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\$8m to maximise use of water, land

Staff Correspondent

An alliance of international organisations yesterday launched an \$8 million research programme to find ways to maximise the use of water and land in the country's coastal region.

The research will be done under the six-year programme to find ways to make the saline and disaster-prone region productive by developing new salt-tolerant crop varieties, introducing new brackish water fish species and managing saline water.

Forty percent of the country's population lives in the coastal belt that covers 32 percent of the country's land, said a speaker at the launching of Ganges Basin Development Challenge Research for Development Programme at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) auditorium.

The Washington-based Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) will conduct research in partnership with The WorldFish Center, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), International Water Management Institute and local organisations.

Agriculturists said 10 lakh hectares of land in the southern coast remain fallow due to salinity and natural disasters.

Aman cultivation is often damaged in the monsoon for natural disasters, while boro, a dry season rice, cannot be cultivated there due to salinity, pointed out The WorldFish Center's South Asia Director William J Collis. He also suggested for introducing new fish species in the region.

IRRI Liaison Scientist MA Hamid Mia said fallow lands could be used to grow short-duration and saline-tolerant boro during the dry season.

A comparative study should be done to ascertain whether one needs to transform his fishery to arable land when fish cultivation seems more profitable, said additional secretary Anwar Faruque of agriculture ministry.

Agriculturists said Bangladesh's food production depends on the north and northwestern regions where ground water levels are depleting for heavy use of water for dry season rice -- boro.

"Exploring the opportunities in the south is a demand of time," said BARC Executive Chairman Wais Kabir. Scientists must think of developing technologies considering not only the present challenges, but also that of future, added Kabir.

Boru Douthwaite of CGIAR and Parimal Chandra Saha of water resources ministry also spoke in the launching.

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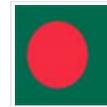
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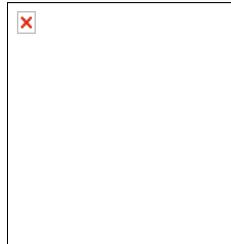


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