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Welcome to this edition, where we feature some of CABI's work across the region.

At the IWGO in Malaysia, more than 80 leading experts on maize pests shared their latest research - an ideal opportunity to demonstrate how partnerships can help address invasive species through science, advance agricultural research, and ensure food security.

This month, we are celebrating our stories of impact. These highlight the people and communities whose lives have been transformed through CABI's work. I invite you to explore our stories and this edition further.

With best wishes,

Dr Babar Bajwa
Senior Regional Director, Asia

News and Stories

CABI highlights value of South-South collaboration at first CAASTIA General Assembly

CABI has taken part in the first China-Africa Agricultural Science and Technology Innovation Alliance (CAASTIA) General Assembly held in Ethiopia, an important milestone in South-South cooperation for agricultural innovation and sustainable development.

The event, jointly initiated by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), brought together nearly 90 founding member institutions from across Africa and China, along with international and regional organisations.

The General Assembly reviewed and approved the Alliance's Charter, elected its first Council Members, and endorsed the CAASTIA Addis Ababa Declaration.

How to strengthen Africa's agricultural research and innovation systems

Under the theme "Joint effort through CAASTIA towards China-Africa Modern Agricultural Development", delegates discussed how to strengthen Africa's agricultural research and innovation systems to advance sustainable agricultural growth.

Dr Daniel Elger, Chief Executive Officer of CABI, said, "We are pleased to have participated in this first CAASTIA General Assembly, which highlights the power of partnerships in strengthening capacities, the exchange of expertise, and knowledge sharing in agriculture and development.

"CABI looks forward to working with CAAS, AAS and other stakeholders in CAASTIA as this alliance gains momentum in driving increased agricultural and technological collaboration between Africa and China, with potential for great benefit to both sides."

Solutions to improve food security and livelihoods

Representing CABI, Dr Elger and Ms Phyllis Ombonyo, Director of Strategy and Engagement, delivered a joint presentation titled "Accelerating the impact of scientific research through Africa-China cooperation."

They highlighted CABI's long history of collaboration with both African Member Countries and China to translate agricultural research into practice in ways that enhance food security and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The speakers then showcased successful examples of South-South collaborations involving Africa and China.

Dr Daniel Elger at the lectern supported by Ms Phyllis Ombonyo.

Successes in Africa-China collaboration

One success story highlighted by Ms Ombonyo was the building of local capacity in Rwanda for the mass production and use of beneficial nematodes to kill crop pests including the devastating fall armyworm (Spodoptera frugiperda).

The collaboration among CABI, China, Rwanda, Switzerland, and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) transferred technologies from China, and the project lives on in Rwanda thanks to Rwandan government support.

Today, Rwanda is celebrating more than 10 years of biocontrol success with the facility producing over 100 billion insect-killing nematodes per batch, enough to treat more than 100 hectares of field crops or seed beds that can later be transplanted to over 800 hectares.

Vietnam to advance biocontrol collaboration with experts from CABI and China

Vietnam is taking an important step towards greener, safer and more sustainable agriculture.

Working in partnership with CABI and experts from the Shandong Academy of Agricultural Sciences (SAAS), a new collaboration allows Vietnam to advance biocontrol research, build national capacity and support farmers in adopting environmentally responsible pest management practices.

Protecting Vietnam's agricultural future

Agriculture is integral to Vietnam's economy. In 2024, the sector achieved a record USD 62.4 billion in exports. Rice alone accounted for 9 million tonnes, generating over USD 5.7 billion. Meanwhile, fruit and vegetable exports climbed to USD 7.2 billion, with durian accounting for USD 3.4 billion. Coffee, pepper and other crops also contributed significantly, highlighting the sector's role in national revenue and food security.

Despite its success, Vietnamese agriculture faces threats from pest and diseases, challenges that are made worse by the impacts of climate change.

On average, farmers lose 37% of rice yields to pests and diseases. Fall armyworm was detected in 2019 and has spread widely across the country, causing severe damage to maize. Meanwhile, thrips and whiteflies continue to threaten vegetables. Poor management practices amplify these losses, aggravating an already difficult situation.

Supporting farmers to implement sustainable pest management is therefore critical in protecting the future of Vietnam's agricultural sector.

Partnerships for a sustainable future

Vietnam is a valued Member Country of CABI, joining officially in 1992 – a membership which can be seen as an international extension of Member Countries' capabilities. During this strong partnership, CABI and the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS) and other organizations have helped the country to mitigate pests and diseases, meet sanitary

and phytosanitary requirements and engage with key agricultural value chains.

For example, as part of the Safer Spices: Boosting Food Safety and Market Access for the Peppercorn Value Chain in South East Asia project, CABI helped Vietnam take the lead in developing a Code of Practice (CoP) for peppercorn production. The CoP yielded positive results not only for Vietnam, with better pest management practices and yield increases, but also south-south collaboration with Cambodia and Laos.

This new collaboration, facilitated by CABI, builds on existing relations and includes a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between VAAS, CABI and SAAS. The agreement formalizes their partnership and sets a framework for joint research, knowledge sharing and a new Centre of Excellence for Biological Control.

As a result, it demonstrates how scientific expertise, regional cooperation and practical application can address agricultural challenges. By reducing pesticide use, improving crop health and protecting biodiversity, VAAS, SAAS and CABI are building a sustainable and climate-resilient food system.

Dr Feng Zhang, CABI Regional Director for East and Southeast Asia, said, "This tripartite collaboration brings practical, science-based solutions to farmers, helping them grow safer and high-value agricultural produce while protecting the environment."

Increasing Vietnam's biocontrol knowledge

Taking advantage of networking opportunities, knowledge exchange and technology transfer – key benefits of being a CABI Member Country – the signing of the MoU took place during a high-level visit which included a biological control seminar at the Plant Protection Research Institute in Hanoi. SAAS and CABI experts demonstrated mass-rearing techniques for natural enemies like Trichogramma, Orius, and predatory mites. The seminar included hands-on sessions, interactive discussions and practical demonstrations.

Following the seminar, the team visited a melon cooperative farm. They observed pest challenges firsthand and discussed biocontrol solutions with farmers. These visits highlighted the importance of adapting techniques to local conditions and helping farmers apply Integrated Pest Management effectively, helping Vietnam to advance biocontrol knowledge.

"Working closely with Vietnamese colleagues allowed us to share practical techniques and adapt them to local farming conditions," said Prof Li Zheng, biocontrol expert of SAAS. "We are excited to see these solutions implemented to reduce pesticide use and improve crop productivity."

Conventional pesticide use increases resistance and environmental risks. Biological control provides a nature-based solution, reducing chemical inputs, protecting biodiversity and improving yields. Through this exchange, CABI helps Vietnam scale these solutions regionally and support climate-smart farming practices.

Delegates visiting the Tan Ming Duc Cooperation Farm in Truong Tan commune, Hai Phong city, supporting Vietnam to advance biocontrol collaboration

Establishing a Centre of Excellence

A key outcome of the new collaboration is a Centre of Excellence for Biological Control.

Delegates visiting the Tan Ming Duc Cooperation Farm in Truong Tan commune, Hai Phong city

The centre will focus on research, training and innovation. It will improve mass-rearing techniques for natural enemies, develop standard operating procedures and establish field demonstration plots.

Digital tools and knowledge platforms will complement on-the-ground efforts, helping researchers and extension officers access training resources and guidance. By combining training, demonstrations and technology transfer from China, the centre will enhance Vietnam's research capacity and support sustainable crop production, contributing significantly to Vietnam advancing biocontrol knowledge.

Capacity building and practical impact

Capacity building for farmers and technical staff will also be enhanced. Training programmes and exchange visits with China will strengthen skills and knowledge transfer. In synergy with other CABI-led programmes such as PlantwisePlus, farmers and extension officers will be able to access CABI's Bioprotection Portal, PlantwisePlus Knowledge Bank, PlantwisePlus Digital Tools, and CABI Academy Courses covering crop pest diagnosis, pest management, and sustainable soil practices.

Researchers will conduct field demonstrations and develop practical guidelines, supporting broader adoption of biocontrol practices. Digital platforms will ensure knowledge reaches farmers and extension officers nationwide.

A partnership for a greener future

Dr Nguyen Hong Son, President of VAAS, highlighted that the collaboration will enhance research capacities, technology development and practical implementation of biocontrol solutions nationwide.

Mr Jinguang Liang, Secretary of SAAS, stressed the importance of the collaboration to build win-win partnerships and the promotion of south-south co-operation and technology transfer.

Through this joint effort, VAAS, SAAS and CABI are taking concrete steps toward a future where innovation and collaboration drive sustainable agriculture in Vietnam and the wider region, supporting Vietnam to advance biocontrol.

Reaching 1,000 farmers with plant health advice in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Fast-paced pest outbreaks and plant diseases are a constant threat to farmers' crops and livelihoods in Duhok, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Without timely training and advice by extension officers, farmers miss out on critical knowledge to combat these threats. To help close this information gap, agricultural extension teams tried a new approach by taking plant health messages directly to farmers.

These "extension rallies" are part of the CABI-led 'Strengthening the potato value chain in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq' project. It is funded by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency and KH Company (KH) and implemented by CABI, KH, the Directorate of Agriculture (DoA), University of Duhok, and HZPC.

Rapid plant health advice through rallies

Extension rallies offer a quick, flexible, and practical way to reach farmers with urgent plant health guidance. Instead of expecting farmers to travel to workshops, extension workers visited villages, markets, orchards, and roadside gathering points. Anna Wood, Project Manager, explains: "Extension rallies are designed to offer quick, practical advice where farmers need it the most. By meeting farmers in their own communities, extension officers can respond quickly to emerging pest and disease challenges and reach people who might otherwise be missed."

The model draws on global experience but was adapted specifically for the potato value chain project in Duhok. More than 1,000 farmers were reached with district-specific advice on the pests and diseases most affecting their crops.

Building skills and guiding the pilot

Farmers in the project area grow a variety of other cash crops, including wheat, onions and pomegranates. Over the past five years, CABI has supported capacity building for local extension advisors on pest management across multiple crops. This earlier training provided a good foundation for successful rallies.

To prepare, the DoA extension officers first identified the priority pests and diseases affecting crops in their districts. CABI then trained them to develop simple, locally relevant materials to support field identification and farmer engagement. These included fact sheets with clear images of pest and disease symptoms.

Training also focused on delivery. Extension officers were guided how to deliver short, practical talks, facilitate discussion with farmers and conduct interviews to gather field data and feedback. During the pilot phase, CABI experts joined the rallies to supervise and ensure consistency and technical accuracy.

A day in the field

Potato farmer in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, examining his crops (Credit: CABI)

Each rally followed a simple structure to quickly engage farmers and deliver practical information. Extension teams

chose strategic locations such as markets or village gathering points and set up a rally banner to attract attention. They delivered a short talk on the most pressing pest issues affecting local crops, using visual materials and real samples, helping farmers recognize symptoms. This was followed by discussion, giving farmers the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns from their own fields. Mini-fact sheets allowed farmers to take key advice home, while extensionists conducted brief interviews to gather feedback. Repeating this process at several locations each day enabled the teams to reach large numbers of farmers and rapidly share essential plant health information.

What farmers told us

Farmers responded enthusiastically. Many said it was their first time seeing extension officers bringing advice directly into local marketplaces and village squares. They valued the practical tips and the chance to ask questions about issues in their own fields. The interviews also revealed an important insight. Many farmers rely heavily on pesticide shops for guidance. This reinforces the need for stronger public extension systems and more accessible, science-based advice.

Not just crop pests

Farmers also used the rallies to raise wider crop production challenges beyond pests and diseases. One key issue is declining groundwater levels, which is affecting the irrigation of some crops.

Potato farmer in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, examining his crops (Credit: CABI)

These discussions give extension officers valuable insight into emerging challenges and help them prepare more targeted support in future rallies.

Why these rallies matter

Improving potato production in Duhok and supporting farmers' livelihoods isn't just about seeds or agronomy. Farmers need timely, practical plant health advice they can actually use.

Manfred Grossrieder, ICM Advisor for CABI explains: "Extension rallies allow us to take practical plant health advice directly to farmers in their own communities. Many farmers cannot easily attend formal training sessions, so bringing information to markets and village gathering points helps ensure they are not left behind."

The rallies are also helping strengthen engagement between farmers and extension services, while generating valuable insights from the field.

Salwa Husain, project representative for the DoA, adds: "These rallies raise awareness of the key pests and diseases affecting farmers' crops and promote safer, more responsible pesticide use. They also create opportunities for farmers to share their experiences, and provide valuable feedback that helps guide future agricultural support."

Looking ahead

The pilot phase has shown that mobile, rapid extension can make a meaningful difference. As the potato value chain project advances, extension rallies will remain a valuable tool for helping farmers reduce losses, protect their crops, and strengthen their livelihoods across Duhok.

PlantwisePlus News and Stories

Rooting out parthenium: A milestone for Pakistan

Farmers “rooting out” invasive parthenium weed from their fields (Image: CABI)

Parthenium hysterophorus, commonly known as parthenium or “famine weed”, is one of Pakistan’s most damaging invasive species. It spreads aggressively, suppresses crop productivity, threatens grazing lands, impacts biodiversity, and poses serious health risks to humans and livestock. Over the past decade, CABI has led a comprehensive, science-based campaign to address this threat. Now, as the programme enters a new phase, Pakistan stands at a pivotal moment. The effort is transitioning from a project-led initiative into a sustainable national management system.

Biological control breakthrough

CABI’s work on parthenium in Pakistan has combined scientific research, biological control, community awareness, and strong institutional partnerships. Under the PlantwisePlus and Action on Invasives programmes, CABI has built the country’s most extensive and effective biological control initiative for parthenium to date. A major breakthrough came with the introduction, mass production, and release of Listronotus setosipennis, a stem-boring weevil recognised globally as a safe and highly effective biological control agent.

At CABI’s Rawalpindi facility, teams rear over 3,000 weevils each month using a dedicated plant-production system. Teams have already released more than 7,400 adult weevils at key sites across the country, spanning Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, AJK, and Punjab. Importantly, host-specificity tests confirmed that the weevil does not damage important crops such as sunflower, which makes it a safe and environmentally sustainable solution for farmers.

This year marks an important transition, as CABI hands over the live culture of L. setosipennis to six national institutions, including PARC, the University of Agriculture Faisalabad, NIAB, the Entomological Research Institute of AARI Punjab & Ghazi University DG Khan, and the Directorate of Agriculture Research in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The handover marks a shift from externally driven support to local ownership, helping ensure the long-term continuation of biocontrol operations. It ensures that the expertise, resources, and scientific tools required to manage parthenium will now be embedded within Pakistan's national system.

Evidence-based action: Research and community engagement against parthenium in Pakistan

CABI has also generated critical scientific evidence that underscores the urgency of controlling parthenium. A recent study conducted at CABI's regional office in Rawalpindi found that maize yields can drop by 14-46%, depending on weed density. This demonstrates the severe impact of weeds on food security. Further research indicates that parthenium will likely expand its range under climate change, placing additional pressure on vulnerable ecosystems. The discovery of the rust fungus Puccinia abrupta var. partheniicola infecting parthenium in Pakistan provides another promising natural enemy that complements the weevil and enhances biological suppression where suitable.

Urban outreach efforts in Islamabad's Fatima Jinnah Park (Image: CABI)

Beyond scientific interventions, CABI has invested heavily in community awareness and behavioural change. Through farmer trainings, village-level campaigns, and collaborations with public institutions, CABI has reached more than 10,000 farmers across 438 villages. Urban outreach efforts in public parks and city centres engaged over 2,000 citizens. A "Weeding Week" campaign mobilized 1,400 farmers, while around 2.2 million viewers watched a nationally broadcast documentary, helping communities recognise the invasive weed and learn safe management practices.

The Pakistan Museum of Natural History also partnered with CABI to establish an educational exhibit highlighting the dangers of parthenium. This raised awareness among thousands of museum visitors. These wide-ranging initiatives have helped build public understanding – an essential foundation for the long-term management of invasive species.

As part of the sustained handover efforts, CABI organized a national training workshop on 3–4 December 2025. It focused on rearing techniques, plant production, data recording, practical culturing procedures,

and field-release methods for L. setosipennis. In total, 22 officers and lab assistants from research and academic institutes were trained. This equips them with the skills and confidence to independently maintain and expand biocontrol operations across their regions. It also strengthens collaboration among national stakeholders and supports continued progress after CABI's direct support concludes.

The path forward

Pakistan is now entering a new phase in its fight against invasive weeds. With the foundations firmly in place: scientific research, biocontrol capacity, and public awareness. The country is well-positioned to move from pilot efforts to a fully institutionalised national system.

The road ahead involves several key actions. Provincial agriculture and environmental departments must embed biological control into their operations. Release sites need continuous monitoring. Community engagement must continue to prevent further spread. This successful model can also be adapted for managing other invasive species in Pakistan. Strengthening research capacity through universities and research institutes will further support sustained progress.

Parthenium spreads aggressively, suppresses crop productivity, threatens grazing lands, impacts biodiversity, and poses serious health risks to humans and livestock. (Image: CABI)

Parthenium is more than an agricultural nuisance; it is a national challenge that affects food security, livelihoods, biodiversity, and public health. After many years of CABI-led intervention, Pakistan is now taking full national ownership of this work. CABI is handing over essential tools, training, and biological resources to Pakistan's institutions, researchers, extension agents, and communities. They will sustain long-term management independently.

This marks a critical milestone in sustainable development. Pakistan can protect its agricultural landscapes and support its farmers without external funding. This model demonstrates how time-bound investment can build lasting local systems. The approach can be replicated to combat other invasive species across Pakistan and serves as a blueprint for sustainable pest management in other countries.

The recent training workshop (Image: CABI)

How PlantwisePlus and partners are supporting Assam's agricultural future

Plant health campaign in Assam. Image: AAU, Assam

From July to December last year, Assam Agricultural University (AAU) in Jorhat hosted a series of initiatives under the CABI-led PlantwisePlus programme to strengthen plant health services and enhance crop productivity. Co-organized by CABI, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), and AAU, the events demonstrated how Integrated Pest Management (IPM) trainings, plant clinics, plant health campaigns, and stakeholder collaboration can help farmers protect their crops and increase production.

These activities are part of PlantwisePlus's Farmer Advisory pathway. Working closely with local and international partners, the programme combines expertise, resources, and on-the-ground support to implement targeted training, awareness campaigns, and farmer advisory services, such as plant clinics.

Local partnerships are crucial for ensuring such work has a lasting impact. In Assam, through the involvement of AAU scientists, extension staff, and local NGOs, plant clinics are being embedded within existing advisory systems. As a result, communities have access to plant health services beyond individual projects and advisories.

Providing advice through plant clinics and plant health awareness campaigns

Plant clinics, community-based advisory services staffed by trained agricultural advisors, are central to this approach. Farmers bring crop samples to the clinics for diagnosis and receive science-based, practical guidance on sustainable management practices. The advice covers preventive measures such as monitoring, the use of resistant varieties, and sustainable pest control options, which reduce farmers' reliance on hazardous chemical pesticides.

The Plant Health Campaigns were conducted last year across several villages in Assam, including Dangdhora, Sekuria, Thengal Gaon, and Naginijuri. They serve as a

strong example of the positive impact that plant clinics can have on farmers. These campaigns not only showcased the benefits of plant clinics but also helped gather valuable feedback from farmers. Their responses highlighted how plant clinics and plant health awareness initiatives have boosted farmers' confidence in adopting Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Disease Management (IDM) practices. Moreover, they have created an effective platform for ongoing communication between farmers and agricultural experts.

Beyond the plant clinics, such campaigns play a vital role in helping farmers in Assam identify and manage major and emerging pests and diseases in rice. By promoting integrated and eco-friendly approaches, they help reduce crop losses, improve yields, minimize pesticide misuse, and reinforce the impact of plant clinics. As a result, these efforts contribute to healthier crops, higher farmer incomes, and enhanced food security across the region.

Dr. Rajkumar, Senior Fellow at MSSRF, said the initiatives had "been very helpful to the resource-poor farming community." He added, "These programmes have raised awareness, reduced crop losses, and shown how science, technology, and partnerships can safeguard food security."

Plant clinic in Assam. Image: AAU, Assam

The power of partnerships

The events in Assam highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration. By linking partner organisations and local experts, PlantwisePlus makes it easier for farmers to access timely, reliable, and science-based advice for their growing plant health challenges.

Partnerships bring together expertise, field experience, and timely advice through digital tools, creating a sustainable framework for crop protection and extension services.

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Chetia, Director of Research (Agri) at AAU, emphasised the importance of such collaboration, "It is the need of the hour to reinforce the plant health system with emphasis on pest preparedness, pesticide risk mitigation, and farmer-centric advisory services … This collaboration, through plant clinics, campaigns, digital agriculture tools and capacity building, will continue to play a key role in enhancing farmers' income while benefiting all stakeholders involved."

Ensuring lasting impact in Assam

Through initiatives with AAU and MSSRF, PlantwisePlus is supporting farmers in Assam in managing pest threats and reducing crop losses sustainably.

Importantly, these partnerships are being integrated into institutional frameworks, such as AAU's training programmes and state extension systems, helping ensure plant health services and farmer advisory networks continue to evolve independently.

Agro-input dealer training scheme developed with Bangladesh government

Agro-input dealer in Bangladesh. Image: CABI

Pest outbreaks in Bangladesh are causing a rapid increase in the sale of pesticides. Farmers are turning to chemical products such as fungicides, herbicides and insecticides to manage pests, which they often buy from their local agro-input dealer. However, these chemicals can harm the environment and human health.

In Bangladesh, pesticide risks are significant due to their extensive agricultural use and a lack of need-based regulation. Currently, a total of 6,410 trade products with 363 active ingredients are registered for use in agriculture. However, pesticide poisoning is common, accounting for almost 40% of total poisoning cases admitted to different levels of hospitals in Bangladesh. Moreover, improper disposal leads to challenges, including environmental contamination that affects soil, water and wildlife.

What role do agro-input dealers play in Bangladesh's plant health system?

Agro-input dealers have the potential to play a central role in pesticide risk reduction. In Bangladesh, they are a key source of information for farmers about pesticides and pest management. That said, many lack the technical knowledge and skills to do so effectively. They require more knowledge around, for example, pesticide toxicity and safe handling practices.

Many countries have minimum education and training requirements for agro-input dealers. However, this is not the case in Bangladesh. Among the almost 100,000 registered agro-input dealers in the country, literacy is low. This has implications for knowledge transfer to farmers.

Nearly 80% of farmers rely on agro-input dealers' recommendations when choosing pesticides. But some worrying trends are emerging. Mixing different groups of pesticides is gaining popularity, and many farmers routinely use stronger doses than recommended on the label. These ineffective shortcuts can damage ecosystems and put people at risk.

PlantwisePlus: Supporting Bangladesh's new agro-dealer certification

In early 2023, PlantwisePlus approached key government stakeholders to propose the agro-input dealer training initiative. Together, they are working to develop training for agro-input dealers. The training component forms part of the government's certification and registration scheme. It helps agro-dealers upskill in pesticide risk reduction and non-chemical pest control.

The programme wanted to explore the possibility of developing a mandatory training component for the certification and registration of agro-input dealers. Discussions were initiated with Bangladesh's Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). This includes the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and the Plant Protection Wing of the Department of Agriculture (PPW). The Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA) also joined. An initial meeting was held in March 2023, followed by a workshop in June.

Reviewing developments in agro-input dealer regulation

In June, a workshop brought together key stakeholders to shape the mandatory training scheme for agro-input dealers. Kbd. Badal Chandra Biswas, the Director of PPW, chaired the event, while Mr Rabindra Sri Barua, Additional Secretary to the MoA, attended as the chief guest. The MoA expressed strong interest in the proposed training, which, they felt, came at an opportune moment, coinciding with the update to Bangladesh's plant protection regulatory framework.

During the workshop, CABI provided an overview of PlantwisePlus and its work with agro-input dealers. Speakers highlighted the global need to raise awareness about the use of lower-risk plant protection products such as biologicals, options that are safer for farmers and the environment.

Break-out groups tackled practical questions about training content and delivery. Participants discussed the option of including bioprotection topics like biocontrol and biopesticides, which aren't typically included in agro-input dealer training. They also emphasized pesticide handling and safety, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety protocols. When agro-input dealers understand these practices, they can better guide farmers toward safer, more effective pest management.

Participants at the agro-input dealer training in Bangladesh. Image: CABI

Overcoming literacy challenges for agro-input dealers in Bangladesh

The revision of the current Plant Protection Rule presents an opportunity to revisit the requirements for agro-input dealer certification. This includes a new mandatory educational requirement and obligatory participation in a training course.

The new regulation will state that agro-input dealers must complete secondary education and have basic literacy and numeracy skills. For those agro-input dealers who may be illiterate or semi-literate, a new system will be devised to enable them to receive training, regardless of their literacy level. The new system will be gradually phased in to enable remedial training. The long-term aim of the new regulation is to license only those of a certain educational standard.

Training materials continue to be developed. A local working group has been formed to collect information for the training, including the curriculum, manual, and materials. PlantwisePlus has played a crucial role in facilitating this work.

PlantwisePlus has finalized training toolkits for existing and prospective agro-input dealers. With support from CABI, the partner organization trained of two batches of Master Trainers who will in turn train the input dealers. The team now awaits the regulation coming into force. Once approved, pilot training sessions will begin with new and existing agro-input dealers. After the pilot phase, the programme will officially handover the training toolkits.

An agro-input dealer receiving his training certificate. Image: CABI

What's next?

CABI's support for the development of a mandatory licensing scheme has already achieved a major milestone: it's now included as a clause in Bangladesh's new pesticide regulation. This represents a significant step forward in enhancing pesticide management nationwide. CABI's local team maintains close contact with the Chairperson of the pesticide regulation committee and has joined two key meetings to advance the initiative.

Bangladesh will soon adopt and publish its new pesticide regulation. Once approved, authorities will set a date by which new agro-dealers must pass certification and registration standards under the scheme currently in development.

This work will deliver real benefits to farmers and their communities. Well-trained agro-input dealers can guide farmers toward safer pest management practices and lower-risk alternatives like bioprotection products. They'll better understand the regulatory environment, applying the right products and the right doses.

PlantwisePlus equips agro-input dealers with carefully curated knowledge resources, including training materials on biocontrol and biopesticides. Equipped with this knowledge, agro-dealers become trusted advisors who help farmers protect their crops while reducing pesticide risk. This shift toward sustainable practices safeguards ecosystems for food production, ensuring productive agriculture for future generations.

Real Change | Real Stories

Pest preparedness safeguards coconut production

A proactive pest preparedness campaign in Bangladesh is helping to protect the country's coconut industry and remain free from the coconut hispine beetle.

Read the Story

Real Change | Real Stories

Celebrating more Stories of Impact

CABI is driving real impact and change through our science, projects and publishing work. Our stories highlight how we are making a difference and improving lives.

Read the Story

Acknowledgment

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