

## Regional Seminar on “GMO crops: Policy and Practices in South Asia”

South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University, organized a seminar on “GMO crops: Policy and Practices in South Asia” on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 in North South University. The key note speaker of the regional seminar was Nobel Laureate **Sir Richard John Roberts**, while Honorable Minister for Agriculture **Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque**, Member of Parliament, Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest. The Guest of Honor was **Dr. Md Kabir Ikramul Haque**, Executive Chair, Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC). **Mr. Benajir Ahmed**, Chair, Board of Trustees, North South University, **Professor Sk. Tawfique M. Haque**, Director, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University, were also present. **Professor Atiqul Islam**, Vice-Chancellor, North South University chaired the session.

Nobel Laureate Sir Richard John Roberts gave a thought-provoking speech on how important GMO crops are to the around 800 million starving people around the globe specially developing nations. Sir Roberts showed proven studies and reports on the safety issues of GMO technology and how it can essentially help nations to have greater, healthier yields. He pointed out that, since 2005, millions of children died or suffered from Vitamin A deficiency, which he pointed out can easily be provided through GMO crops. He praised Bangladesh for being more positive towards GMO crops by growing BT eggplants. Sir Roberts, advised the audience to ensure more introduction of GMO crops nationwide, through the help of both civil societies and of course, the government of Bangladesh.

Honorable Minister, Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Member of Parliament, also expressed positive outlook on GMO crops and how Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh, might and should be willing to consider GMO crops in its policy, to ensure a sustainable supply of food to 161 million people of this country.



Later on a Policy Colloquium session was held where eminent scientists, journalists and business people took part in policy discussions. Professor Dr Zeba Islam Seraj, head the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at DU said there should be a specialized cell within the Environment Ministry to deal with the GMO (genetically modified organism) events. Otherwise, the issue of advancing the frontier science and release of future biotech products would suffer.



Anwar Faruque, former Agriculture Secretary of Bangladesh Government, emphasized on investing more in research and development of agro-biotechnology, while Lal Teer Seed Limited's Managing Director Mahbub Anam shared some of the private sector's experiences about research and development.

Another panelist and Executive Editor of Dhaka Tribune Reaz Ahmad said most of the anti-GMO campaigns are not founded on any scientific basis. "These arguments are placed mostly out of ignorance," Reaz Ahmad said, emphasizing the need for spreading science education among the masses.

Former Director General of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Dr Jibon Krishna Biswas, and Dr Krishna Prasad Pant, a Fellow of the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE) also spoke as panelists at the colloquium which was moderated by SIPG Director Prof Sk. Tawfique M Haque.

Before the colloquium, a business session was took place where 5 scientific papers were presented and discussed. Dr. Anwar Faruque, former Agriculture Secretary of Bangladesh Government chaired the business session.

In the closing session, NSU Trustee Board Member M A Kashem and Nobel Laureate Sir Richard John Roberts spoke at the closing session and Vice-Chancellor of North South University Professor Atiqul Islam chaired the session.