



The Southeast Asian Upland Agriculture Fellowship, a project under the auspices of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the Southeast Asian Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) conducted its first annual fellowship plus conference-workshop on 24 to 26 of September 2013 at SEARCA, Laguna, Philippines. The theme of the conference was *“Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture Development in the Uplands: Challenges and Opportunities”* and was aimed at building the scholars’ knowledge in food security through lectures and paper presentations from experts in food security and sustainable agriculture.

Twenty-seven of the thirty-three IDRC-SEARCA-funded scholars from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam attended the conference. These scholars are pursuing their master’s degrees in

various programs with researches related to sustainable upland agriculture and food security at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), and Chiang Mai University (CMU), Khon Kaen University (KKU), and Kasetsart University (KU) in Thailand. There were two participants from KU, seven from CMU, four from KKU, and 14 from UPLB

Dr. Gil C. Saguiguit, SEARCA Director in his welcome message to the participants, said that SEARCA is pleased to play the role of implementing agency of this special program of IDRC that aligns well with SEARCA's mandate of building capacities of individuals and institutions working for agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia.

Ms. Rita Bowry, Senior Program Specialist and Head of IDRC's Fellowships and Awards Program likewise welcomed the participants and presented the IDRC's Fellowships and Awards and the International Fellowships Program. She said that IDRC supports academic research to help developing countries gain a critical mass of trained and experienced researchers to promote development in their regions; and gives opportunity to a new generation of Canadians and citizens of developing countries to actively participate in international development issues.

Internationally recognized ecologist and environmentalist, Dr. Percy E. Sajise discussed the “*Contemporary Issues and Challenges in Sustainable Agriculture in Southeast Asia* .” Dr. Sajise, a former SEARCA Director (1994-1999), is now a SEARCA Senior Fellow, Adjunct Professor at the UPLB-SESAM, and Honorary Research Fellow at Bioversity International. In his paper, he emphasized the importance of uplands in Southeast Asia and how the researches of the IDRC scholars can respond to the urgent and compelling need for sustainable agricultural development.

On the other hand, Dr. Rex Victor O. Cruz, UPLB Chancellor talked about “*The Role of Research and Extension in Addressing Food Security Concerns in the Uplands of Southeast Asia* .” His lecture focused on the food production, food access, and food utilization and nutrition issues, and the role of research in finding solutions to these real world problems. He also mentioned convergence strategies outlined by group of scientist in UPLB in achieving food security in the Philippines. These are convergence of stakeholders and efforts, convergence in financial mechanisms, convergence in policy and convergences of competencies.

Dr. Maria Victoria O. Espaldon, UPLB Vice Chancellor for Research and Extension lectured on “*The Comparative Use and Application of Indicators and Methodologies in Assessing*

*Sustainable Upland Agriculture and Food and National Security* .” She discussed the indicators of food and nutrition and security, and the food security measure of FAO. She also emphasized the basis of indicators assessment for assessing sustainable upland agriculture and the quantitative methods that can be used by the scholars in their researches.

During the three-day fellowship plus conference-workshop, eighteen scholars presented their thesis proposals before the project advisory committee members, who commented and gave suggestions to enhance their said proposals. Among the advisory committee members who attended were Dr. Mom Seng, Vice Rector for International Affairs, Royal University of Agriculture, Cambodia; Dr. Prasit Wangpakapattanawong, Asst. Professor, Forest Restoration Research Unit, Faculty of Science, CMU, Thailand; Dr. Oscar B. Zamora, Vice Chancellor for Instruction, UPLB, Philippines; and Dr. Gil C. Saguiguit, SEARCA Director.

On the second day of the conference, the group got a chance to visit an upland project site in Brgy. Atisan, San Pablo City, which showcased a private-public partnership in sustainable livelihood for the uplands. In the farm, bignay (*Antidesma bunius*), guyabano (*Anona muricata*), and banana (*Musa* spp.) are planted to be processed later as wine. The second upland project site was the Institute of Agroforestry’s Learning Laboratory for Agroforestry (LLA) located at UPLB College of Forestry and Natural Resources (CFNR). Dr. Roselyn Paelmo, University Researcher of the Institute of Agroforestry toured the participants around the learning laboratory and introduced the techniques and agroforestry systems in the area. Dr. Sajise facilitated the debriefing at the end of the day. The Project Advisory Committee Members and Ms. Bowry commended the scholars’ energy, dedication and enthusiasm during the field visit, and said that it was really evident that the scholars picked up valuable lessons from the lectures of the three resource persons.

At the closing ceremony, Ms. Bowry said that scholars’ career will go far with their energy and attitude shown during the entire conference, while Dr. Saguiguit extended his gratitude to IDRC, scholars and project advisory committee members for their full participation in the said conference. He also hoped for more fruitful partnership with IDRC in the future.

The Southeast Asian Upland Agriculture Fellowships is a 3-year capacity building project of the IDRC and SEARCA which aims to address food security and agricultural development issues in the uplands of Southeast Asia. The project’s second annual conference is planned for 2014 at CMU in Thailand. (Jachin Jane O. Aberilla)