SEARCA and DepEd explore programs to build up agriculture in K to 12 curriculum

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, presented to Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor M. Briones the Center’s programs that can promote agriculture through the K to 12 curriculum during his courtesy visit on 28 August 2019.

Dr. Gregorio highlighted the School-Plus-Home Gardens Project (S+HGP), a SEARCA initiative that revived and revitalized DepEd’s school garden program. The project was piloted in one high school and five elementary schools under DepEd in Laguna province to test the effectiveness of an integrated, participatory, and science-based approach to school gardening that improves the nutrition, education, and economic well-being of schoolchildren.

Through the S+HGP, SEARCA enabled teachers from the pilot schools to integrate concepts of organic agriculture, nutrition, and climate change in their teaching.
SEARCA, UPLB co-hosts 1st UC Faculty Forum

Sixty-six faculty members from eight members of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC) converged at the SEARCA Headquarters for the First UC Faculty Forum on 23-24 July 2019.

Themed “Responding to the Challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” the forum was co-hosted by SEARCA and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). There were four plenary speakers and 43 papers presented in parallel sessions under four sub-themes. Moreover, two roundtable sessions discussed possible key areas of strategic collaboration among the UC members.

The proposals include cross visits, co-supervision of thesis, co-authorship of papers, research collaboration on topics that transcend boundaries such as on studies involving the Mekong River or the South China Sea. It was also proposed to extend the UC project Joint Master of Science in Food Security and Climate Change (MSFSCC) to a Doctor of Science in Food Security and Climate Change (DSFSCC) program. The panelists also suggested that the UC should use its influence to be an advocacy group for policies that would prioritize the agriculture sector or benefit the small holder farmers in the region.

The UC was established in 1989 to be a leader in implementing collaborative strategies for excellent graduate education and cutting-edge research in agriculture, environment and natural resources for the benefit of Southeast Asia. Its members include Institut Pertanian Bogor and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, University of the Philippines Los Baños, and Kasetsart University in Thailand. It also has Tokyo University of Agriculture and National Taiwan University as associate members while Universitas Brawijaya of Indonesia, University of British Columbia in Canada and Gottingen University in Germany are affiliate members. SEARCA serves as the UC Secretariat.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio (right), SEARCA Director, shares a light moment with Dr. Leonor M. Briones, Secretary, Department of Education (DepEd), Philippines, as he presents various ways in which SEARCA and DepEd could collaborate to promote agriculture among the youth. (Photo courtesy of DepEd)
France-SEARCA partnership pitches for PH agricultural resiliency

In a joint move towards steering resilient communities in the country’s agricultural sector, SEARCA and the Embassy of France in the Philippines gathered 47 experts in a Forum on Reducing Disaster Risk towards a Resilient Agricultural Sector held on 29-30 August 2019 at SEARCA. Participants were members of the academe; farmer group leaders, agriculturists at local government units, disaster risk reduction and management practitioners; representatives from the private sector, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and international development organizations; national and local government officials and staff.

The forum focused on capturing the bigger picture of the vulnerability that the agricultural sector faces as it critically looked into the robustness of current policies, adaptive capacity of institutions, as well as actions and mechanisms that are crucial in reducing risks and shocks from natural disasters.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, stressed the importance of translating the forum discussions into collaborative and synergized interplay of interventions towards winning the war of climate change in the country, particularly at the grassroots level.

Mr. Jean-Jacques Forte, Counselor for Cooperation and Cultural Affairs of the Embassy of France in the Philippines, shared how the forum reflects the French Embassy and SEARCA’s shared commitment to the long-term objective of strengthening post-disaster recovery programs for agricultural communities. He expressed high hopes that the forum will redound to more areas of common interests, interventions, and cooperation projects in the agricultural sector.

This forum was also an opportunity to develop Philippines-France cooperation in the field of research with the participation of two well-renowned French research institutes, CIRAD (Agricultural Research Center for Development) and IRD (Research Institute for Development). French expertise in soil conservation and ecological engineering was also given the limelight through the presentation of techniques developed by GECO Ingénierie.

Sixteen national and international leaders and experts in the sector presented on national government policy frameworks and programs in support of agricultural resilience; local disaster governance in the agriculture sector; technology and research in support of resilience building; resilient strategies and mechanisms supported by development organizations; and private enterprises’ support platforms for disaster preparedness and post-recovery programs for agriculture.

The presentations were followed by panel discussions on the responsiveness of DRR programs and challenges in implementation locally; opportunities that development organizations can offer to agriculture and rural communities towards building resilience; innovative practices and programs to ensure sustainability of interventions; and existing modalities and mechanisms for support and assistance to target beneficiaries and communities in the agriculture sector.

NGO representatives and farmer group leaders also shared their experiences on the ground as they narrated the realities of some agricultural communities in the country. Participants then joined different workshop sessions, wherein each group outlined and presented their analysis on the existing risks and current strategies in place, gaps between available resources and needs, capacity building resources or support systems, and the facilitating and limiting factors towards improving action agenda for achieving sustainability of disaster-resilient agricultural sectors. (Report from CRBuendia)
Agri-biotech forum engages PH legislators, judicial members

Twenty legislators and more than 100 of their staff from the Philippine House of Representatives joined the Forum on the Global Status of Biotechnology convened by SEARCA and partners on 9 September 2019.

Dr. Carl Ramage, CEO & Managing Director of Rautaki Solutions, and Dr. Saturnina Halos, President of the Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines, discussed the global and local biotech trends focused on genome editing and biotech regulations. Richard Torno, a biotech corn farmer from the province of Pampanga, shared his experiences in planting biotech corn and its potential to uplift the lives of Filipino farmers.

The legislators were particularly keen on knowing the potentials of genetic engineering or genetic modification in solving current problems in agriculture such as Panama disease, production of stem-borer resistant rice, and swine fever-resistant hogs, among others. Dr. Halos responded that initial research is being conducted in the country. Dr. Ramage emphasized that while biotech is not the only tool to solve agriculture problems, it has documented benefits and should complement other technologies in solving the mentioned concerns.

Expressing his support, Rep. Manuel Zubiri from the third district of Bukidnon and Vice-chair of the House Committee on Trade and Industry said, “I am not against it. This (biotechnology) is the only way to go. Before I was close-minded about GMOs, but now, a lot of people are starving. There is also malnutrition and climate change. We have to make sure that food security is our priority.”

A similar forum was held for selected members of the Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA) and Philippine Association of Law Schools (PALS) on 12 September 2019. Dean Sedfrey Candelaria of the Ateneo Manila College Law, who is also PHILJA’s Chief of Office for Research, Publications, and Linkages Office, shared that they are currently revisiting the curriculum of law schools to include not just traditional subjects but also current trends, particularly science-based issues such as biotechnology. He noted that the Bt eggplant case, which was prominently discussed in court, has already reached the classrooms and is being studied by law students today.

The forums were part of week-long series of biotech outreach activities organized by the SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center in partnership with the US Embassy Manila, House of Representatives, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), and the Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines (BCP).

SEARCA at the forefront of Agriculture 4.0 in next 5 years

“The reality of digitalizing agriculture is won or lost at the farmer level, where applicability and sustainability have to be tested,” Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, told more than 350 scientists, researchers, and educators at the opening of the 25th Federation of Crop Science Societies of the Philippines (FCSSP) and the 1st Federation of Plant Science Association of the Philippines (FPSAP) Scientific Conference in Davao City on 17 September 2019. The event is co-sponsored by SEARCA.

FPSAP is composed of the Crop Science Society of the Philippines, the Philippine Seed Industry Association Inc., PhilFruits Association Inc., and the Philippine Association of Plant Tissue Culture and Biotechnology.

“At SEARCA, we are working toward elevating the quality of life of farmers by improving their access to new, sustainable, resilient production technologies and systems and help them integrate with modern postharvest and logistics systems," Dr. Gregorio said.

He explained the importance of using technology to achieve Agriculture 4.0, but pointed out that there is resistance to adapt to change by adopting modern technologies because of perceived risks associated with them.

“We have to embrace these changes to actually change the lives of farmers. Let’s give these technologies and changes a chance so that we can have a better chance of changing the current state of our farmers,” Dr. Gregorio said.

The theme of the conference highlights this need. “Advances in plant science through the form of biotechnology or agro-engineering technology can create various impacts in our society and environment and thus should incorporate sustainable designs for future generations,” FPSAP President Ryan Rodrigo P. Tayobong said.

“Plant science and agriculture must be able to cope with how fast new knowledge is generated and technologies change,” Dr. Gregorio affirmed.

In the next five years, he said SEARCA will focus its efforts to facilitate interconnectedness among the academe, industry, and government in order to contribute to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly on quality education; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; and partnerships for the SDGs, among others. (LLDDomingo/JCCBarradas)
The Society for the Advancement of Breeding Research in Asia and Oceania (SABRAO) has elected Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, as its President from 2019 to 2023 during the 2019 International Conference on Plant Breeding for Sustainable Development held here on 2-5 July 2019.

Dr. Gregorio succeeded Prof. Dr. Sang-Nag Ahn of Chungnam National University, South Korea.

SABRAO is an international society dedicated to basic and applied aspects of breeding research in economically important plants.

Formed in 1968—at a time when many countries did not have strong government agencies focused on agricultural research or national programs for major crops—SABRAO holds conferences and its general assembly every four years, often in collaboration with a national breeding society.

Its 14th international conference held this year was jointly organized by SABRAO and the Korean Society of Breeding Science (KSBS). The KSBS is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year as well.

SABRAO prides itself in being “a highly diverse and multi-cultural society, a strength that still exists today.”

First published in 1969, the SABRAO Journal of Breeding and Genetics is the official publication of the society. The journal operates on a not-for-profit basis and focuses on plant species or topics that are relevant to developing countries in Asia and Oceania. (LLDDomingo)

Seoul, Korea—Even with the use of genetic modification—including genomic selection and molecular marker-assisted breeding—to improve certain traits of plants, crop improvement is a long process of developing a commercially ready product.

“Many are impatient with this process and offer better techniques and tools to shorten the process, but still fail in the implementation of a new breeding program,” said Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director and eminent rice scientist.

Speaking at the Association of Academies and Societies of Sciences in Asia (AASSA)-Korean Academy of Science and Technology (KAST) Regional Workshop on Crop Biotechnology for Sustainable Agriculture held in Seoul, Dr. Gregorio recommended exploring an alternative approach to implementing a modern breeding program to address the problem of fast tracking the development of crop varieties for commercialization. He proposed that practical factors be considered and a crop master plan be developed where breeding strategies will be laid out.

“The plan should include the crop market analysis or market intelligence, strength-weakness-opportunity-threat analysis by market segment, and breeding strategies,” Dr. Gregorio explained.

While “marker-assisted selection” is central to most plant breeding programs because the technique allows scientists to use genetic markers that enable them to predict whether a plant will have a desired gene, Dr. Gregorio suggests a “market-assisted selection” approach.

He said the strategies in his proposed approach “may include the targeting specific market segments and develop the product profile per segment, followed by the development of breeding strategy for the target market segment, then implementation of the product development strategy, and finally the seed system strategy while taking into account the logistical constraints in regulatory issues especially if the product is derived from regulated biotechnological tools.”

He stressed that in the implementation proper, an integrated breeding platform towards speeding genetic gain must be in place.

“This platform includes the creation of an interdisciplinary crop breeding team, automation and mechanization, specific techniques in shortening the breeding cycles like genomic selection strategy, gene-editing, and strengthening collaboration between the academic community and commercial crop breeders,” Dr. Gregorio said.

In summary, Dr. Gregorio recommends the introduction of genomic selection into a crop breeding program along with a strong research management approach by identifying and analyzing the problem with the particular crop (such as low genetic gain), identifying the impact on stakeholders, and proposing of a project that will implement genomic selection proofs of concept and training for breeders.

He also emphasized the need for an engaged crop breeding team which effectively communicates to ensure the sustainable implementation of a holistic modern crop breeding program.

The scientific workshop was held on 23-25 September 2019, in conjunction with the 2019 AASSA Executive Board Meeting. (LLDDomingo)
2019 UC Summer School, Training of Trainers concluded

Forty-four students from 15 universities under the SEARCA-initiated Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education and Natural Resources (UC) and the Master of Science in Food Security and Climate Change (MSFSCC) project completed the 2019 UC Summer School.

The Summer School was organized by SEARCA, the University of the Philippines Los Banos (UPLB), University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU), and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). Themed “Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems in Vulnerable Areas,” this year’s Summer School was held in the Philippines on 15-31 July 2019.

SEARCA hosted the first leg of the Summer School wherein short lectures, group discussions, and interactive exercises were conducted as preparation for the students’ field work. The students looked at the impacts and challenges of the changing climate and globalization to food security and the sustainability of small farms in Southeast Asia. They considered the ecological and socioeconomic dimensions of typical agro-food systems in the region and the possible indicators to assess the sustainability state of these dimensions.

The students were divided into eight groups and were deployed to different field sites in Camarines Sur, one of the most vulnerable areas to climate change but also one with a robust and pro-active disaster risk reduction management (DRRM) programs in the Philippines. They were briefed by local officials on the risk profile and the status of the DRRM programs in Camarines Sur, with special focus on the rice and cacao farming systems.

The students also conducted surveys and multi-sectoral focus group discussions with farmer leaders, input providers, traders, processors, barangay nutritionists, and market retailers. They also had a two-night homestay with farmer families who served as subjects of their case studies.

Data gathered were processed and analyzed, and results of the studies were presented in a public conference held on 28 July 2019 with local officials, farmer families, and other stakeholders in attendance.

Dr. Maria Cristeta Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development, said she was touched when she saw how the students warmly welcomed and hugged the farmer families who came to the public conference, and commented on how they may have touched each other’s lives during the course of the field work. She exhorted the students who would be going back to their different home countries to continue touching people’s lives.

The Summer School is a UC annual event that started in 2015 and hosted by the UC members on rotation basis. It has now evolved to become a two-unit credit core course in the MSFSCC program.

A Training of Trainers (ToT) was also held simultaneously with the Summer School. Led by experts from Montpellier SupAgro (MSA) and KU, it discussed how to plan and implement said MSFSCC core course, including technical and administrative challenges for such a transdisciplinary action-learning field course. It considered both the content and pedagogy related to the course as well as issues on budgeting, programming, student assessment, and reporting.

The ToT participants consisted of 25 faculty members and staff from UC and MSFSCC partners, including 19 from overseas institutions. They also served helped organize the Summer School. Another set of 23 faculty members from UPLB and a staff from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations served as resource persons and group facilitators.

Founded in 1989, the UC consists of UPLB, UGM, KU, Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB), and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) as regular members with Tokyo University of Agriculture (NODAI), National Taiwan University (NTU), Universitas Brawijaya (UB), University of British Columbia (UBC), and Gottingen University (UG) as associate and affiliate members. SEARCA serves as the UC Secretariat.

The MSFSCC project is partly funded by ERASMUS+ under its Capacity Building for Higher Education component. The project is led by KU with the other UC regular members, Central Luzon State University (CLSU), Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Chiang Mai University (CMU), Nilai University, Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), and University of Battambang (UBB) as university partners in the region, and with BOKU, MSA, and UG as university partners in Europe. SEARCA, Agrinatura, and Agreenium are network partners of the project. (Report from MCNCuaresma)
SEARCA co-organizes 2019 FSC Summer School

SEARCA and the Food Security Center of the University of Hohenheim, Germany jointly organized the 2019 FSC Summer School held on 9-27 September 2019 with 19 students from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The theme was “Transformative Changes in Agriculture and Food Systems” with modules on Precision Agriculture, Vertical and Urban Farming, and Edible Insects.

During the first week, Dr. José Paulo Molin, Associate Professor at University of São Paulo, Brazil, conducted the first module, which was on precision agriculture. It was concluded with an outdoor post tour of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). The participants also prepared individual reports on relevant researches on precision agriculture.

The module on vertical and urban farming was conducted at the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija on 16-20 September with Dr. Irineo C. Agulto, Professor and former Dean of the College of Engineering, and Engr. Christopher S. Pascual, Instructor at the College of Engineering, as resource persons. They highlighted the importance of re-engineering the agricultural environment through indoor and outdoor vertical farming systems for year-round production of high-value crops. Engr. Pascual demonstrated how to set up a household-type indoor vertical tower, transplant lettuce seedlings, and prepare the liquid nutrient solution. For the rest of the week, the students monitored the crop’s environmental parameters. They also joined outdoor post tours of the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC), Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech), and the experimental stations in CLSU.

Ms. Marwa Shumo, Junior Researcher for EntoNUTRI: Development and implementation of insect-based products to enhance food and nutritional security in sub-Saharan Africa, discussed edible insects for the last module, which ran on 23-27 September. The module delved into insects as an alternative source of subsistence and protein, its nutritional benefits, reasons for eating edible insects, western perception of consuming insects, entomophagy, history and culture of eating insects, and insect production systems for food and feed. The students developed a business pitch to promote edible insects.

The students also attended the SEARCA Agriculture and Development Seminar given by Dr. Reiner Doluschitz, Director of the Food Security Center (FSC) in Germany, who talked about “ICTs in Agriculture and Agribusiness: Past Development, Current Status, Perspectives, and Development Needs.”

The FSC Summer School is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) under the Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation (EXCEED) program. (Report from LAVMalveda)

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Moreover, two roundtable sessions discussed possible key areas of strategic collaboration among the UC members.

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Orientation for new and continuing scholars conducted

An orientation for new and ongoing SEARCA scholars was attended by 60 students enrolled in master’s and PhD programs at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) on 18 August 2019. The orientation intended to acquaint the students about SEARCA and their responsibilities as scholars, and enable them to meet fellow scholars.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, spoke of the importance of finding a mentor which can guide the scholars in their academic pursuits and personal development. He also challenged them to excel in their studies and said SEARCA will do its best to support their endeavors.

Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development, discussed the SEARCA Graduate Scholarship Program administration and management, policies, and guidelines. She emphasized the importance of being in good standing every semester, the prompt submission of documentary requirements for the release of stipend and continuation of scholarship duration, and safety reminders while staying on campus and going out of it. An open forum enabled the scholars to clarify some points and give suggestions based on their earlier experience.

A new set SEARCA Scholars Association (SSA) officers were elected during the meeting. Mr. Romiel John P. Basan, a Filipino PhD in Agricultural Economics student, succeeded Mr. Zadieshar G. Sanchez as SSA President. Other scholars were also elected for various posts in the SSA.

In closing, Dr. Cuaresma enjoined the students to actively participate and support future activities of SEARCA. (Report from PGMMuyco)

FANSSEA integrative forum evaluates SEARCA-UC projects

BOGOR, Indonesia—Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB), a member of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC), hosted and co-organized an Integrative Forum on Food and Nutrition Security in Southeast Asia (FANSSEA) with SEARCA and the Food Security Center of the University of Hohenheim, Germany. Held on 30 September 2019, the forum assessed the impacts of implementation of the six SEARCA-UC research projects under the SEARCA Umbrella Program on FANSSEA 2014-2019 and explore further research collaborations within the region.

As the forum technical coordinator, Dr. Paul S. Teng, Managing Director and Dean of NIE International and SEARCA Senior Fellow, explained provided an overview and explained how FANSSEA was formulated to complement the components of the ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework (AIFS) and Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security in the ASEAN Region (SPA-FS) 2015-2020. He also presented a three-part Regional Perspective on Food and Nutrition Security in Southeast Asia which included the current status of food and nutrition in ASEAN, agriculture situation and food security initiatives in ASEAN, and how to prepare for the future.

Presentations on the six SEARCA-UC research projects were made by the UC member leading the project, as follows: Dr. Rimbawan of IPB for Indigenous Crops; Dr. Warapa Mahakarnchanakul of Kasetsart University for Post Harvest System Improvement; Dr. Aida Azrina Azmi of Universiti Putra Malaysia for Safeguarding and Sustaining the Integrity of Halal; Ms. Anna Floresca F. Firmalino of University of the Philippines Los Baños for Enhancing Human Resource Development in Agriculture; Dr. Masyhuri of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) for Implications of AEC and Trade and Investments; and Ms. Bernice Anne C. Darvin of SEARCA for Food Reserve Management and Policies in Southeast Asia.

The forum participants also discussed how to develop an enhanced framework for collaboration on food and nutrition security in Southeast Asia and the new and urgent research topics that SEARCA and the members of the UC can work on. One group identified four major areas of research to wit: food production; food handling, processing, storage, and transport; food trade and marketing; and consumption behavior. The other group suggested a wider range of topics: food safety risk assessment, standardization of food systems, aquaculture and fisheries, plant-based protein; edible insects, industrial revolution 4.0, agriculture investment standards, technology commercialization, and capacity building on intellectual property.

All the outputs will be integrated and will be disseminated to the partner universities, including identified research gaps, action plans and priority study areas for collaborative research projects and/or scaling up activities, assured Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head of the Graduate Education and Institutional Development Department (GEIDD). (Report from BACDarvin/DBNMalyang)
Ten Southeast Asian nationals received the In-Country/In-Region Scholarship Grants from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) through SEARCA to pursue their graduate studies at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Kasetsart University (KU) in Thailand for academic year 2019/2020.

The 2019 DAAD grantees and their nationality, degree program, and study post are as follows:

- Mr. Pengly Koun, Cambodian, MS in Agricultural Resources, KU
- Ms. Chindy Ulima Zanetta, Indonesian, PhD Plant Science, UPM
- Mr. Cipto Nugroho, Indonesian, PhD in Plant Pathology, UPLB
- Ms. Gita Addelia Nevara, Indonesian, PhD in Food Science, UPM
- Mr. M Murughan Manikam, Malaysian, PhD in Forest Management and Ecosystem Sciences, UPM
- Mr. M. Azlin Bin Mohd Nor, Malaysian, PhD Biocomposite Technology and Design, UPM
- Ms. Nursabrina Munawar, Malaysian, PhD in Food Technology, UPM
- Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuy, Vietnamese, MS in Veterinary Medicine, KU
- Ms. Mai Thanh Huong, Vietnamese, PhD in Agricultural Economics, UPLB

The 10 new grants bring to 32 the total number of ongoing DAAD-SEARCA scholars in the region. DAAD has been SEARCA’s partner in its human resource development program since 1975. To date, more than 350 DAAD-SEARCA scholarship grants have been awarded, 93% of which have been completed. (Report from ZRJalotjot)

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**Fun in the Sun: SEARCA Scholars’ Teambuilding**

SEARCA organized a team building activity for 52 of its scholars enrolled at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. This activity is regularly conducted by SEARCA’s Graduate Education and Institutional Development Department (GEIDD) to welcome new and continuing scholars and enable them to socialize with the rest of their peers at the start of the semester. This year’s activity was held on 8 September 2019 at Shercon Resort and Ecology Park in Batangas, Philippines.

The scholars were divided into four groups named after colors. The first activity tested their communication skills. The second required them to navigate a maze as a team, which put their trust on each other to the test. The third activity required the scholars to collaborate with their teammates in order to win. In the fourth activity, their flexibility was tested. For the fifth activity, the scholars were asked to form a human centipede and then race each other. The last three activities involved water: one tested the scholars’ flexibility and consistency, another their willingness, and the last, their unity. (Report from PGMMuyco)

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Worm Up. All four teams raced each other with Yellow Sun winning for the second time.

Jellyfish. Full on water wars with the combined teams of Love Team-Green Champs vs. Yellow Sun-Blue Sky.

Blue Sky navigating the maze
16 PH gov’t staff complete IKM Mentorship Program

The second batch who completed the Communicating Agriculture and Fisheries Research for Inclusive and Sustainable Development (CAFRISD) course were 16 research and communication staff of the regional offices of the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) and other DA attached agencies.

SEARCA conducted the course under the Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Mentorship Program, a capacity-building project funded by the DA–Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR). It aims to facilitate improved agricultural and fisheries research reporting and knowledge management.

For the final assessment, the mentors synthesized the CAFRISD course while learners provided key learnings and feedback on the implementation of the mentorship program. Mr. Mikael Angelo Francisco, Editor-in-Chief of FlipScience, also gave a supplementary talk on Digital Strategies for Science Communication.

“You as storytellers will create and share insightful, inspiring, and especially truthful stories emanating from research and development technologies. You will share stories that will compel R&D stakeholders to act and create change for the benefit of the agriculture community,” said Ms. Julia Lapitan, Head of DA-BAR’s Applied Communication Division.

In response, top learner Mary Grace Nidoy said “We go back to our offices more equipped, more critical, and more discerning. The real challenge now is to apply and share the lessons we learned in communicating research outputs; to make sense of the information that matters the most to our farmers and fisherfolks; to make the information available and accessible. From practice to praxis.”

IKM Batch 2 ran for eight months, taking off from the successful Batch 1 implementation that ended in September 2018. It employed a blended learning approach that combines online and face-to-face learning tools and methods. The sessions were facilitated by SEARCA consultants who are faculty and staff from the University of the Philippines Los Baños–College of Development Communication. (Report from SPPasiona)

3rd Business Talk for Clients training held

The third run of the training dubbed “Business Talk for Clients: Financial Management” was conducted on 27-30 August 2019 for 40 chairmen, managers and bookkeepers under the project “Building Capacity and Strengthening Partnership for Carabao Development Program funded by the Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) and implemented by SEARCA.

Held in San Fernando City, Pampanga, the training aimed to increase the business literacy knowledge of cooperative entrepreneurs or “cooprenuers” who encountered losses due to lack of efficient financial monitoring and system.

The cooprenuers, along with PCC Carabao-based Enterprise Development (CBED) coordinators, learned how to interpret financial statements and apply it in their respective enterprises, understand performance metrics, and read and use accounting reports.

Prof. Jimmy B. Williams, a financial management expert, facilitated the lecture discussions, workshops, and presentation of outputs. PCC officials present included Dr. Arnel B. del Barrio, Executive Director; Dr. Caro B. Salces, Deputy Director; and Dr. Liza G. Battad, Chief, Planning and Information Management Division. The SEARCA team comprised Project Development and Technical Services staff Ms. Imelda L. Batangantang, Ms. Sarah Grace L. Quiñones, Ms. Maylyn G. Desamparo, and Mr. Ronald P. Salazar. (Report from SGLQuiñones)
Roving workshop features best practices in climate-smart agriculture

SEARCA, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS SEA) organized a roving workshop to demonstrate how local-level outscaling of climate-resilient agricultural practices can be undertaken under different agro-ecosystems and conditions in Guinayangan, Quezon Province.

Held on 9-13 July 2019, the workshop was titled “Establishing Climate-smart Villages (CSVs) in the ASEAN Region to Improve Food Security and Resiliency in Local Communities.” It gathered participants from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand, all of whom are part of the ASEAN Climate Resilience Network (ASEAN-CRN).

Through field visits to key Guinayangan CSV sites, the workshop aimed to increase the participants’ appreciation for CSVs and their potential to significantly improve food security in local communities in the face of heightened risks to agriculture-based livelihood due to changing climate.

CCAFS developed the CSV approach as a response to the need for context-specific solutions to climate risks at the local level, particularly to enable farmers to use experiential learning to cope with challenges posed by climate change and capacitate them in establishing their own CSVs. Model CSV sites were established in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam to serve as platforms for climate-smart agriculture (CSA) learning and community-based participatory action demonstrations.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, underlined the close interconnection between climate and food security issues as the changing climate poses greater risks over the agriculture sector, thereby compromising food security. He noted that the battle against climate change is won or lost at the grassroots level, where localized interventions assume a pivotal role.

Dr. Leocadio S. Sebastian, CCAFS SEA Regional Program Leader, emphasized the crucial role of the village, the basic political unit of society, in national development. He added that the village is the “nucleus of social action,” where real action toward climate change mitigation and adaptation, particularly community mobilization through CSV, starts.

Borrowing from the old adage “It takes a village to raise a child,” Dr. Sebastian said it takes a village to scale CSA.

Lessons learned from the implementation of the Guinayangan CSV were shared by Ms. Emlita Monville Oro, IIRR Country Director and Acting Regional Director for Asia. She emphasized the importance of building the capacities of communities and local government units (LGUs) in scaling up initiatives on CSA.

In his keynote address, Dr. Rex Victor O. Cruz, Professor and Director of the Environmental Forestry Program of the University of the Philippines Los Baños-College of Forestry and Natural Resources, discussed the challenges, needs, and priorities in the ASEAN Region in the context of the current climate change scenario. He shared his experiences working with conservation farmers and pointed out that empowerment entails unlearning and learning processes. He also explained that establishing CSVs require climate-smart technical services, science and technologies, social relations, and governance.

ROVING WORKSHOPS

Module 1 involved a discussion of the key concepts and elements of the CSV as an agricultural research for development approach to addressing climate change, food and nutrition security, and livelihood development. Participatory tools and experiences in establishing the context of CSV, particularly in the case of the Department of Agriculture’s Adaptation and Mitigation Initiative in Agriculture (AMIA) villages and the Guinayangan CSV were also presented.

Module 2 tackled the emerging lessons from CSVs in Southeast Asia through a panel discussion, with Dr. Sebastian; Ms. Perla G. Baltazar, Senior Technical Officer, DA Systems-wide Climate Change Office; and Dr. Julian Gonsalves, IIRR Senior Adviser and CCAFS Project Leader, serving as panelists. Ms. Jana Patricia Koerner, CCAFS SEA Scaling Officer, elaborated on scaling considerations in CSV development.

Module 3 consisted of roving workshops to various sites in Guinayangan, Quezon that showcase best practices in CSA. The first site was Barangay Cabong Norte where participants learned about intercropping and other interventions in an upland agricultural system, with emphasis on corn production. They also visited Barangay Capuluan Tulon, which featured small-scale low external input, low carbon footprint methods of swine raising using resilient but improved native swine breeds as alternative source of livelihood of farmers. Next stop was Barangay Cupulan Central, which showcased initial work on coastal reforestation and diversification of livelihoods of coastal fishing families.

Local experiences and re-entry action planning Guinayangan Mayor Cesar J. Isaac III shared the LGU’s experiences with the Green Fund (payment for ecosystem services) and water resource management during the field visit to the Maulawin Spring Protected Landscape. Participants then proceeded to learn about farmers’ experiences regarding agroforestry and diversification in Brgy. Sta. Cruz, specifically the production of chili peppers and linkage with the private sector in expanding their market. The demo farm and eco-park managed by the Guinayangan Office of the Municipal Agriculturist (OMA) was the last site of the roving workshop. The participants also visited the National Swine and Poultry Research and Development Center and the Quezon Agricultural Research and Experiment Station in Tiaong, Quezon where they learned about the various initiatives and milestones under the DA-AMIA Program, particularly the adaptation strategies and interventions implemented in the AMIA village in San Francisco, Quezon.

The participants later shared their best practices and experiences in CSA-related work. A plenary presentation of their re-entry action plan capped the event. (CRBuendia)
CORON, Palawan—School and home gardens would significantly benefit Busuanga Island, Palawan. This was the consensus of a consultation workshop undertaken by a team from SEARCA and the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) during a scoping visit in Coron on 29-31 July 2019 to gauge the interest and willingness of potential partners and the community to participate in the SEARCA-led School-Plus-Home Gardens Project (S+HGP).

Representatives of the Coron Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO), Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO), local grade schools from the inland and coastal districts, and the tourism sector who participated in the workshop said the municipalities of Coron and Busuanga, which comprise Busuanga Island, are food insecure.

The said agriculture is not a strong sector in the island primarily due to the poor quality of its soil. Though rich in seafoods, the municipalities import most of their fruits and vegetables from neighboring areas. This leads to high prices of these produce, which adversely affect nutrition of poor families. This also increases prices of food in restaurants, an integral part of the booming tourism industry of the island. It was likewise underscored that for every peso earned from tourism in Coron, eighty centavos (Php0.80) leave the municipality due to the importation of produce.

The consultation also indicated the support that could be extended to the S+HGP by various stakeholders. Government agencies, through their local offices, could provide technical assistance on organic vegetable production and provide inputs such as garden tools, seeds, other planting materials, and organic fertilizers.

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The tourism sector could also provide training venues, food and accommodations, and local transportation to the training teams. Under particular conditions, members of the sector could also allow parcels of land adjacent to schools and owned by members of the sector to be used as S+HGP demonstration areas. The sector could be a consumer/market of produce in excess of the needs of the schools. It could likewise encourage industry players to adopt a school for S+HGP and showcase the adopted S+HGP to guests/tourists and engage these tourists in local initiatives.

The S+HGP was a collaboration among SEARCA, UPLB, and the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines, district of Laguna. It supported and redesigned DepEd’s earlier school garden programs through an innovative approach that focused not only on nutrition and education but on the economic well-being of school children, their families, and their communities. The project extended the gardening-feeding linkage to the establishment of food gardens in the children’s homes through which the parents could ensure good nutrition for their children, while also saving on food expenses. Piloted in six schools in the province of Laguna, Philippines, harvests from the school gardens provided fresh vegetables for the school-based feeding program. S+HGP highlighted the multi-functionality of school gardens as learning laboratories for pupils, teachers, and parents on sustainability concepts and the interconnections of food and nutrition, organic agriculture, and edible landscaping, among others.

The scoping visit was undertaken upon the invitation of the Regalo ng Kilit (RnK) Foundation. Its vision is to enhance biodiversity while growing food, boosting tourism, and increasing income in Busuanga Island. It aims to meet its vision through the protection of the Kilgit, which is the local name for the blue-headed racquet-tail parrot, Prioniturus platenae, an International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)-listed vulnerable parrot with less than 10,000 left in the world. Palawan, Philippines is said to be the only place where the Kilgit lives.

The RnK Foundation is headed by Dr. Manuel R. Reyes, Research Professor and Agroecological Engineer at the Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab (SIIL) of the Kansas State University.

The scoping visit team was composed of Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, Program Head; Ms. Carmen Nyhria G. Rogel, Program Specialist; and Ms. Rochella B. Lapitan, Program Support Staff; all from SEARCA’s Research and Development Department and Dr. Blesilda M. Calub, University Researcher IV of the Agricultural Systems Institute of the UPLB College of Agriculture and Food Science and SEARCA Adjunct Fellow. (CGRogel)
ISARD project gains and case studies discussed

BAYBAY CITY, Philippines—Partners in the SEARCA action research “Piloting and Upscaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agriculture (ISARD)” convened for the Case Studies Presentation cum Writeshop of the Gains, Challenges and Opportunities in Piloting Effective Models of ISARD held here on 16-18 July 2019.

SEARCA organized the activity and gathered participants from Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology (MinSCAT); Visayas State University (VSU); the local government units of Victoria, Oriental Mindoro and Inopacan, Leyte; Victoria Kalamansi Farmers Federation (VKFF); Hinabay Women Workers Association (HIWWA), Hinabay Upland Farmers Association (HUFA); and Inopacan Jackfruit Farmers Association (IJFA).

Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development, emphasized the action-to-impact principle of the project. The site-based objectives of the project were also presented.

The project partners validated and finalized the case studies and drafted the project terminal report. They also discussed and documented success stories of the two pilot sites in Victoria, Oriental Mindoro and Inopacan, Leyte, to realize the gains of the project and gather recommendations for the way forward, especially the project’s scaling up to other sites locally and internationally. The case studies on the project sites were presented and refined in workshop sessions.

The ISARD implementation model was also analyzed to assess how it was translated into development strategies used and anchored on the project components, namely: technical assistance, capacity building, knowledge management, and linking and networking.

The workshop included sessions on framework analysis, overall project implementation assessment, and suggestions for sustainable implementation. It summed up the significant accomplishments of the three-year project. It served as a “look back” to the lessons learned during the project implementation by identifying the facilitating and hindering factors experienced by SEARCA and the partners. (Report from RJMBandong)

SEARCA joins IFAD Mekong Knowledge Fair

BANGKOK, Thailand—SEARCA participated in the 2nd International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Mekong Knowledge and Learning Fair (MKLF) held here on 10-12 July 2019 with a knowledge and learning booth that highlighted its IFAD-funded projects and SEARCA publications related to the theme “Promoting Partnerships: Smallholder Producers with Private Agribusiness and Financial Institutions.”

IFAD has tapped SEARCA to implement two projects: Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN) and Rural Regional Transformation: Pathways, Policy Sequencing, and Development Outcomes in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam (RRT).

Mr. Thomas Rath, IFAD Country Director for Vietnam and Lao PDR and Coordinator of the Mekong Hub, explained that the MKLF is a platform for creating partnerships in learning and developing solutions that will serve the interests of both rural producers and agri-food enterprises. He added that it aims to help provide a better understanding of the limitations, challenges, and opportunities of the partnerships between smallholder farmers, the private sector, and the public sector or governments.

SEARCA representatives participated in the event sessions that focused on the stakeholders’ perspective on the partnerships among producers, financial sectors, and agribusiness groups; showcase of agribusiness and financial models and innovations in the Mekong region and the Philippines; and discussions on various mechanisms for engagement with the private sectors. They also visited successful agribusiness in Thailand that showcased public-private-producer partnerships in the country.

More than 100 participants from IFAD offices, loan and grant projects, and other partner institutions attended the event. (Report from PMOrencio/BACDarvin/ZMCEstareja)
UPLB-CEM honors former SEARCA Directors

The University of the Philippines Los Baños-College of Economics and management (UPLB-CEM) has recognized Dr. Arsenio M. Balisacan and Dr. Gil C. Saguiguit, Jr., both former SEARCA Directors, as UPLB-CEM Centennial Outstanding Alumni during its Centennial Anniversary Celebration held on 19 July 2019.

Dr. Balisacan, who is currently the Chairman of the Philippine Competition Commission, keynoted the event.

The SEARCA top executives were among the 100 awardees recognized by UPLB-CEM for their significant contributions to their respective fields of study and practice that carry the College’s brand of education and training.

Both Dr. Balisacan and Dr. Saguiguit earned their MS in Agricultural Economics at CEM-UPLB. They were cited for their illustrious career and outstanding leadership and service to governments and international organizations, including SEARCA.

Dr. Balisacan, who holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Hawaii, served as SEARCA Director from 2003 to 2009. He was succeeded by Dr. Saguiguit, who led the Center from 2009 to 2018. Dr. Saguiguit earned his Doctorate degree in Rural Economics from the Université de Montpellier, France.

Other SEARCA alumni awardees include Dr. Bessie M. Burgos, former SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development Department; Dr. Geronimo M. Collado, SEARCA Senior Fellow and former Project Manager of SEARCA’s Agribusiness and Related Projects; and Dr. Maripaz L. Perez, who headed SEARCA’s Consulting Services Department (now called Project Development and Technical Services). (Report from EGPandanan)

Menorca gets SEAMEO Service Award

PETALING JAYA, Malaysia—Mr. Ricardo A. Menorca, SEARCA Unit Head for General Services, received the SEAMEO Service Award at recognition rites during the 50th SEAMEO Council Conference held here on 22-25 July 2019. Mr. Menorca joined SEARCA in 2003 and is the 12th SEARCA staff to receive the SEAMEO Service Award.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is an inter-government treaty body founded in 1965 to promote regional cooperation in education, science, and culture in Southeast Asia. SEARCA is one of the oldest among SEAMEO’s 26 specialist institutions.

The SEAMEO Service Award is given biennially to recognize exemplary staff members of each SEAMEO specialist institution and its Secretariat who have demonstrated high level of achievement in their work performance, innovation and creativity, professionalism, and commitment that contribute to the success of the organization. The recipients of the SEAMEO Service Award are selected by their home institutions based on a standard set of criteria.

Mr. Menorca travelled to the SEAMEO Council (SEAMEC) Conference with the SEARCA delegation led by Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director. With them were Ms. Adoracion T. Robles, Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Deputy Director for Administration and Unit Head for Management Services; Ms. Julita G. Ventenilla, Unit Head for Internal Audit; and Ms. Leah Lyn D. Domingo, Public Relations Specialist.

The SEAMEC Conference is a ministerial level forum that discusses education initiatives and policies in the region and set out the strategic directions for implementing the programs and projects of SEAMEO.

This year’s conference was hosted by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia and was attended by education ministers and high-level government education officials from SEAMEO member states and associate members as well as top officials and representatives from SEAMEO institutions, development partners, and international organizations. (LLDomingo)
Local stakeholders validate rural transformation study

MANILA, Philippines—SEARCA and the Regional Development Group of National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) jointly organized a Local Stakeholders’ Meeting-Workshop for NEDA Regional Directors and Assistant Directors as part of the project “Rural Regional Transformation: Pathways, Policy Sequencing and Development Outcomes in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam (RRT).”

The project documents and compares the pathways of rural transformation in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam. It is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented by SEARCA.

The workshop is a supplemental validation of the study, allowing high-level officials to reflect on the status of rural transformation in their respective regions, identify key factors and local policies that influenced the state of transformation and identify additional development policies that could affect the achievement of higher rate of transformation.

Dr. Mercedita A. Sombilla, NEDA Regional Development Group and RRT team leader, presented the objectives of the typology paper which describes the rural regional transformation in the Philippines and clusters similar regions based on their performance on selected rural transformation variables.

Dr. Arvin B. Vista, RRT project leader, presented the study results, which showed that most regions belong to the low rural transformation group. He asked for the NEDA officials’ expert opinions on the status of the regional rural transformation and bottlenecks that slow down their transformation (e.g., climate variability and the lack of investments on national road networks). The participants also discussed resources that can be capitalized on to achieve a higher rate of transformation. (Report from MHD Teves)

SEARCA hosts learning event on social forestry impacts in ASEAN

SEARCA, the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), and the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF) Secretariat hosted the Regional Learning Exchange: Impacts of Social Forestry in ASEAN back-to-back with the AWG-SF Strategic Response Fund (ASRF) Knowledge Sharing Workshop held in Sta. Fe, Nueva Vizcaya and Makati City, Philippines on 8-13 September 2019.

Over the past decades, Social Forestry has made significant strides in Southeast Asia and has become an important feature of forest management in the region. Since 2011, the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry (ASFCC) program has been supporting the AWG-SF in addressing three inter-related issues confronting the region: food insecurity, poverty, and climate change. As an implementing partner of ASFCC, SEARCA manages the AWG-SF Strategic Response Fund (ASRF), a flexible funding mechanism that aims to enable AMS Leaders and Focal Points on Social Forestry to quickly respond to emerging issues and challenges and articulate policy recommendations and directions on social forestry.

ASFCC ends in 2020, after nine years of implementation. To date, eight of the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) have developed official social forestry or community-based forest management programs, each with its own specific terminology, definition, and objectives. However, social forestry is yet to realize its potential.

The Regional Learning Exchange workshop for high-level officials was designed to reflect on the key factors such rights and tenure, governance, and local livelihoods that could influence the success of social forestry in meeting national forestry targets and contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event was an opportunity for AMS Leaders and Focal Points on Social Forestry to create a vision on how social forestry could support the achievement of SDGs and the Strategic Plan for ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (FAF) 2016-2025. Participants identified specific key interventions for the Plan of Action for the ASEAN Cooperation in Social Forestry beyond 2020.

The workshop was be attended by AMS Leaders and Focal Points on Social Forestry from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam; ASRF project grantees; and representatives of the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Non-timber Forest Products-Exchange Program (NTFP-EP), RECOFTC, ASEAN Secretariat, AWG-SF Secretariat, and SEARCA. (Report from XGB Capita)
SEARCA Director honored for pioneering breeding research

A scientist, research manager, and teacher in national and international public and private institutions, SEARCA Director Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio was awarded as Crop Science Society of the Philippines (CSSP) Honorary Fellow.

Dr. Gregorio was recognized for his significant contributions to crop science through his pioneering breeding research. These include having led the development of at least 20 rice varieties with tolerance to abiotic stresses while at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) as Senior Plant Breeder. His studies on the genetics and molecular mapping for salinity tolerance, and his development of rapid screening techniques resulted in the first batches of salt-tolerant varieties in the Philippines and other countries in Asia and Africa. The iron-enhanced rice he and his team developed was proven to significantly increase levels of total body iron in the blood of women. A prolific author, he has 112 scientific publications to date. He has also mentored many undergraduate and graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows in the Philippines and other countries.

The award was presented during the 25th Federation of Crop Science Societies of the Philippines (FCSSP) and 1st Federation of Plant Science Associations of the Philippines (FPSAP) Scientific Conference held on 19 September 2019, in Davao City, Philippines.

CSSP promotes human welfare through the discovery and dissemination of knowledge concerning the nature, utilization, improvement, and interrelationships of plants and their environment and the people.

The society holds an annual scientific conference and publishes the Philippine Journal of Crop Science.

In his acceptance speech, Dr. Gregorio said receiving such a prestigious award could dissuade one from making mistakes, and thus making one hesitant to explore and try new and different things more daunting, but he affirmed that it will not be so for him. He still wants to explore and take risks.

He also pushed young crop science professionals to “continue to explore and enjoy; to try and to be ready to fail and learn from it. We tried it; succeed or fail, we always learn. Explore, dare, be different and take risks for the sake of science. But, at the same time, be patient. Perseverance is the key.”

Dr. Gregorio added that “there are three types of people who are likely to be great or successful: those who are related to great people, those who are pioneers or the first in doing things, and those who are different. Most of us cannot be the first two, so be different.” (LDDomingo)