

Cultivation of indigenous rice varieties is an answer to extreme weather conditions?

Press release
04th December 2008

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Rice is the single most important crop occupying 34% (0.77 /million ha) of the total cultivated area in Sri Lanka. On average 560,000 ha are cultivated during maha and 310,000 ha during yala seasons. Approximately 1.8 million families are engaged in paddy cultivation island-wide. Sri Lanka currently produces 2.7 millions of rough rice annually and satisfies around 95 % of the domestic requirement. However, extreme weather conditions such as recurrent floods have negative implications on the overall paddy production of the country.

By 2080, agriculture output in developing countries may decline by 20% due to climate change and yields could decrease by 15% on average stated Martin Khor, Director, of the Third World Network in his presentation Food Crisis, Climate Change and the Importance of Sustainable Agriculture at the World Food Programme Food Security Summit, at Rome in June 2008. According to Department of Census and Statistics records in 2007, paddy production in the country shows a decline of 4.1% due to hostilities in the eastern province and bad weather conditions such as floods. In this set-up is it possible to find coping mechanisms for extreme weather conditions from our indigenous paddy cultivation systems?

There are around 2,000 indigenous rice varieties in Sri Lanka of which many have high nutritional value, medicinal properties, and the ability withstand most extreme weather conditions, diseases and pests. Cultivation of these rice varieties require organic manure and minimum labour input.

One such indigenous rice variety is Maha ma Wee. According to the indigenous knowledge of farmers the 'Maha ma Wee' variety can withstand extreme flood conditions. In flood conditions these plants can grow from 7-10 feet in height. In such conditions the crop is harvested by using a paddle canoe. Farmers also claim that cultivation of Maha ma wee needs very little labour input as it does not require weeding or pesticides. Maha ma wee is also revered for its historical importance in religious ceremonies. According to folklore Maha ma wee has been placed in caskets of sacred relics and the pinnacle (kotha) of dagabas. The number of field level applications carried out by Practical Action on this traditional rice variety has provided important findings on this indigenous rice variety's ability to withstand floods.

In order to create a discussion about the importance of Maha Ma Wee cultivation for paddy lands affected by floods Practical Action has organised a media briefing on the 10th of December 2008 at Sri Lanka Foundation Institute from 2p.m to 4p.m. We welcome your participation and coverage of this event. The agenda follows.

DhanushiSenanayake
Project Manager-Publicity

Agenda

Date : 10th December 2008

Venue : Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Colombo

2 p.m : Introduction to the programme

2.15 p.m : Socio cultural aspects related to cultivation of Maha ma wee
HemanthaAbeygunewardane (Representative - National Federation for Conservation of the Seeds and Agricultural Resources)

2.30 p.m : Is cultivation of Maha ma wee a viable solution for climate change and the food crisis?
Varuna Rathnabharathi(Project Manager - Practical Action)

2.45 p.m : Legal protection for our indigenous plant gene resources
JagathGunawardane