

ASIA AND OCEANIA

Development

Activities in the Asia and Oceania Region Run Gamut of Development Continuum

Countries in the Asia and Oceania region are at various stages of development—from those struggling to provide basic utility service to their rural communities or others rebuilding their economy after years of repression to those seeking current and emerging technologies to increase agricultural productivity and promote trade and economic growth.

The activities described below demonstrate the depth and breadth of USDA development programs in cooper-

ation with other U.S. government agencies, the private sector, academia and non-governmental or private voluntary organizations to further developing countries' capacity to participate in the global economy.

India Seeks To Reform Power Distribution System

A historic, four-year agreement between USDA's FAS and Rural Utilities Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development will help India's federal and state financial institutions and utilities reform the distribution of electricity.

Currently, electric power delivery is inefficient in rural areas and Indian state power suppliers are in financial crisis.

Technical and commercial losses amount to between 40 and 50 percent of electricity generated in most states or \$6 billion annually, causing state electricity companies to default on their loans and forcing state governments to pay the loans back. As a result, state governments are in debt, sapping federal financial resources and harming India's prospects for economic growth.

Because of the lack of funds, power suppliers have not adequately invested in electric power distribution networks,





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resulting in overloaded feeders, poorly maintained substations and aging transformers that create power outages in urban and rural areas. In addition, while more than 80 percent of rural villages are electrified, only about 35 percent of households within those villages have access to electricity because they remain unconnected to the public power system.

The objective of the agreement is to help develop alternative funding and lending mechanisms to reform rural electric distribution. This will be accomplished through technical assistance and training.

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Afghan Women Help Revive Economy

As **Afghanistan** struggles to overcome years of brutal repression under the Taliban, USDA has enlisted the Cochran Fellowship Program to help revive the country's agricultural economy and strengthen its trade links with the United States.

Last June, 12 Afghan women participated in a two-and-a-half week program in the United States. They learned about business plans, financial management, farmers' cooperatives and micro-credit programs. Micro-credit, when combined with basic business management, can promote food security and non-agricultural, income-generating businesses.

The women—all from rural parts of Afghanistan—hold a variety of jobs rang-

ing from nutrition consultants and veterinary technicians to rural extension agents and village agricultural development teachers.

Since returning home, one of the women presented a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture to develop an agricultural extension service in 16 Afghan provinces that could potentially



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reach 3,200 families. The Ministry is considering funding the proposal.

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Biotechnology Training Provides Insight

While some countries are just beginning the long journey along the development continuum, others are at a different crossroad. These countries are participating in the global economy, but need more information about new and emerging technologies to make informed choices for their agricultural sectors.

To facilitate the decision-making process, FAS in collaboration with Michigan State University offers a two-

week course several times a year in agricultural biotechnology.

Last May, 10 individuals from **India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman** and **Thailand** took the course. They attended sessions in Michigan, Missouri and Washington, DC, on topics as diverse as biotechnology research, development, applications, commercialization, regulatory systems and policies, intellectual property rights, technology transfer, public perception, marketing and trade, and international treaties and conventions.

Participants included scientists, researchers, government officials and university professors. They met with U.S. farmers who grow biotech crops to discuss experiences.

In St. Louis, the participants saw how



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a multinational biotechnology company develops and commercializes agricultural products worldwide. They also visited a plant science center to observe biotechnology applications in tropical agriculture.

While in Washington, participants met with representatives from U.S. govern-



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ment agencies involved in regulating the products of biotechnology. They also met with international organizations to learn about programs to help their countries build the capacity to use and manage biotechnology products.

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Workshop Participants Form Regional Network

A workshop to help five APEC (**Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation**) countries build their capacity to use new and emerging technologies, specifically agricultural biotechnology, was held in December 2003 in Manila, the Philippines.

The objectives of the five-day farmer-to-farmer workshop were to increase awareness, expand knowledge and provide first-hand experience in agricultural biotechnology through classroom sessions, panel discussions and field trips.

Attendees visited farms growing biotech corn, toured the International Rice Research Institute's gene bank and saw genetically modified papaya at the Institute of Plant Breeding.

Of the 29 participants, five were **Indonesian** farmers; four were **Malaysian** community leaders, including two farmers; nine were **Philippine** farmers, media representatives and a researcher; six were **Thai** farmers and media representatives; and five were **Vietnamese** farmers.

The participants established a regional farmers' network to exchange experiences and knowledge, ensure responsible farming, accelerate the transfer of appropriate modern technology and engage their communities in these activities.

Since the workshop ended, the Asian Farmers Regional Network has published a newsletter, held two meetings—one in Thailand in February 2004 and another in Indonesia in November 2004. Members of the network have spoken at a high-level APEC meeting and a farmer-to-farmer workshop in Latin America. ■

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