

## IRRI, USAID, & Bayer launches global DSR initiative 'Scale Direct' for Asian and African farmers

30 March 2023 | News

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The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Bayer agreed to support and co-invest in a four-year project 'Scale Direct' that aims to accelerate the global efforts of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) on direct seeded rice (DSR) research and development for smallholder farmers in Asia and Africa. The Project got launched through a ceremonial event hosted at IRRI South Asia Regional Centre, Varanasi on 09 March 2023.

Underpinned by IRRI's DSR research flagship, the project titled 'Improving the quality of life of smallholder rice farmers in Asia and Africa through introduction, on-farm testing and scaling of improved germplasm and climate smart agronomy' and also named as 'ScaleDirect' is a comprehensive integration of breeding specific varieties for DSR establishment methods, on-farm validations, DSR specific agronomic practices, and seed systems and enterprise development activities.

The global initiative's core objectives include the 1) establishment of a network of institutions and actors to advance seed and varietal development, adaptation, and accelerate the deployment of product concepts, product varieties or hybrids, and required DSR market-suited traits, 2) introduction, validation, and scaling of climate-smart agronomic practices and technologies, 3) strengthening formal and informal seed production, delivery, and entrepreneurship for equitable, gender-inclusive access to climate-resilient products, and 4) an evidenced-based learning, feedback, and recommendation mechanism for experts and policymakers.

'Smallholder farmers are an integral part of the agriculture system and advancements in farming are key to their growth. We are elated to partner with USAID and IRRI to bring the latest innovation and Agri-focused technology to smallholders across the globe, building a better agriculture system and staying true to Bayer's vision of 'Science for better' in agriculture,' said Simon-Thorsten Wiebusch, Country Divisional Head 'Crop Science Division of Bayer for India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

USAID General Development Officer, Dr. Jim Gaffney lauds the project for its alignment with the US government's Feed the Future Initiative to end hunger. He also expressed his optimism for the returns this investment will bring given its strong backing from multiple national agriculture research systems (NARS) partners, among other collaborating sectors.

There is massive opportunity and learning in public, private, and community extension network collaborations. The diverse participation by various stakeholders in this launch is a clear manifestation of true public-private partnership. This collaboration rests upon a shared vision of making our farming systems more responsive to climate change impacts," said IRRI Rice Breeding Innovations Platform leader, Dr. Hans Bhardwaj.

Resulting from co-conceptualization meetings between IRRI, Bayer, and USAID that began in 2022, the project is touted to help improve the environmental and socio-economic sustainability of rice production and lead to widespread adoption of DSR practices among smallholder farmers in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique.

IRRI Director General, Jean Bali stressed the importance of this synergy as well as the crucial role of the NARES partners in the timely and appropriate scaling of these interventions. "We cannot emphasize enough that we are committed to bringing new innovations to the forefront of rice systems. Furthermore, we are highly committed to ensuring that these technologies provide sustainable economic outcomes for our stakeholders. The shared goal is always to improve the lives of farmers."