

## Impact Assessment Project

### The Role of SEARCA Graduate Alumni in the Agricultural and Rural Development of Southeast Asia: Evaluating the Impact of SEARCA Graduate Scholarship Program through its Graduate Alumni

#### BACKGROUND

With the vision of producing leaders for rural and agricultural development, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) has been providing graduate scholarship grants since July 1968 to address the progressively increasing demand in all Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) member countries for high-level manpower resources in agriculture and related fields. The graduate program's main objective is to train and develop future leaders in a developing agricultural economy.

To determine the relevance and effectiveness of SEARCA's Graduate Scholarship Program, impact assessment studies have been conducted since 1991. These studies provided information on the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the program.

In 2014 the Graduate Education and Institutional Development Department (GEIDD) launched an impact assessment project entitled "*The Role of SEARCA Graduate Alumni in the Agricultural and Rural Development of Southeast Asia: Evaluating the Impact of SEARCA Graduate Scholarship Program through its Graduate Alumni.*" Phase 1 of the project includes the implementation of the Alumni Tracer Study, where a survey was launched in November 2014 and was concluded in March 2015. To validate the responses received from the survey and have in-depth information on Graduate Scholarship Program offered by the Center, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in selected member countries of SEAMEO in early 2015. In Phase 2, a Selection Committee of five members was formed to screen candidates for the Outstanding SEARCA Scholarship Alumni (OSSA), who will be recognized during the 50<sup>th</sup> SEARCA Anniversary in 2016.

#### OBJECTIVES

The project generally aims to evaluate the impact of SEARCA's Graduate Scholarship Program through the performance and contributions of its graduate alumni in all 11 countries. In particular, the project aims to:

- Assess the impact of the SEARCA Graduate Scholarship Program as a vehicle in building the capacities and developing leaders in agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia (SEA).



#### SEARCA GRADUATE ALUMNI



## ABOUT SEARCA

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) is one of the 21 regional centers of excellence of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). Founded on 27 November 1966, SEARCA is mandated to strengthen institutional capacities in agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia through graduate scholarship, research and development, and knowledge management. It serves 11 SEAMEO member countries, namely: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Vietnam. SEARCA is hosted by the Government of the Philippines on the campus of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in Laguna, Philippines. It is supported by donations from SEAMEO member and associate member states, other governments, and various international donor agencies.

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- Assess the contribution of SEARCA graduate alumni in the agricultural and rural development of their home countries and of the region.
- Identify champions of inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD) among the Graduate Alumni of SEARCA

## OUTCOMES

As with the closing of the tracer survey on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, a total of 479 responses were received either through online or self-administered questionnaires, with the alumni from the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand comprising most of the survey respondents. Results showed the profile of survey respondents and the overall impact, relevance, and contributions of SEARCA's Graduate Scholarship Program in different aspects of development – individual, and in agriculture and rural development.

A total of seven focus group discussions among graduate alumni and several key-informant interviews with colleagues and/or supervisors of alumni were conducted in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The discussions explored the marketability of the graduate study programs, the satisfaction on the performance of graduate alumni, the contribution of graduate alumni within and outside their respective organization, and the opportunities to improve SEARCA's Graduate Scholarship Program. The findings are being used to support the survey results and to provide information to better understand the overall impact of the program.

In the search for OSSA, the Selection Committee recently gathered in Manila, Philippines to refine the selection criteria and assess the nominees. Another Selection Committee meeting is scheduled in October 2015 to finalize the list of OSSA candidates.

## CONCLUSION

Together with the active search for OSSA, the analysis and writing of project reports are still in progress and are expected to be finished by December 2015.