

IMPROVING QUALITY RICE SEED SUPPLY

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Abstract

Inherent problems in the DOA-dominated seed programme resulted in the incapacitation of the rice seed supply situation from 1984 which created continuous rice seed shortages prompting the development of a seed policy for commercialisation of the seed industry. The seed policy of 1996 and incentives offered by the government through the Basic Seed Improvement Project of 1998 and 1999 has attracted private investment in rice seed supply. Initiatives by the DOA to attract and train potential seed producers has resulted in large volumes of rice seed being produced, specially at village-level.

The quantum jump from 200,000 bushels of rice seed available in 1998 to 650,000 bushels in 2000 satisfies 15% of the seed requirement. This level of coverage should suffice for the next decade. The rapid influx of seed into the formal system has created extreme competitiveness among private sector producers. However, some of the farmers' aspirations and objectives of the seed policy such as easy access to seeds with the highest quality are yet to be fulfilled.

The DOA continues production and supply of almost all the released rice varieties with complete quality certification and a price subsidy while the private sector concentrates on the 3 month age class and markets most of the seed with some quality assurance, short of complete certification but sold at a higher price.

Survival of the private sector which is crucial for the rice seed industry will depend on:

- a) realistic pricing of DOA seeds
- b) Strengthening internal mechanisms to improve quality to conform to the Seed Act
- c) Marketing seed quality
- d) Marketing own varieties with superior genes, and
- e) Improvement of seed distribution

Suggestions for improvement of seed supply through co-coordinating mechanisms to assess demand and arrange supply at least at provincial level are important.