

Feedback Report: The National Training on Characterization of Rice (2012-13 and 2013-14)

Sanjay Patil (2012 – 2013):

It was a great experimental learning experience for me and I was lucky to attend Rice characterization workshop at Muniguda, Orissa under the guidance of Dr. Debal Deb, great scientist who had devoted his life for conserving amazing rice diversity of India.

This workshop had make me to understand following with

- How rice came into world?
- Rice biology
- Purification of rice landraces without disturbing its originality
- Participatory seed selection methods
- Characterization of rice diversity as per national and international guidelines
- Cultivation of rice crop by using organic inputs.
- Rice germplasm collection and storage.
- Maintaining rice genetic diversity at on farm level

Dr. Debal taught us simple methods of rice characterization (Measuring grain length and grain width using simple graph paper)

What I had done after Rice characterization workshop?

- Characterization of 33 paddy landraces.
- Maintenance of more than 200 paddy landraces at on farm level.
- Maintaining seed purity
- Collection of germplasm by panicle selection method

and its my strong feeling that this workshop need to be continued for seed savers, farmers, extension workers in different parts of India for keeping their rice diversity genetically pure along with its agro morphological data.

It's very needful initiative by OFAI for conserving and reviving rice genetic diversity, as OFAI is National network, OFAI should focus on characteriation, seed production of millets, vegetables, tubers etc to build capacity of grass root workers like me.

Soumik Banerjee (2013 -14):

I had the opportunity to attend the Rice Characterization Workshop held in 3 phases in 2014 at Basudha, Rayagada-Odisha organised by Organic Farming Association of India, Basudha and Living Farms.

From 2012, we have been conserving Paddy varieties from different states of India and had rudimentarily begun characterization following Dr Debal Deb's pioneering book- "*Seeds of Tradition & Seeds of Future*". However it was a rare occasion to learn from the Master himself; the splitting of the training session in 3 phases was very appropriate to get a proper understanding of the different characters at different stages, apart from this the hands on experience with conservation pioneers and other seed savers greatly helped in learning the fundamentals of characterizing crops.

The importance of maintaining varietal purity and understanding how the best of efforts in conservation gets diluted if we do not follow some simple yet very important steps was a great eye opener.

Apart from characterization, the discussions and information were very enriching to understand the genesis of agriculture and the stunning achievement of humanity towards domestication of species and creating varietal diversity in them. I was particularly fascinated of our unnamed ancestors whose critical observations and undeterred commitment over generations in highly adverse conditions gave us these amazing crops and diversity; I also realized the greatest threat to humanity is the loss of this diversity and the ultimate control over food in the hands of the few would spell perpetual slavery and annihilation of thousands of years of painstaking genius.

In regards to future programs, it would be good if we could incorporate the following-

- Develop a simple handbook based on the training with appropriate pictures especially in relation to color, shape and other important characters.

- Translation to vernaculars would help in increasing outreach.
- PPT, videos and more visuals could be used in the training sessions.
- Cross visits among trainees would help in mutual learning and supporting each other
- Batch size should not be more than 15.
- Training should not be the end, but the means to reinforce our commitments towards seed sovereignty; in this respect it is important to have post training interactions and exchanges.
- Every trainee-seed conservator should ideally publish her/his varietal characters as prior art in the name of the custodian farmers association/groups maintaining these cultivars.
- Validation of characterization could be done by cross visits
- There needs to be inter-phase assignments and post training revision workshops.
- It would be good if we could come out with State-wise/Region-wise Rice Diversity Booklets/posters which need to also mention the special features like-Historic, Scented, Medicinal and stress tolerant characters of the varieties.
- Training Kit could include Linen Tester Folding Lens, Tweezers and some other basic items (that can also be paid for).

Tanmay Joshi (2013 - 14):

- Learning the characterization was really interesting. Though I did not pursue it last year to document on my own farm it definitely gave me an insight of how varietal purity maintenance plays a significant role in seed conservation.
- While talking to farmers now my vision has broadened regarding domestication of crops and varieties and hence the immense need to maintain the varietal purity for any crop.
- The talk cum discussion on domestication of Rice from its wild ancestral relatives was really interesting and should be included as a compulsory chapter/ session in all the trainings.

- It would be good if there is little more background on the present scenario where traditional seeds are on the verge of extinction. It is generally assumed that all the farmer activists already know the same but many farmers might not know the significance or importance of seed conservation.
- Session on experiences and drawbacks of registering through PPVRFA act and how to convince how that cannot be the way forward.
- Brief awareness about nationwide seed movement
- Brief session on precautionary steps to avoid bio piracy
- Training for three days is found sufficient considering everyone's time commitment. The training for 5 days makes it repeating and lengthy.
- I would personally suggest maintaining the M: F ratio almost the same. If people are sending from farmers associated with an organization then they could easily also send female participants if we insist on.
- Would like to stay on the farm sometime.

ALL THE PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO SEND THE FEEDBACK BUT MANY COULD NOT WRITE BACK. ALSO ENGLISH HAS BEEN THE LIMITATION IN WRITING THAT MAKES IT A SHORT REPORT. THOSE WHO COULD NOT SEND IN TIME ARE MOST WELCOME TO SEND IT ACROSS AND IT'S NEVER LATE....
