New SEARCA Director advocates strengthening academe-industry-gov’t interconnectivity for agri dev’t

The newly installed SEARCA Director envisions the Center’s strategic role in pushing for inclusive innovation and academe-industry-government interconnectivity towards Agriculture 4.0 and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SEARCA held investiture rites for Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio as the 11th SEARCA Director presided by Philippine Education Secretary Leonor M. Briones on 28 October 2019 at the Center’s headquarters.

A distinguished rice scientist and Academician of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) of the Philippines, Dr. Gregorio is also currently a Professor at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). He brings to SEARCA his wide experience from three decades of work with the International
Among the guests at the investiture were Lao Ambassador Songkane Luangmunthinthe (second from right), Thai Ambassador Vasin Ruangroteepsaeng (third from right), and French Ambassador Nicolas Galey (fourth from right), and representatives of the Embassies of Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Vietnam in the Philippines. (LLD Domingo)
Florendo appointed SEARCA Deputy Director for Administration

SEARCA welcomes Prof. Joselito G. Florendo, a distinguished educator and administrator at the University of the Philippines (UP), as its new Deputy Director for Administration effective 1 December 2019.

Prof. Florendo is an Associate Professor at the UP Diliman (UPD) Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business.

Having served as Vice President for Planning and Finance of the UP System from May 2014 to November 2019, Prof. Florendo brings with him an extensive experience in administration. Prior to that, he also served as Assistant Vice President for Planning and Finance, UP System; Director of UP System Budget Office; Chief Accountant of the UP System Accounting Office; Assistant Executive Director of the UP Foundation, Inc.; Executive Director of the UP Provident Fund; Director of the UPD Business Concessions Office; and Chair of the Department of Accounting and Finance, UP Virata School of Business.

Prof. Florendo has also done work in financial management for the Philippine government at the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd), and Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

Not completely new to SEARCA, Prof. Florendo served as Financial Adviser on Accounting, Audit, Investment, and Finance at SEARCA from 2003 to 2007.

Prof. Florendo has conducted training programs for Citigroup, United Coconut Planters Bank, the Chartered Business Administrator Program of the Philippines, and for overseas Filipino workers in Dubai.

He has authored chapters in the Philippine Corporate Finance (2009 Textbook Edition) and a case study on the arts and culture management in the Philippines in 2003.

In 2015, he was awarded the Most Outstanding Finance Educator of the Philippines by Deloitte-FINEX. He is also the recipient of the Philippine Civil Service Dangal ng Bayan Award conferred by President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016.

Last April, Prof. Florendo was named Runner-up for the PwC Philippines’ 2019 National Accounting Teacher Award on its inaugural year of honoring “the accounting teacher who is a distinguished model of excellence and who has helped uplift the standards of the teaching profession.”

Prof. Florendo is a Certified Public Accountant with a BS in Business Administration and Accountancy from UPD. He holds an International Masters in Small and Medium Enterprises from the Asia-Europe Institute of the University of Malaya, Malaysia. He was also a research fellow of the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.

New Myanmar envoy to PH visits SEARCA

His Excellency U Lwin Oo, Ambassador of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Philippines, visited SEARCA on 19 December 2019. He was received by Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, and Mr. Joselito G. Florendo, SEARCA Deputy Director for Administration.

Ambassador Lwin Oo has been very recently appointed to the Philippines, having presented his credentials to President Rodrigo R. Duterte just on 4 December 2019.

Dr. Gregorio briefed him about SEARCA and its programs, many of which are regional in scope and include projects and activities covering Myanmar. In particular, Myanmar has been actively engaged with SEARCA’s Graduate Education and Institutional Development Program. Exactly 100 Myanmar nationals have been awarded SEARCA scholarships for master’s and PhD studies, 83 of whom have completed their graduate programs.

The envoy expressed appreciation of the scholarships that SEARCA has provided to Myanmar nationals.

Also present during the briefing were Mr. Florendo; Mr. Min Si Thu Zaw, Third Secretary, Embassy of Myanmar in the Philippines; and the Ambassador’s wife.

Before meeting with the SEARCA officials, Ambassador Lwin Oo met with Myanmar students currently enrolled at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), most of whom are SEARCA scholars.
ACB, SEARCA renew ties to mainstream biodiversity in agri

SEARCA and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on 4 November 2019 to continue cooperating on programs that will mainstream biodiversity in agriculture and build capacities of ASEAN Member States (AMS) in biodiversity conservation as it relates to agriculture and food. They will jointly undertake projects and activities covering thematic areas on agriculture and biodiversity, along with capacity enhancement activities and information exchange and awareness campaigns.

Dr. Gregorio said a healthy natural resource base as a prerequisite for sustainable agricultural and rural development is emphasized under SEARCA’s new five-year strategic plan.

"Mainstreaming is important because of the inextricable connection between agriculture and biodiversity. Together, our organizations can work to strike the balance between the two," Dr. Lim said.

This was affirmed by Dr. Gregorio, emphasizing that "our hope is that these common interests will evolve into concrete plans for joint research and development undertakings, and scientific fora and conferences on emerging development issues in the region we both serve and call home."

(SEARCA Director Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio (front, right) and ACB Executive Director Dr. Mundita Theresa S. Lim affix their signature to the MOU during the ceremonial signing. Also in the photo are Dr. Pedcris M. Orenicio, SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development, and ______ of ACB.

SEARCA takes part in 2019 World Food Day

STUTTGART, Germany—A SEARCA delegation joined experts, students, and practitioners to tackle various perspectives, solutions, and challenges to global food security and trade at the World Food Day (WFD) Colloquium themed “Food Security and Trade in the Period of Change and Innovation” held here on 16 October 2019. The colloquium is an annual event organized by the Food Security Center (FSC) of the University of Hohenheim.

Dr. Pedcris M. Orenicio, SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development, presented the Southeast Asian experience on the enablers of inclusive and sustainable agricultural value chains that contribute to food security and poverty alleviation in the region. He drew lessons from SEARCA’s various initiatives under the umbrella theme of inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD). Sharing insights from the SEARCA-implemented project “Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region (ATMI-ASEAN), he emphasized the importance of linking smallholder farmers to the commercial food systems and analyzing areas for policy intervention and enterprise development to address weak links in the value chain.

With Dr. Orenicio at the colloquium were Dr. Maria Cristeta Cuaresma, Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development, and Mr. Sonny P. Pasiona, Project Development and Technical Services Staff.

Dr. Cuaresma and Mr. Pasiona also attended the FSC Annual Planning Meeting where SEARCA presented accomplished activities that included a short course on cropping system models for climate impact assessment and planetary health, a regional workshop on pasture and forage crops, a regional forum on the fundamentals of halal toward food security, a summer school on transformative changes in agriculture and food systems, an integrative forum on food and nutrition security in Southeast Asia, and a seminar on ICTs in agriculture.

Since 2009, SEARCA has been a strategic partner of FSC, one of five excellence centers of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) program “EXCEED - Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation.” (Report from SPPasiona)
German Embassy awards DAAD-SEARCA scholarships

MANILA, Philippines – The German Embassy here awarded master’s and PhD scholarships to 11 Southeast Asians, among them three Filipinos, under the In-Country/In-Region Scholarship Programme by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) through SEARCA.

DAAD is one of SEARCA’s staunchest and longest partners in its human resource development program. Since 1975, more than 380 DAAD-SEARCA scholarships have been awarded, 90% of which have been completed.

The scholarship certificates for academic year 2019/2020 at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) were presented to eight of the 11 scholars in a handover ceremony presided by Mr. Kai Tomzig, First Secretary for Cultural Affairs, at the German Club in Makati City last November 25. Also present was Katja Becker-Sliwa, DAAD representative and lecturer at UP Diliman (UPD) and Ms. Zacyl R. Jalotjot, SEARCA Program Specialist, Graduate Education and Institutional Development.

The new DAAD scholars are UPLB are:

- Ms. Vat Sovanny, Cambodian (MS, applied nutrition)
- Ms. Edchelle S. Flores, Filipino (MS, community development)
- Ms. Ines Soares Pereira, Timorese (MS, environmental science)
- Mr. Cipto Nugroho, Indonesian (PhD, plant pathology)
- Ms. Marla V. Relloso, Filipino (PhD, agricultural economics)
- Ms. Zyra May H. Centino, Filipino (PhD, agricultural economics)
- Mr. Augusto Barros, Timorese (PhD, animal science)

Moreover, there are also 14 DAAD-SEARCA scholars studying in Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Indonesia, Kasetsart University (KU) in Thailand, and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Malaysia, who received scholarship grants for academic year 2019/2020. (Report from ZRJalotjot)

Agreement on doctorate scholarship forged

TAIPEI, Taiwan—SEARCA, the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC), and Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI) signed a Memorandum of Agreement on the Tokyo NODAI-UC Scholarship for Dissertation Doctorate Program on 22 November 2019.

SEARCA is one of the oldest specialist institutions of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), an international treaty organization.

The partnership aims to enhance the agricultural research and development in Southeast Asia by allowing SEAMEO scholars to be conferred a doctorate degree from Tokyo NODAI upon satisfying the requirements for doctorate dissertation work.

Tokyo NODAI offers a unique integrated approach to agricultural education through its three campuses with the Faculties of Applied Bio-Science, Regional Environmental Science, International Agriculture and Food Studies located at its Tokyo campus in Setagaya-ku, the Faculty of Agriculture at the Atsugi campus in Kanagawa and the Faculty of Bio-industry at the Okhotsk campus in Hokkaido. Tokyo NODAI aims to advance agriculture and to support agriculture’s related industries through its programs focused on core areas of Agronomy, Life Science, Environmental Science, and Bio-industry Science. (Report from PGMuyco)
Orientation of SEARCA scholars held at UPM, IPB, and KU

SERDANG, Malaysia—The SEARCA Graduate Education and Institutional Development Department (GEIDD) conducted an orientation on scholarship guidelines and responsibilities for new and ongoing SEARCA scholars studying at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) on 31 October 2019.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, joined the GEIDD team to meet 21 of 34 SEARCA scholars enrolled at UPM who attended the meeting. He informed them of SEARCA’s new collaboration with the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), which will open opportunities for scholars studying at UPM to conduct part of their research at MARDI.

Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, SEARCA Program Head for Graduate Education and Institutional Development, presided over the orientation. She discussed the responsibilities of a SEARCA scholar, nature of the scholarship, and other benefits extended to SEARCA scholars such as support for paper presentation, publication fees, customized trainings, among others.

The same orientation was held at the Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) in Indonesia on 29 September 2019 and at Kasetsart University (KU) in Thailand on 4 October 2019.

The orientation meeting is held annually for SEARCA scholars based in five study posts: UPM, IPB, KU, the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). It is intended to guide the scholars on the scholarship administration policies. It also serves as a venue for scholars studying in the same study post to meet each other. (Reports from ZRJalotjot/PGMMuyco)

SEARCA’s scientific journal steps up to global challenges of agri dev’t

The Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development (AJAD) launches a new look on its 15th year of publication, symbolic of the pivotal turn in the goal of its publisher, SEARCA, to contribute in addressing regional and global challenges, elevating agricultural families’ quality of life through sustainable and resilient livelihoods and access to modern networks and markets.

The new AJAD look highlights the iconic tree emblem of its publisher. The SEARCA emblem is a molave tree with an interlace of grain stalks and panicles wreathed under its roots. In the same way, the AJAD intends to anchor on its roots while widening its reach to promote greater awareness of the latest findings in research, new methodologies, and policy concerns in agriculture and rural development in Asia.

“The evolving context of agriculture, rural development, and state of farmers, as aligned with the global goals, focus on the contribution of agriculture to hunger and malnutrition eradication, and to improving the standard of living of all in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner,” says Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director.

Dr. Gregorio underscores SEARCA’s commitment “to participate in the achievement of global priorities and contribute to developing awareness, changing mindsets, and initiating collective action in collaboration with its key partners.”

In line with SEARCA’s more aggressive stance of contributing to the state of agriculture primarily in the Southeast Asian region, and broadly to global development targets, the AJAD will continue to improve the quality and relevance of published papers and broaden its reach across Asia and beyond.

The latest AJAD issue, Volume 16 Number 2 published this December, features six papers authored by researchers from four countries. The first two measure performances: one is the rice production efficiency in Myanmar using data envelopment analysis, and the second is a Philippine paper focusing on communal irrigation systems. Two other articles tackle conditions in Indonesia, one discusses agricultural households’ food demands, and the other is on income inequality of oil palm plasma farmers. Another Philippine paper studies the technical efficiency and social capital in tilapia production, while the final paper discusses a transformative learning ground-up approach to sustainable development in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta.

First published in 2004, AJAD provides information and analysis on topics within the broad scope of agriculture and development. As the official journal of SEARCA, it publishes articles resulting from empirical, policy-oriented, or institutional development studies, as well as articles of perspectives on agriculture and development, political economy of rural development, and trade issues.

Regularly published twice a year in June and December, AJAD is indexed in the Emerging Sources Citation Index of the Web of Science, EBSCO Information Services, Research Papers in Economics, AgEcon Search, Socio-economic Research Portal for the Philippines, CAB Abstracts, ASEAN Citation Index, The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library, and Australian Business Deans Council.

SEARCA publications are a part of its broader knowledge management program that promotes a learning culture, knowledge creation, and knowledge sharing and use among key actors in agricultural and rural development, primarily in Southeast Asia. It aims to link science, practice, and policy toward food and nutrition security and rural poverty reduction primarily in the region.

AJAD accepts submissions throughout the year through the submission portal https://ajad.searca.org/ and all articles published in AJAD may be downloaded for free from the same link. Print editions may be purchased—intentions may be emailed to ajad@searca.org. Electronic notifications for new issues may also be subscribed to by registering to http://bit.ly/AJAD-subscribe. (MBCadiz)
SEARCA joins MSFSCC final project meeting

BANGKOK, Thailand—SEARCA participated in the final meeting of the Master of Science in Food Security and Climate Change (MSFSCC) project held here at Kasetsart University (KU) on 3-4 October 2019.

The MSFSCC is a joint degree project offered by five members of the SEARCA-initiated Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC), namely: KU, University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in the Philippines, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Malaysia, Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), in Indonesia.

The meeting discussed the project accomplishments vis-à-vis planned targets and the difficulties during project implementation. It was presided by project leader Dr. Poonpipope Kasemsap, who provided an overview of the project, outcomes, and outputs. Prof. Dr. Robiah Yunus, Dean of UPM School of Graduate Studies, presented the established MSFSCC curriculum at UPM. Meanwhile, the students’ handbook shared by Dr. Mark Dondi Arboleda, UPLB Graduate School Secretary, was refined with comments from project team members.

The project team members also took part in a webinar hosted by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) regarding the final report preparation.

Dr. Didier Pillot of Montpellier SupAgro, discussed the next steps and prospective cooperation and new projects arising from the MSFSCC.

The MSFSCC project is partially funded by the European Commission’s ERASMUS+ Capacity Building for Higher Education. Led by KU, the ERASMUS project participants include 11 other partners from Southeast Asia and five partners from Europe. (Report from PGMMuyco)

SEARCA, NTU co-organize University Consortium Board Meeting

TAIPEI, Taiwan—SEARCA and the National Taiwan University (NTU) jointly organized the 32nd Executive Board Meeting of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC) on 21-22 November 2019.

SEARCA has been the consortium secretariat since it launched in the UC in 1989. SEARCA was represented in the Executive Board by Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director. With him were Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma, Program Head, and Ms. Paula Grace M. Muyco, Program Specialist, both of the SEARCA Graduate Education and Institutional Development Department; and Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, Program Head, Research and Development Department.

The Executive Board reviewed the UC’s accomplishments as reported by its members in terms of scholarships, grants, activities, and offshoot projects resulting from collaborations with institutions. They firm up planned activities for next year and discussed updates on the ERASMUS+-funded project on a Joint Master program in Food Security and Climate Change (MSFSCC) and its offering in 2020.

One of the top comprehensive and research-oriented universities in Taiwan with four international research centers, six national research centers, and 50 college-level research centers, NTU was formally accepted as an associate member early this year. NTU has will host the 2nd UC Faculty Forum in September 2020.

This year’s meeting was also the first for Universitas Brawijaya (UB) as a regular member of the UC after being granted an affiliate member status since 2016. Founded in 1961, UB is one of Indonesia’s leading universities, specializing in agriculture, medicine, economics, law, engineering, and information technology. UB has committed to host in 2020 the UC Summer School, a postgraduate course designed to enhance the understanding of the interdisciplinary approach in tackling the issue of food and nutrition security in Southeast Asia for sustainable development.

All UC regular members were and associate members were represented in the meeting. The University of British Columbia (UBC) was also in attendance, having been reinstated as an affiliate member in 2018. (Reports from PGMMuyco)
Diverse perspectives on Phl Rice Tariffication Law aired at World Rice Congress

MANILA, Philippines—SEARCA convened a parallel session on “Regional Implications of the Philippine Rice Tariffication Law” during the Inaugural Rice Research Symposium of the World Rice Conference (WRC) organized by the The Rice Trader (TRT) on 13 November 2019 at the Makati Shangri-La Hotel.

Republic Act 11203, otherwise known as the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), has recently been passed in the Philippines with the purpose of lifting existing quantitative import restrictions on rice. With the current influx of imported rice and the consequent plunge in domestic farmgate prices, the RTL has amassed mixed reactions from various stakeholders of the local rice industry, raising the question as to whether it is indeed beneficial for the Philippine rice industry. Nonetheless, the current push for the establishment of an ASEAN common market has steered regional strategies toward promoting and strengthening intra-ASEAN trade and market integration.

The parallel session aimed to assess the policy implications on regional trade, rice reserves, food security, agriculture and rural development, and rice farmers’ income and competitiveness in relation to the implementation of the RTL.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, opened the session by emphasizing the need to make people more aware of what the RTL is about, especially the farmers. He said farmers and consumers are mostly concerned with the price of rice and therefore we need to discuss and determine the “right price and the right time.” He added that the medium by which people are informed about the RTL is likewise of crucial importance to ensure that stakeholders are given the proper information about the law.

Dr. Roehlano M. Briones, Senior Research Fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), keynoted the session with a presentation titled “Is tariffication in trouble?” He provided an overview of the immediate aftermath and potential long-term impact of rice industry liberalization in the Philippines. He said that despite the immediate decline in farmgate and retail prices of rice, the implementation of the RTL or liberalization of the industry, in the long-term, can benefit the society as a whole.

In terms of regional trade, Dr. Ramon L. Clarete, Professor at the UP School of Economics (UPSE), said that with the liberalization of rice import policies in the Philippines, we can possibly experience an increase of around 10% in rice imports for local consumption. Moreover, the expected boost in productivity and efficiency in rice farming (i.e., milling and logistics) will encourage modernization and farm aggregation as part of the productivity effect of import liberalization.

A U-shaped “love-hate relationship” is how Mr. Jose Ma. Luis P. Montesclaros described food security in Southeast Asia. The associate research fellow from Nanyang Technological University of Singapore claimed that climate change and the failure of rice production systems to upgrade or adapt has caused a sudden reversal of the state of undernourishment in the region. In addition, he cited the lack of exposure to trade competition in markets, caused by quantitative restrictions such as the import quotas, has prevented rice production systems to upgrade and adapt.

The RTL’s implications on regional rice reserves were discussed by Ms. Jansinee Kankaew, Head of Implementation of the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserves (APTERR) Secretariat. According to Ms. Kankaew, the RTL has significantly affected the operations of the National Food Authority (NFA), which is APTERR’s counterpart in the Philippines. With NFA losing its importing capacity, the implementation of the APTERR Tier 1 programme between the Philippines and Japan might be at risk.

Mr. Jerry E. Pacturan, the Country Programme Officer for the Philippines and Myanmar of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), provided his views from the development sector. Looking at the broader perspective of selected ASEAN countries, he stressed that rapid rural transformation is indeed happening in the region. In support of the implementation of the RTL, Mr. Pacturan claimed that the positive implications of the RTL as indeed for the benefit of the country. He said that with the tariffication, resources must be used to support increasing productivity, farm consolidation, and mechanization in the rice sector. With a more responsive strategy for the rice industry, the government will be able to refocus its resources toward the diversification of the agricultural sector and provide equal attention to other high-value crops with competitive advantage.

To voice out the sentiments of the local farmers, Mr. Crescencio C. Paez, Director of the Cooperative Development Program of the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), warned us about the impacts of the RTL to our farmers if the law is not properly calibrated. He said that the issues and challenges that farmers face every cropping season in relation to market and environmental risks, market power, and governance, were not addressed head-on in the RTL. Moreover, appropriate safeguards and safety nets for the protection of local farmers and consumers must be put in place.

In closing, Dr. Briones said that at the regional level, although the Philippines may become the world’s biggest rice importer soon, it will not be much of a shock to the world rice market as during that of the 2008 crisis. The discussions on the regional implications of the RTL appears to be more on the long-term. If other countries would follow the same step that the Philippines took with the liberalization of its rice industry and open up rice trade, then rice supply may be secured for the region in the foreseeable future.
Organic or inorganic farming? Pitfalls, opportunities bared

SEARCA hosted the Forum on Organic and Inorganic Farming held on 14 October 2019, which was organized by the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines, Inc. (CAMP) in partnership with SEARCA, the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic, and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), and the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Institute of Plant Breeding (UPLB-IPB).

The forum gathered scientists and practitioners in agriculture for a balanced discussion on the science and practice of both organic and inorganic agriculture, and the ways and means for integrating the two opposite and often conflicting sides of farming to achieve food security.

Dr. Rogelio V. Cuyno, CAMP Secretary, said CAMP hopes to come out with a policy paper highlighting the position shared with SEARCA, PCAARRD, and IPB during the forum. A book of proceedings will also be produced by PCAARRD based on documentation from SEARCA.

Roundtable discussion tackles ASEAN economic integration

BANGKOK, Thailand—SEARCA organized the Regional Workshop cum Roundtable Discussion on ASEAN Economic Integration held on 28-29 November 2019 under the auspices of the “Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN)” funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The ATMI-ASEAN project is being implemented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) as lead and SEARCA as partner to support the ASEAN and ASEAN Member States (AMS) by designing policies and programs to enhance the enabling environment for investment in regional value chains towards food security and inclusive development.

Dr. Fabrizio Bresciani, IFAD Lead Regional Economist of the Asia and Pacific Division, said the broader challenge of the project is to understand how market integration will impact transformation of farm households and their ability to rise from poverty. He pointed out the need to go beyond the research gains of the project and start engaging closely with policymakers.

The discussion focused on the domestic agricultural marketing systems, and infra- and extra-ASEAN international trade, particularly in the project’s target AMS (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam). Researchers who conducted national-level policy studies gave an overview of the agricultural marketing systems in their respective countries and chosen priority commodities—that is, maize for Cambodia and Lao PDR, pulses for Myanmar, pork-based processed products for the Philippines, and swine for Vietnam.

Moreover, the meeting discussed the findings of researches conducted by IFPRI and other institutions that can provide insights on the drivers of transformations and growth in the AMS. (Report from BACDarvin)

SFRT grantees gather in technical workshop

HO CHI MINH, Vietnam—Researchers from five projects funded by the SEARCA Seed Fund for Research and Training (SFRT) convened here on 9-10 December 2019 for a technical workshop focused on challenges of their research to contribute to inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD).

SEARCA conducts the technical workshop at the start, midterm, and end of the SFRT projects to ensure that grantees use appropriate methodologies, resolve difficulties in conduct of the research, and ensure research results meet the standards of scientific rigor.

The participating SFRT grantees and title of their research are: Dr. Thong Anh Tran, “Freshening salinity areas: Implications of Ba Lai irrigation scheme for agro-ecosystems and household adaptation in Binh Dai district, Ben Tre Province, Vietnam;” Mrs. Quynh Thi Thanh Dang and Mr. Tran Van Hieu, “Understanding relationships between providing ecosystem services of forest and rural livelihoods: A Case Study in Le Tri Commune, Tri Ton District, An Giang Province, Vietnam;” Mr. Rhomir Samiley Yanquiling, “Demystifying climate adaptation finance for the poor rural-agricultural communities and the vulnerable sector: the case of the People’s Survival Fund in the Philippines;” Dr. Le Thi Thanh Loan and Dr. Nguyen Van Loc, “Food and nutrition security of poor households in Tuong Duong district, Nghe An province, Vietnam;” and Mr. Le Ngoc Hiep and Mr. Nguyen Minh Dang (on behalf of Dr. Nguyen Van Kien), “Social perception of the organic industry in Vietnam.”
The experiences shared by farmer-scientists supported by the Community-based Participatory Action Research (CPAR) of the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR) on how such intervention has been instrumental in increasing productivity and income was the major highlight of the 4th National CPAR Congress held on 28-29 October 2019 in Quezon City, Philippines.

Jointly organized by SEARCA and DA-BAR, the congress showcased the most significant results of CPAR, a location-specific research cum extension activity that used a participatory approach wherein farmers and fisherfolk are considered as co-implementers and providers of key inputs and not merely project beneficiaries. CPAR also verifies as well as adapt or demonstrate improved farming systems technologies and practices to suit the needs of a specific micro-agro-climatic environment within a given municipality or province.

Mr. Vicente Casas Sr., a farmer from Zamboanga, shared that the CPAR program showed how to effectively use technologies to increase profit margin in their rubber plantations. For her part, Ms. Sherlie Suniga, an Ilocos farmer, related how CPAR was instrumental in increasing their access to better trainings and farm inputs that were selected jointly by their farmers’ organizations. Other farmers and fisherfolks from different parts of the country also shared similar sentiments.

Dr. William D. Dar, Philippine Agriculture Secretary, stressed the importance of using the results and technologies generated from various CPAR projects across the country and pushed for their commercialization. He also put forth the challenge of upscaling the 20-year experience of the CPAR program, given the lessons learned, and maximizing the tested technologies so that farmers and fisherfolk can fully benefit from them.

To support DA-BAR in upscaling tested technologies and farming practices, SEARCA is undertaking a project that assesses the overall program cycle of implementation of CPAR with the DA-BAR regional field offices (RFOs), the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the local government units-implementing partners to draw lessons and harvest policy recommendations for the overall improvement of CPAR. This 18-month project would provide DA-BAR a Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation (RBME) Framework for the CPAR Program, policy brief, and updated CPAR Manual for program improvements and benchmarking activities in the implementation process of CPAR vis-à-vis comparable programs implemented by other national government agencies and other research institutions within and outside of the country.

(Report from RCAncog)

The 4th National CPAR Congress participants.

UB prof presents study on underused tuber-based food

MALANG, Indonesia—Dr. Teti Estiasih, Professor at Universitas Brawijaya in Indonesia, presented her SEARCA Professorial Chair Lecture titled “Developing Local Underutilized Tuber-based Foods as Healthy and Functional Food to Support Food Security” on 30 October 2019 in this city.

In order to encourage people to consume local underutilized tuber-based foods, Dr. Teti said there is a need to address constraints such as limited production, availability in the market, and awareness in terms of health benefits and bioactive compounds in tuber crops.

The SEARCA Regional Professorial Chair Grant aims to recognize outstanding Southeast Asian experts in the academe who have championed agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia. Since Academic Year 2012-2013, the Center has awarded the SEARCA Regional Professorial Chair to 38 deserving academics. (Report from ZRJalotjot)
ASRF progress reported in ASEAN-Swiss partnership meeting

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia—A Planning Meeting among the implementing partners of the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership on Social Forestry and Climate Change (ASFCC), its Advisors, and the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG-SF) Secretariat was held here on 18-19 October 2019.

The ASFCC is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to support the AWG-SF in addressing three inter-related issues confronting the region—food insecurity, poverty, and climate change. SEARCA is an implementing partner of the ASFCC along with the Center for Forestry Research (CIFOR), World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Non-timber Forest Products-Exchange Program (NTFP-EP), and The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC).

SEARCA implements the AWG-SF Strategic Response Fund (ASRF), a flexible funding mechanism that aims to enable AWG-SF Leaders and Focal Points to quickly respond to emerging issues and challenges and articulate policy recommendations and directions on social forestry. Under ASFCC Phase III, the ASRF awarded nine projects in eight ASEAN Member States and provided funds to enable six grantees to participate in conferences. SEARCA also supported the ASEAN-level initiatives of developing policy frameworks and guidelines for cross-sectoral collaboration in support of ASEAN Food, Agriculture and Forestry and the ASEAN Multi-sectoral Framework on Climate Change.

(PH swine industry in focus at ATMI-ASEAN events

MANILA, Philippines—The Roundtable Discussion on Policy Recommendations of the Value Chain Study on Pork-based Processed Products in Luzon, Philippines discussed the results of the policy study under the Philippine component of the Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security and Inclusiveness Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN)* project co-implemented by SEARCA and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). The meeting gathered recommendations on how to strengthen and support the pork-based processed products industry in Luzon.

SEARCA and the Philippine Department of Agriculture (DA) jointly convened the roundtable discussion and the third national project steering committee meeting held on 2-3 October 2019 in Quezon City. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) funds the ATMI-ASEAN project.

Key preliminary findings of the study on value chain of pork-based processed products in Luzon include expansion of yellow corn production due to technological seed innovation, live animal improvement due to improved animal inventory, increase in pork consumption due to an increase in population and income, Filipino families have a general preference for pork compared to beef and chicken.

Dr. Imelda J. Santos, Division Chief of the National Veterinary Quarantine Services Division, Bureau of Animal Industry, noted the upward trend in the country’s swine population in 2010-2019 (65% from backyard farms, 35% imported). She also said the African swine fever is the most economically devastating swine disease and presented the reactive and preventive measures conducted by the Philippine government to mitigate it.

Other speakers discussed food safety and standards for processed pork products and stakeholders’ perspective on challenges and opportunities in the processed pork industry. Also tackled were issues and challenges related to swine production, processing, and marketing as well as specific strategies and policies that the government agencies have implemented and should undertake to address such problems. Ways on how the farmers’ and civil society organizations and the private sector can assist the government in addressing these issues in the Philippine swine industry were also threshed out.

(Report from JAustria/LACarandang)

SEARCA scholar bags writing award

Ms. Hoang Le Huong, a Vietnamese SEARCA scholar, bagged the Best in Grammar and Academic Writing special award from the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), Language Instruction Towards Excellence (LITE) Program on Intensive English Course for International Graduate Students for first semester AY 2019-2020. The award was presented on 2 December 2019.

With her were seven other SEARCA scholars who took the intensive lessons to develop their competency in the English language in terms of speech, reading and vocabulary, grammar, and academic writing. They were the 43rd batch to finish the course.

The other UPLB-CAS LITE program completers who are SEARCA scholars were Mr. Candle Siddhisone and Viengvilaiphone Botthoulath, both Lao; Ms. Thant Mon Paing, a Myanmar; Mr. Simao Margono Belo, Mr. Nelson Aniceto Da Costa, and Ms. Agostinha Soares Amaral, all Timorese; and Ms. Issaree Supnui, a Thai. (PGMMuyco)
ASEAN agri marketing systems tackled in regional meeting

BANGKOK, Thailand—Domestic agricultural marketing systems as well as intra- and extra-ASEAN international trade were the focus of the Regional Workshop cum Roundtable Discussion on ASEAN Economic Integration organized by SEARCA here on 28-29 November 2019.

Conducted under the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)-funded project “Agricultural Transformation and Market Integration in the ASEAN Region: Responding to Food Security Concerns (ATMI-ASEAN),” the regional meeting concentrated on Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam as these are the countries covered by ATMI-ASEAN.

ATMI-ASEAN is being implemented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) as lead and SEARCA as partner. It aims to support ASEAN and its member states by designing policies and programs that can enhance the enabling environment for investment in regional value chains, thereby contributing to food security and inclusive development.

Representatives from the research teams that conducted the national-level policy studies provided an overview of the agricultural marketing systems in their respective countries and chosen priority commodities, that is maize for Cambodia and Lao PDR, pulses for Myanmar, pork-based processed products for the Philippines, and pig for Vietnam.

Speakers included Mr. Sorn Vichet of the General Directorate of Agriculture (GDA), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Cambodia; Dr. Phonevilay Sinavong of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao PDR; Ms. Nang Seng Pin of the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Myanmar; Mr. Christian Paul L. Fang of the College of Economics and Management (CEM), University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB); and Ms. Bui Thi Viet Anh of the Center for Agricultural Policy (CAP), Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD), Vietnam.

On the other hand, Dr. Hirooyuki Takeshima, IFPRI Senior Research Fellow, and Dr. Roy, presented two IFPRI studies: “Agricultural transformation, market integration, and smallholders in Southeast Asia: Regional overview and some micro-evidence from Vietnam” and “A Tale of Two Headmost Asian Trading Blocs: Assessing Food Trade of ASEAN and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC),” respectively.

Going beyond the research work Dr. Fabrizio Bresciani, IFAD Lead Regional Economist of the Asia and Pacific Division, noted that the need to consider understanding how the process of market integration will impact the transformation of the farm-households and their ability to emerge out of poverty as the broader challenge of the project.

He expressed the need to go beyond the research work that the project has accomplished so far and start engaging more closely with policymakers, to whom the roles of the ASEAN Secretariat, civil society organizations, and regional institutions will be of key importance.

Meanwhile, Dr. Pedcris M. Orencio, SEARCA Program Head for Research and Development and ATMI-ASEAN Principal Investigator for SEARCA, saw the activity as an opportunity to bring forward the discussion towards charting sustainable development in view of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC has contributed in terms of facilitating trade and policy development in support of increasing the competitiveness and efficiency of the targeted ASEAN Member States (AMS).

Future outlook. All the presentations served as inputs in the roundtable discussion on the design and methodology of regional-level technical assistance of ATMI-ASEAN and recommendations for the high-level policy forum to be organized in 2020.

The key takeaways from the workshop were summarized by Mr. Jimmy B. Williams, ATMI-ASEAN agri marketing/ to page 13
SEARCA holds agri-biotech boot camp for youth

“When you are an agriculturist or scientist, you will see the world and the world will see you,” SEARCA Director Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio told the delegates of the 4th Agri-biotech Boot Camp held at SEARCA on 13-15 November 2019.

Currently the youngest scientist in the country to have been conferred the rank of Academician by the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) of the Philippines, Dr. Gregorio underlined the importance of engaging the youth in agri-technology and encouraged the students to explore a career in agriculture. He also advised them to “strive in their studies with persistence, passion, and prayer.”

The delegates were 33 students and teachers from seven provinces across the Philippines. The boot camp offered them hands-on learning experiences through series of lectures, study tours, and interactive games. They also interacted with young agriculture advocates as well as some of the country’s leading scientists, including Dr. Ricardo Lantican and Dr. Dolores Ramirez, both National Scientists.

Dr. Ruben L. Villareal, NAST Academician and former SEARCA Director, gave a presentation on the challenges faced by agriculture and how the youth can be part of the solution.

“This three-day camp was developed to spark renewed interest of the youth in agricultural sciences, most especially in the field of biotechnology,” said SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center (BIC) Coordinator Jerome Cayton C. Barradas.

He added that “we have developed this year’s program to offer an expanded view on agriculture by adding new components such as agricultural entrepreneurship, science communication, and utilizing social media to promote agricultural development.”

ASEAN agri marketing/ from page 12

ASEAN Project Support Unit (PSU) Coordinator, for the 2nd Regional Project Steering Committee (RPSC) Meeting of ATMI-ASEAN following the workshop.

Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, closed the event, underscoring the important role that agriculture plays in driving overall regional development and transforming the ASEAN region into a single economic force in global agricultural trade.

He added that developing countries, such as those covered by ATMI-ASEAN, stand to benefit from this integration considering significant contributions of agriculture in domestic income, trade, and employment.

He also shared the focus of SEARCA’s 11th Five-Year Plan on strengthening academe-industry-government interconnectivity and bringing forward agricultural innovations and market-driven agribusiness development in the Southeast Asian region. The plan will guide the Center in its continued engagement with governments, educational institutions, and international and regional donors and development organizations, as it initiates collective action towards improving agricultural and rural development in the region.

(Report from DjoMedina)
SEARCA hosts 2nd Asian Course on Agribiotechnology

Recognizing the importance of integrating research, effective communication, and science-based regulatory frameworks in harnessing the full potential of agribiotechnology to fuel sustainable agricultural development, SEARCA partnered with the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) Southeast Asia, Malaysian Biotechnology Information Center (MABIC), and Monash University in organizing the Asian Short Course on Agribiotechnology, Biotechnology Regulation, and Communication (ASCA) held on 2-6 December 2019 at SEARCA.

Now on its second year, this program is designed to educate on the entire value chain of living modified organisms (LMOs), as well as national and international legal instruments regarding LMOs. It also covers effective communication of agribiotechnology and biosafety regulation.

SEARCA Director Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio emphasized SEARCA’s role in advancing science-based innovations to address poverty and food security. He asserted that “we stand behind products of agribiotechnology that increase agricultural productivity to feed a growing population in the midst of dwindling natural resources and erratic changes in climate.”

ISAAA Global Coordinator Dr. Mahalechumy Arujanan said “it is important that Asia has institutional memory on international agribiotechnology regulatory framework as the field is very complicated and turnover among policymakers and regulators is high. ISAAA and its partners aim to develop Asia’s institutional memory so that capacity building in this area could be sustained and scaled up.”

“Their joint work on science communication has created a strong foundation for the advancement of biotechnology in Asia,” said Dr. Rhodora Aldemita, ISAAA Southeast Asia Coordinator.

The course had 25 participants from the public and private sectors of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. (Report from DJOMedina)

Villena among 2019 Filipino Faces of Biotech

The late Dr. Maria Monina Cecilia Q. Arcelo-Villena, who led the SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center (BIC), was posthumously hailed as one of this year’s Filipino Faces of Biotechnology for her significant contributions in the field of science communication.

The other eight awardees are Dr. Gabriel Romero, Dr. Ernelea Cao, Dr. Cynthia Hedreyda, Dr. Candida Adalla, Dr. Claro Mingala, Dr. Gisela Concepcion, Dr. Nathaniel Dugus, and Dr. Milagros Greif. They work in the fields of bioengineering plant breeding, animal science, education, and public health.

The Department of Agriculture Biotechnology Program has organized this annual event since 2016 to recognize and honor Filipino champions who have made significant contributions to the advancement of biotechnology in the country, encompassing the fields of agriculture, health, environment, information and education, and policy. Now on its fourth year, the awarding ceremony was held on 26 November 2019 as part of the National Biotechnology Week 2019.

Dr. Villena was instrumental in initiating and facilitating discussions on biotechnology with the government’s legislative and judicial branches as well as other key stakeholders in the country.

Through various projects to create public awareness and to reach out to farmers, consumers, students, and policymakers, Dr. Villena hoped to help Filipino make informed decisions regarding biotechnology.

She also started the biotech discussion on social media through the Know The Science project, a multi-platform educational campaign to help the Filipino public understand the science and benefits of biotech.

In his welcome address, Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Rodolfo Vicerra recognized the importance of scientists and researchers in finding out innovative solutions using biotechnology to the country’s pressing problems. He also highlighted the great need to make the products of research serve the needs of people and help them have better quality lives.

“This award that was given to Ma’am Nina is also a recognition of the importance of science communication in creating an enabling environment for biotechnology in the country. This inspires us to continue the work she has initiated, and to do more to help our stakeholders gain a better understanding of biotech and how they can reap its benefits,” said Mr. Jerome Cayton C. Barradas, who succeeded Dr. Villena as SEARCA BIC Special Projects Coordinator.

Mr. Nathaniel Villena (at rostrum), the husband of Dr. Villena (onscreen at the back), accepted the posthumous award in behalf of the family.

Mr. Nathaniel Villena, Dr. Villena’s husband, accepted the award in behalf of the family. In his short message, he thanked everyone who worked with Dr. Villena throughout her career. She was also the head of the SEARCA Knowledge Management Department at the time of her passing in June 2019. (Report from DJOMedina)
Forum looks into biotech crops safety for food and feed industries

MANILA, Philippines—The Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines (BCP), International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center (BIC) jointly organized a forum on the development and adoption of biotech crops for food and feed in the Philippines to provide consumers updated science-based information on the benefits and the unblemished safety record of biotech products.

Some 50 participants from food manufacturing companies, technology developers, and members of the academe had the opportunity to interact with the country’s leading technology developers to discuss the government’s regulatory processes.

They also discussed genetically modified crops that are currently being developed. These include beta-carotene-enriched golden rice to improve nutritional status in the Philippines, and the Bacillus thuringiensis eggplant (Bt talong) with embedded resistance to the fruit and shoot borer.

Dr. Rey Ordonio, Healthier Rice project leader at the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), shared that Golden Rice harvests were recently completed without issue in the field trial sites in Nueva Ecija and Isabela. The aim is to apply for commercial propagation after a certificate of satisfactory completion of field trial has been issued by the Bureau of Plant Industry.

Dr. Ramon L. Clarete, Professor at the University of the Philippines School of Economics, also discussed the economic value of genetically modified corn (Bt corn) for the Philippines. In 2003, the Philippine government approved the commercial release of Bt corn for food and feed, the first in Asia.

The forum was held on 25 November 2019 in Quezon City as part of the Philippine 15th National Biotechnology Week (NBW). The Department of Health led this year’s NBW celebration with the theme “Biotek: Makabagong Solusyon sa Kalusugan.” (Report from DJOMedina)

Farmers introduced to agri-biotech

More than a hundred vegetable farmers from the provinces of Laguna and Quezon were introduced to agricultural biotechnology and its products like Bt Eggplant during the Farmers’ Forum on Biotechnology organized by the SEARCA Biotechnology Information Center on 19 December 2019.

SEARCA Director Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio expressed his desire to engage with the participants and encouraged them to think critically and be open to information about genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

“Don’t be afraid of modern biotechnology. This activity is meant to clarify misconceptions about GMOs so we should take this opportunity to learn more about it,” he said.

Scientists from the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Institute of Plant Breeding (UPLB-IPB) are currently developing a genetically modified eggplant that contains a gene from the soil bacteria Bacillus thuringiensis. Inserting the Bt gene into the eggplant protects the plant by making it resistant from the eggplant fruit and shoot borer, which is the most damaging pest of eggplant in South and Southeast Asia. With this GM crop, exposure of farmers and consumers to potentially harmful pesticides are reduced while increasing yield and ensuring farmer income.

The forum also included a discussion on the projected socioeconomic impacts of Bt eggplant, the government’s safety regulations for products of modern biotechnology, and a demonstration of the Simple Nutrient Addition Program (SNAP) Hydroponics planting system. (Report from JCCBarradas)
The book aims to find the links between socioeconomic and gender issues in the context of a changing climate.

“The integration of research, planning, and implementation of agriculture and climate change interventions is crucial in achieving outcomes on agricultural productivity, climate resiliency, and food and nutrition security in Southeast Asia,” Dr. Sebastian said. He added that said integration ensures that the impacts of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) research benefit men and women equitably.

Dr. Thelma R. Paris, the book’s lead editor, pointed out the importance of examining the context in the study area, including risks, sources of livelihoods, gender roles, and social groups, and the enabling and constraining factors affecting the adoption, adaptation, and scaling out of CSA. She elaborated on this during her seminar on the subject of the book that preceded the book launch.

Dr. Gregorio added that it is timely for SEARCA to co-publish the book as it is currently crafting its 11th Five-Year Plan which aims to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which include gender equity.

The book features case studies on climate change, gender roles, and adaptation strategies in Southeast Asia. It was primarily compiled to respond to the need for a book on gender analysis in the context of climate change and agriculture.

ISARD Guidebook in the works

Now on its wrap-up stage, the SEARCA action research project titled “Piloting and Upscaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (ISARD)” is preparing for the publication of an ISARD Guidebook that will document the lessons learned in implementing good practices and innovative approaches that contribute to the program’s success.

The ISARD project had four components: technical assistance, capacity building, knowledge management and linking and networking. The development strategies coupled with the strong partnerships are key to the project’s success. Research outputs, lessons learned, challenges, and recommendations will comprise the ISARD Guidebook, which can be used for scaling up across different crops and commodities and in other sites.