling from 19% to 42% due to the increase in irrigation. Nearly all of the Aus and Boro season rice and 70% of Aman (wet season) rice grown are high yielding varieties, leading to an increase in average rice yield from 2.4 t per ha to 4.15 t per ha.

**Influence**
VDSA data is being used by government and donors to plan and direct funding, for example in Bangladesh’s 7th Five-Year Plan, the major programs of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Bangladesh and those of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“The data tells you how people move out of poverty into prosperity. This is very useful for donors who can pinpoint exactly where they want to intervene to get the maximum value for their investment,” said Dr Samarendu Mohanty, Head of IRRI’s Social Sciences Division.

In Bangladesh the VDSA project is overseen by IRRI. The project undertakes surveys in villages at varied times, from weekly through to annually.

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**Project: Village Dynamics in South Asia**
This work is now incorporated as part of the RESEARCH PROGRAM ON POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND MARKETS

**Investor:**
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

**Partners:**
IRRI & Socio-Consult, Bangladesh,
ICAR-RCER, IIWM, NIAP and ICRISAT, India
Readers’ comment
The recent issue highlights the importance of IPM. IPM is very much imperative in residue free production of fruits, vegetables, cereals and other agri-produce required for export and indigenous markets. ICRISAT’s team has well demonstrated that the residue-free cotton, pigeon pea, chickpea and vegetables can be produced employing IPM in farm practices. Use of IPM also helped to keep the soil, water and air free from contamination. The efforts of ICRISAT are appreciated.

– Dr JC Rajput
Director (R&D), Nirmal Seeds Pvt Ltd