

IDRC-SEARCA holds its second annual fellowship conference

Written by Eriza C. Asilo

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CHIANG MAI, Thailand – The Southeast Asian Upland Agriculture Fellowship, a collaborative project of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the Southeast Asian Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), recently concluded its 2nd IDRC-SEARCA Annual Fellowship Plus Conference held on 7-9 of January 2015 at the Empress Hotel Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Thirty-six IDRC-SEARCA scholars from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Myanmar (CLMV), ten of whom were oral presenters while seven were poster presenters, were among the 150 participants who attended the Conference. Mr. Var Sophal, IDRC-SEARCA scholar from Cambodia studying in the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), placed 3rd in the poster presentation held during the Conference.

This year's conference, hosted by the Faculty of Agriculture of Chiang Mai University (CMU), was held together with the 1st International Conference on Asian Highland Natural Resources Management (AsiaHiLand). With more than 80 experts and researchers from 16 countries who gave presentations on topics that emphasized mountain development in Asia, the Conference highlighted how scientific knowledge and innovations in the field of agricultural science contributes to the development in the uplands.

Prince Peesadej Ratchanee of Thailand opened the program and delivered a keynote address about the contribution of the Thai Royal Project Foundation in the development of the highlands in Thailand. The Thai Royal Project Foundation held the distinction of receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award for International Understanding in 1988 and the Colombo Plan Award for distinguished service in efforts to combat the drug problem in the Asia Pacific region in 2003, among others.

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Dr. Annie Wesley, IDRC's Senior Program Specialist on Agriculture and Food Security, also delivered a keynote address on the "Role of Research and Impact Pathways for Improved Nutrition and Food Security in the Uplands". Her speech stressed the "need to understand the linkages, influencing factors and gender dynamics between food security and nutrition." Dr. Wesley also affirmed that "improved partnerships and collaboration between researchers, farmers and decision-makers can accelerate food and nutritional security in the uplands and mountainous regions."

On the third day, the participants joined the field visit to the Nong Hoi Royal Project Development Center under the Thai Royal Project Foundation. The Center serves as a research support center that conducts experiments on new and potential development of temperate fruits and vegetable cultivation.

After the three-day conference, a special session on 10 January 2015 was held where another nine IDRC-SEARCA graduate scholars presented their thesis proposals before the project Advisory Committee Members, namely, Dr. Vo Tong Xuan of Vietnam, Dr. Mom Seng of Cambodia, and Dr. Prasit Wangpakattanawong of Thailand. Former SEARCA Director and now SEARCA Senior Fellow, Dr. Percy E. Sajise, served as resource person for the said session. As a parting message, Dr. Wesley encouraged the scholars to serve as catalysts of change in their home countries.

The 2nd IDRC-SEARCA Annual Fellowship Plus Conference was co-sponsored by SEARCA, IDRC, CMU, University of Hohenheim, and The Royal Project Foundation of Thailand.

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