



T R I B U T E

The Founder of Vietnam-India Collaboration in Agriculture

Bui Ba Bong*

<https://doi.org/10.25003/RAS.13.02.0019>

The strong and flourishing ties between Vietnam and India were laid by the founding fathers of modern Vietnam and India, President Ho Chi Minh and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The relationship between Vietnam and India is unique and was described by the late Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong as “clear as the blue sky without any clouds.” Immediately after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the relationship and collaboration between the two countries was raised to a new height, with agriculture becoming the sector for which Vietnam received immediate support from the Government of India. The first collaborative initiative was the establishment of the Rice Research Centre in the Mekong (Cuu Long) Delta with support from the Government of India. Dr. M. S. Swaminathan conceived this idea.

In 1976, Dr. Swaminathan was deputed by the Government of India to Vietnam to develop the plan to establish the Rice Research Centre. He traveled to the Cuu Long Delta and visited the proposed site for the Centre. After the survey, Dr. Swaminathan had a direct meeting with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to report his findings. During the meeting, Dr. Swaminathan assured the Prime Minister that, given the potential of the Cuu Long Delta that he observed, Vietnam could become self-sufficient in rice very soon. In those days, there was severe shortage of rice, the food staple of the country, and Vietnam had to import a large volume of rice annually.

This historic study trip of Dr. Swaminathan laid the foundation of agricultural collaboration between Vietnam and India. The Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture established the Mekong Rice Centre in 1977. It later became the Cuu Long Delta Rice Research Institute (CLRRI). To follow up the collaboration, Dr. Swaminathan appointed Dr. E. A. Siddiq (later Deputy Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research) to CLRRI in 1981 to construct a master plan for research activities and organisation. This included a plan to depute Indian experts to Vietnam, and also to send machines and equipment to CLRRI. From 1982 to 1988, several

* Former Vice Minister, Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Development, former Director of Cuu Long Delta Rice Research Institute, buiomon999@gmail.com

Indian experts came to the CLRRRI, including J. Chandra Mohan, B. K. Singh, T. K. Kandaswamy, S. Balasubramanian and S. Devadath, all of whom worked along with young Vietnamese researchers. In 1986, the first batch of researchers from the CLRRRI was sent to the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) for post-graduate study under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC). To date, 70 researchers from CLRRRI have trained in India, obtaining M.Sc and Ph. D degrees. This invaluable resource is an important factor contributing to the successful development of the CLRRRI.

When Dr. Swaminathan was Director General of IRRI in 1982-1988, he continued to support Vietnam immensely in rice research and development. He travelled to the Mekong Delta in 1984 to sign a collaboration agreement between IRRI, Can Tho University, and CLRRRI. Under this agreement, IRRI provided Vietnam valuable support, especially in terms of rice genetic resources, human resource training, and research projects.

With the early assistance provided by the Government of India, CLRRRI has become the leading rice research institute in Vietnam. The CLRRRI's scientific achievements and technology development have played a vital role in improving rice production in the Cuu Long Delta, the rice bowl of Vietnam, which contributes more than half of national rice production, and up to 90 per cent of total rice export. In the last 30 years, Vietnam has emerged as a country that has achieved national rice-based food security and is now one of the leading rice exporters of the world.

M. S. Swaminathan will be remembered forever as the founder of Vietnam-India collaboration in agriculture, and as a meritorious contributor to rice development in Vietnam. As the relationship between Vietnam and India becomes brighter, he will always remain an exemplary symbol of that Vietnam-India relationship.



Dr. Swaminathan visited CLRRRI in 1984



Indian Experts at CLRRI in the early 1980s



CLRRI campus



Rice in the Cuu Long Delta of Vietnam