



**Launch Meeting
The Myanmar Plant Health System Strategy
8 September 2016, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar**



The Myanmar Plant Health System Strategy (MPHSS) was launched successfully in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 September 2016. Dr Malvika Chaudhary reflects on her participation at this event.

CONTEXT

Myanmar (certain countries are still using the old name Burma) is the second largest country in Southeast Asia. Its administrative capital is Nay Pyi Taw and the largest city is Yangon. The country enjoys about 400 miles of uninterrupted coastline. Its current population is about 60.2 million. Agriculture is the most important sector accounting for about 60 percent of the GDP and employing about 65 percent of the country's workforce.



Plant clinics manned by plant doctors being held in Myanmar by Plant Protection Department for advising farmers on pest and diseases and general plant health.

Rice is the main crop covering some 60 percent of the total cultivated area. Other crops include pulses, beans, sesame, groundnut and sugarcane. The Department of Agriculture is one of 12 institutions of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. It has eight divisions, the Agricultural Extension Division (AED) being the biggest. On an average, a Village Manager, who is supposed to maintain direct contacts with farmers, is required to cover a few village tracts or villages with 1,215 to 2,430 hectares of cropland (Khin Mar Cho, 2013). Farmers receive very limited extension support in Myanmar. The extension program planning remains the prerogative of the government with involvement of men and women farmers. In other words, farmers' extension needs are generally not taken into consideration. Moreover, there are no well-established farmers' associations to constitute a strong lobby. CABI's Plantwise program is an added impetus towards strengthening the extension system in Myanmar.

PLANTWISE IN MYANMAR

Pilot initiative

Plantwise (Box 1) a global initiative for food security started its operation in the country from 2014 onwards (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5gYmz7-3ig>).

Box 1: Plantwise

Plantwise is a global programme led by CABI, which works to help farmers to lose less of what they grow to plant health problems. Working closely with national agricultural advisory services, Plantwise establishes and support sustainable networks of plant clinics, run by trained plant doctors, where farmers can find practical plant health advice. Plant Clinics are reinforced by the Plantwise Knowledge Bank, a gateway to online and offline actionable plant health information, including diagnostic resources, pest management advice and front-line pest data for effective global vigilance (Malvika, 2015). Currently operational in 34 countries, Plantwise has reached over 6 million farmers through its concerted efforts.

The major objective of the pilot program was to reach out to the smallholders and extension workers through Plantwise framework of Plant Clinics and Knowledge bank. The clinics are the point of contact for the farmers to take actionable knowledge from the extension officers who were trained as Plant doctors. The key objective of the program is also to strengthen the Plant health system of the country for a synergistic effect of various stakeholders towards a common goal of sustainable agriculture.

When the evaluation results of the pilot phase of Plantwise were reviewed and presented by the Plant Protection Division and CABI, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI) officials were convinced that internalising the Plantwise approach could substantially contribute to Myanmar plant health extension by (a) increasing the efficiency and (b) affecting the desired changes. A major outcome of the pilot program of Plantwise in Myanmar came in the form of a recommendation from Dr. Tin Htut, Permanent Secretary of the MOALI. He urged the Plantwise team in the country to develop a Myanmar Plant Health System Strategy (MPHSDS) to guide the future development of plant health system. The process of drafting started with a meeting chaired by Dr. Tin Htut and attended by other key MOALI officials in

February 2016. The output of the meeting set the stage for a writeshop in April 2016 whereby the drafting team was formed.

Writeshop

A writeshop with senior officials of MOALI was held on 22 April 2016. The first draft of the MPHSS was prepared by CABI and it used the Myanmar Rice Sector Development Strategy (MRSDS) and Climate Smart Agriculture Development Strategy as the key reference documents while drafting the MPHSS.

Dr. Tin Htut in his address to the audience said Myanmar is undergoing transformation and needs guiding strategies for the different agricultural sectors, and plant health is a key sector. The Myanmar Plant Health System Strategy (MPHSS) *shall cover plant health aspects from seed health to harvest*. diversification, intensification, mainstreaming, scaling up and streamlining are the current focus for Myanmar agriculture and thus it is beneficial to incorporate initiatives like Plantwise in current systems. CABI has been working in Myanmar, which is a member country of CABI, for several years and proved to be an important partner in Myanmar. However, there is a need to upscale CABI's activities to a national level. CABI, through its good reputation, can support Myanmar in accessing new external funds from multilateral donors such as JICA, KOICA, WB, FAO, etc.



Write Shop organised with MOALI, DOA, DAR, DOP and its various wings in NayPyi Daw in April 2014

Twenty six (26) senior officials from MOALI and other stakeholders participated in the writeshop. The writeshop entailed presentation of the draft MPHSS followed by breakout groups to discuss the Objectives, Themes, and Activities mentioned in the draft MPHSS. A plenary discussion was also held and feedback collected in terms of roles and responsibilities and sources of funds. It

was agreed that post Writeshop, the Director of the Plant Protection Department, who is also the National Coordinator for Plantwise in Myanmar, will coordinate and finalise the drafting of the MPHSS with CABI and MOALI and that the MPHSS will be officially launched in August 2016.

Launch Meeting

The Myanmar Plant Health System Strategy (MPHSS) was launched successfully in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 September 2016. It was officiated by H.E. Dr. Tun Win, the Deputy Minister of, and was attended by key officials of MOALI including the Permanent Secretary, Dr. Tin Htut. Dr. Tin Htut, who is also the CABI Liaison Officer for Myanmar, had earlier advised the CABI country team to write the MPHSS as a strategic document based on the Plantwise framework to transform and catalyse the required reforms in the nascent agricultural extension of Myanmar.

With this launch, it is anticipated that the MPHSS will become MOALI's main strategic document to guide and strengthen the extension services in the country. H.E. Dr. Tun Win, who represented H.E. the Union Minister, noted that it is important that the country takes firm steps on improving the performance of the extension system. His speech expressed concern on the growing debts of farmers and the high costs of cultivation. This was due to serious misuse of fertilisers and pesticides which are indiscriminately applied without any testing facilities. In such a scenario, an overhauling of extension with technical help of organisations like CABI is timely and important. As mobility amongst the extension workers has been a major constraint for efficient technology transfer, the Government has made a provision for 2000 bikes to their extension officers which will help in the implementation of the strategy.



Myanmar Plant Health Strategy launched in September 2016 by Deputy Minister Dr. Tun Win. Also seen is Regional Director Dr. Loke Wai Hong from CABI South East Asia.

The strategy was handed over to the Deputy Minister by CABI SEA Regional Director Dr. Loke Wai Hong. The Permanent Secretary Dr. Tin Htut requested CABI to work closely with the Plant Protection Division to draft a budget and an activity plan for the coming five years which can be submitted for national and international funding. To increase more buy-in and ownership, he stressed that more stakeholders and donors should be involved to discuss the implementation of the strategy. To facilitate this aspiration a donor forum will be held in December 2016.

Plantwise in Myanmar would build on the lessons it has learnt from implementing this approach in South Asia (Box 2).

Box 2: CABI in South Asia

In South Asia, Plantwise approach is implemented in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. There have been great learnings from operating the program in all these countries and these have been considered for improvising the strategy extended to Myanmar for streamlining its extension system.

- Some of the key challenges faced in these countries, include the high competition faced by projects with similar mandates and duplication of roles running in parallel. Hence, in Myanmar the stakeholders like NGOs and INGOs operating in this sector were consulted while drafting the strategy. Specific roles which can be covered under their mandates were also identified.
- Gender disparity is reflected in data collected from the clinics. Hence to make the program more responsive the strategy suggests inclusiveness of vulnerable sections of the society and factors that are favourable for their participation.
- As sustainability is often an issue post-project period, an effort was made in Myanmar to include the Plantwise approach in their national plan. To broaden the ownership, co- funding is being sought from the key donors in the country.
- To address the long bureaucratic procedures for signing an agreement (which is typical in South Asian countries), all the stakeholders involved in taking decisions on this strategy were brought on a same platform and they participated in a workshop to draft this as comprehensive national strategy.
- Collection of data on many parameters and its under-utilisation has been very common. To address this issues, we need to look into the options of digitalisation. Hence use of ICT to its optimum is suggested in the strategy to make the system responsive and useful. -Considering that in some of the above mentioned countries initial efforts to pilot clinics had to face delays in data management and monitoring and evaluations strategies, in strategy proposed for Myanmar there has been simultaneous developmental plan for a much more synchronised activity.

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Dr. Malvika Chaudhary, Regional Coordinator - Plantwise Asia, has over 15 years of experience in developmental projects implementing IPM and also research and development of bio pesticides. She can be reached at M.Chaudhary@cabi.org

AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP),

Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India

www.aesa-gfras.net

Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com