About SEARCA
SEARCA is one of the 21 regional centers 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 education, short-term training, research and development, and knowledge management. It serves the 11 SEAMEO member countries, namely: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

Mission
SEARCA works to strengthen institutional capacities toward inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD) in Southeast Asia through graduate education, research and development, and knowledge management.

Vision
SEARCA seeks to be a leading enabler and champion of ISARD in Southeast Asia.

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Piloting and Up-scaling Effective Models of **Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (ISARD)**

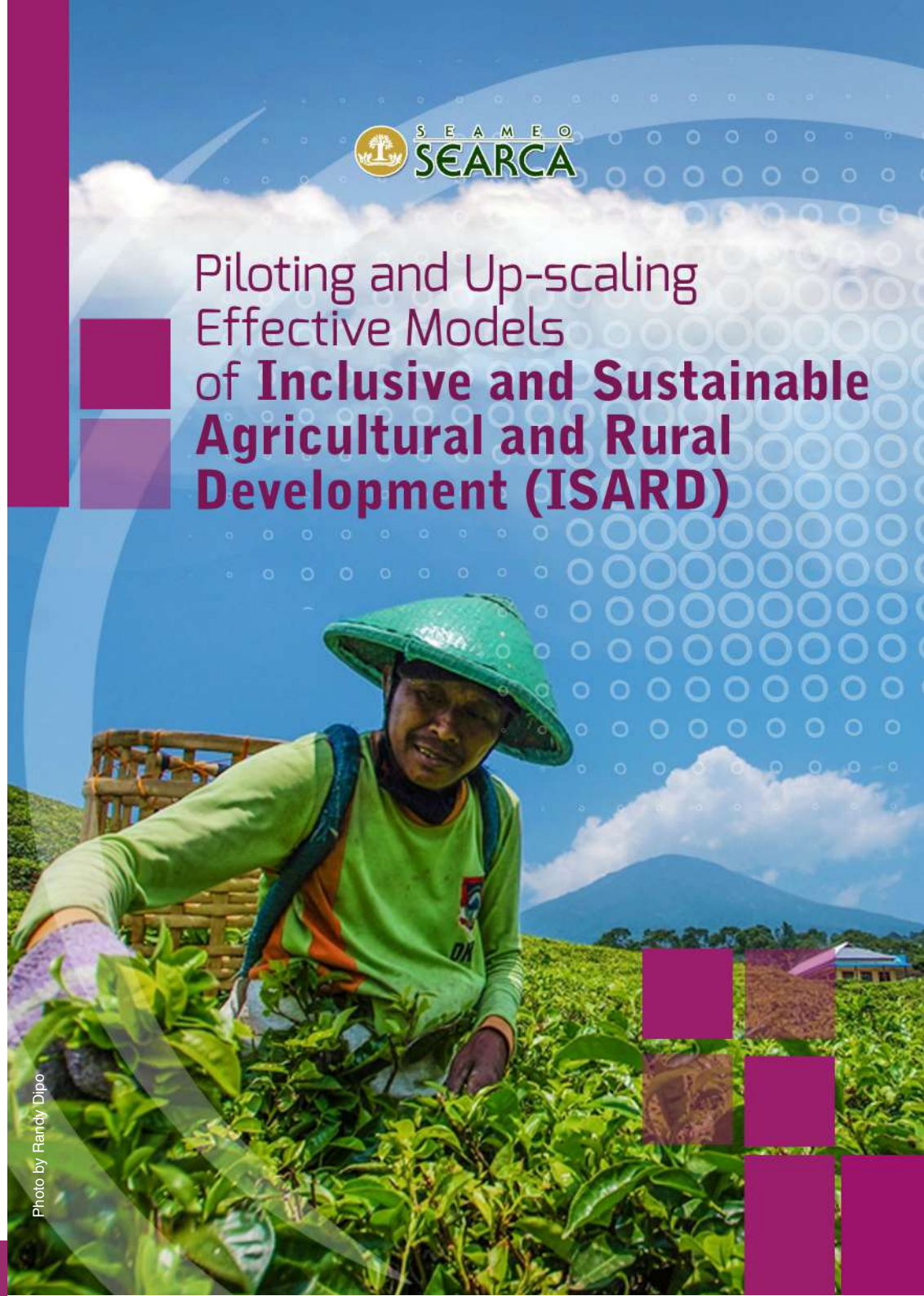


Photo by Randy Dipo

Rationale and Background

Over the past 50 years, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) has facilitated action research in agricultural and rural development (ARD), and lately in supply chain improvement and value chain approach of major food commodity products. These initiatives include the promotion of ARD through the concepts of social laboratory; rural development integration; pilot-testing of agricultural technologies; agricultural and rural enterprise development or agribusiness; and ecosystems-based approach to natural resource management and agro-biodiversity. From all these, the Center has drawn lessons, principles, concepts, and good agricultural practices and technologies that serve as key factors in forming an Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Systems Development Model.

As a way of walking the talk, SEARCA puts into action these learnings from the past years of ARD initiatives by launching the program **"Piloting and Upscaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (ISARD)"**.

The program empowers rural stakeholders with knowledge and skills in terms of organizational management, sustainable farming practices, decision making processes, resource generation and management, social enterprise development, financial management (group savings and rural financing schemes), and credit building.

Photo by Arnold Conlu Jumpay

The activities in Year 3 enjoin farmers and local stakeholders to be involved in assisting other farmers within the ISARD communities in adopting recommended best-fit practices and generated technologies on various farm commodities. Markets of commodity and by-products are expected to have been established at this stage both within and outside the community and municipality. This is also the **institutionalization** phase of all ISARD technological and institutional development interventions. ISARD farmers, with their established demonstration farms, will be used by LGUs and other farmers as a learning field laboratory for sustainable agricultural technologies and rural development.

Throughout program implementation, SEARCA will link the local partners and beneficiaries with other partners in the Center's network within and outside the country to enhance and improve further their production systems.

At the end of the program, a certain degree of ISARD adoption will be achieved by an empowered community that are expected to contribute to food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation of the pilot sites.

Expected Outputs and Outcomes

The Project is expected to enhance the capacity of communities and partner institutions in effective agricultural systems that demonstrate increased benefit for the poor and vulnerable groups, as well as assess the enabling environment, socio-economic processes and overall performance in implementing effective agricultural systems.

Therefore, the expected results are:

1. A well-established set of need-based productivity-enhancing and environment-friendly technologies and practices and other critical elements of people-centered development;
2. A set of recommendations based on lessons drawn and identified best practices that can be used to formulate strategies for replicating and expanding the project in other areas;
3. Institutionalization of active community and local institutions' participation to ensure sustainability of ISARD models and projects (e.g. sustainable community-based agricultural research and extension services); and
4. Identified set of outcomes and impact that can be used to formulate adaptive measures and interventions, and integration of the design of impact evaluation studies within the Project design.

Year 1 activities focused on **mobilization and social preparation**. It started with consultations among potential partners and beneficiaries on the project implementation. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed by heads of all the core implementers. Capacity building activities based on the identified needs of the beneficiaries were implemented by consolidating and integrating the ISARD technologies with the best-fit practices, including the indigenous knowledge of the beneficiaries and local farmers. The activities consisted mainly of participatory trainings, workshops, formation or development of new or existing farmers organization, and establishment of demonstration farms within the context of agro-ecological principles. In addition, study tours and field trips to advanced research institutions within the network of SEARCA was conducted to gain appropriate knowledge and skills in sustainable farming.

Year 2 activities are designed to encourage farmers and local stakeholders from partner institutions to practice **knowledge integration and technology application**, based on the learnings from Year 1. The application will be done individually or by groups in the form of technology adoption, based on the best-fit practices applied in the demonstration farms as well as resource mobilization and sustainability by linking the beneficiaries to other institutions through project proposal development. At this stage, the farmers as well as local stakeholders will monitor and record their daily activities through journals. The beneficiaries will also be encouraged to integrate other commodities to the main project commodity for biodiversity as well as to augment their family income. An area should be allotted within their farms for food and nutrition security by the end of the year.

Goal

The ISARD Piloting Project aims to increase agricultural productivity of rural communities in an environmentally sustainable manner to ensure local food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation. This will be done with the right level of inclusiveness that would allow beneficiaries to assess their current situation and enable them to apply the technologies or ideas that the project brings in for their economic welfare. Environmental sustainability will be achieved through the application of learnings from SEARCA's works and efforts on different research areas such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, climate smart agriculture, integrated pest management, and others, with the help of all the institutions linked to, and involved in, the project. With this, the beneficiaries are expected to continue to increase production and improve productivity by considering the available resources they have despite the threats of climate risks and other environmental hazards. For income improvement, beneficiaries will be introduced to entrepreneurship through involvement in supply or value chain, processing, product diversification, and market integration.

The Program Implementation Model

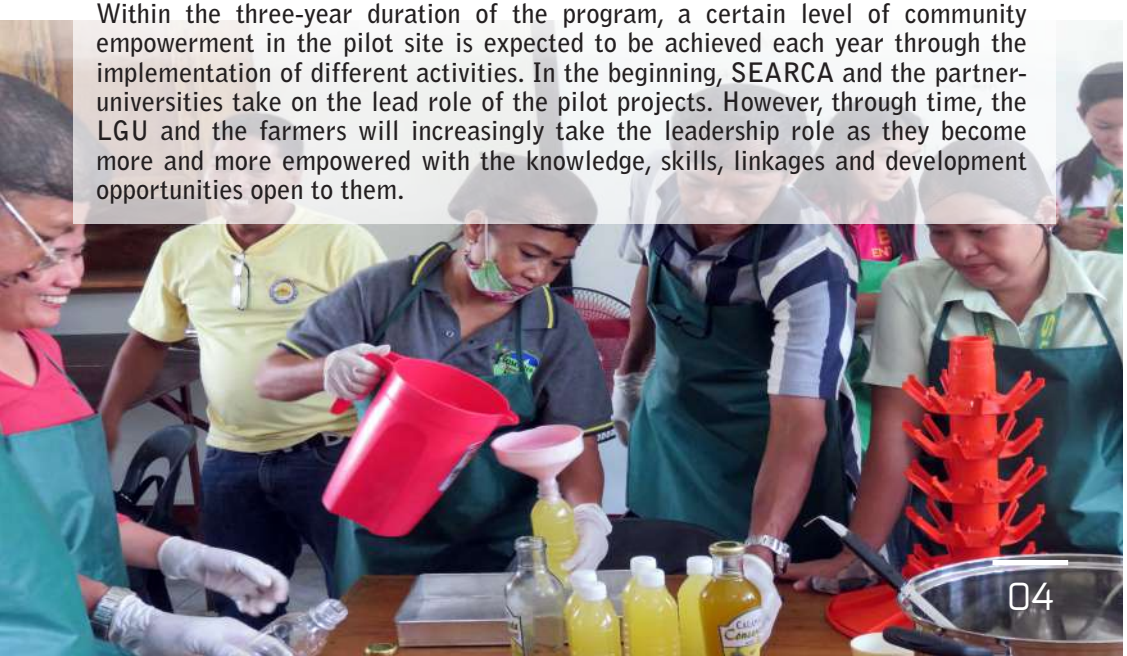
The ISARD model (Figure 1) is implemented by engaging multiple stakeholders in attaining the ISARD goals of food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation. It adopts the convergence of a tripartite partnership involving SEARCA, academic institution, and local government unit (LGU) in enhancing the scientific knowledge, skills, and creativity of the beneficiaries to promote sustainable farming and rural development. The model at the site level operationalizes activities with the participation of various organizations and agencies. This partnership will ensure the sustainability of the project as it will entail support from these sectors that are involved in ARD.

The program has four major components:

- Technical Assistance
- Capacity Building
- Knowledge Management
- Linkaging and Networking

These components basically follow the learnings harvested from SEARCA's 50-year experience in ARD, categorized into four different approaches namely participatory development; ecosystems-based planning; entrepreneurial; value chain-centered; and systems-oriented, and inter- and transdisciplinary. These approaches serve as the backbone of all the activities of the program.

To ensure inclusiveness, the activities were identified and prioritized by the beneficiaries and local farmers through participatory consultations and workshops. Within the three-year duration of the program, a certain level of community empowerment in the pilot site is expected to be achieved each year through the implementation of different activities. In the beginning, SEARCA and the partner-universities take on the lead role of the pilot projects. However, through time, the LGU and the farmers will increasingly take the leadership role as they become more and more empowered with the knowledge, skills, linkages and development opportunities open to them.



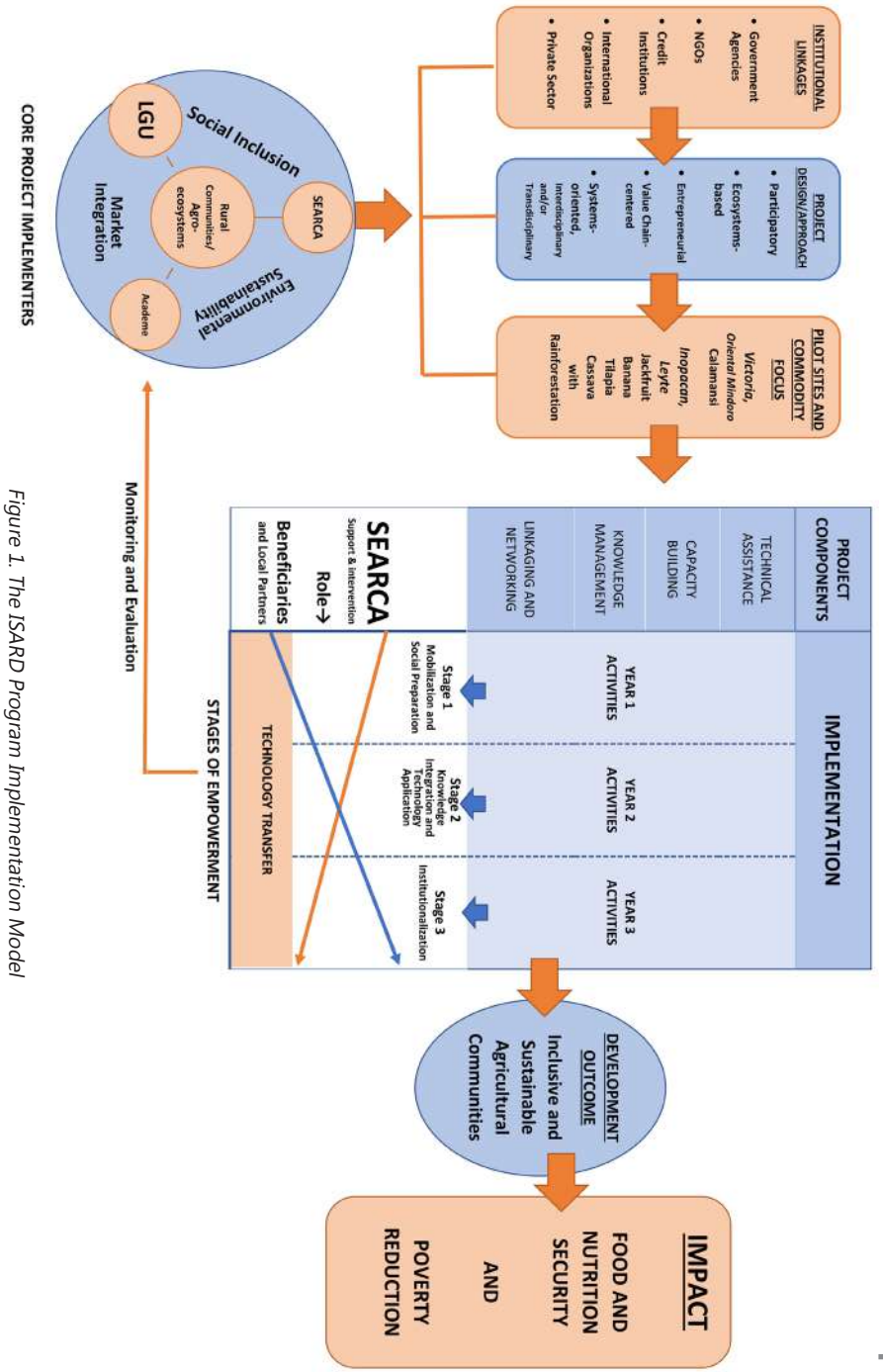


Figure 1. The ISARD Program Implementation Model