



MY MEETING NOTES

ARD 2014 – 2nd International Conference on
Agricultural and Rural Development in Southeast Asia
November 12-14, 2014
Makati Shangri-La, Manila, Philippines



Organization of International Conferences can be improved considerably by following the best practices adopted in the conduct of the ARD 2014-2nd International Conference on Agricultural and Rural Development in Southeast Asia. Bhaskaran Chenthuran who participated in this Conference reflects on his participation at this event here

CONTEXT

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) organized its second international conference on Agricultural Research for Development at Philippines during 12-14 November 2014. The theme of the conference - 'Strengthening Resilience, Equity and Integration in ASEAN Food and Agriculture Systems' was both topical and timely as food price inflation has been affecting the general economy on a global scale.



THE PROGRAMME

Inaugural session

The Conference opened with the keynote address of His Excellency Benigno Simeon Aquino III, President of the Republic of the Philippines delivered by the Secretary for Agrarian Reform of the Philippines, Hon. Virgilio De los Reyes. The Conference overview and background presented by Dr. Cielito F. Habito, the Conference Technical Advisor & Coordinator provided the impetus for animated discussions among over 400 delegates representing 30 countries.



Virgilio De los Reyes, Secretary Agrarian Reform of the Philippines, delivered the keynote address of Pres. Benigno S. Aquino III

Technical sessions

Spread over two plenary sessions, technical theme presentations were held in six parallel venues. A lot of brainstorming occurred over the pathway to resilience, equity and integration in ASEAN food and agriculture systems at the “partners forum”, “the sponsors' exhibition” and the synthesis valedictory session. From the stage of cut-throat competition in ASEAN region in capturing the food market, the Conference paves the way for complementation among these nations. The innovation strategy of FAO to save & grow & produce *more with less* under the "10:20:70" (area expansion, intensification and technology) is going to be put to practice by the Southeast Asian nations to ensure food and nutrition security to the people of the region who constitute the vast majority of the masses below the poverty line. The Conference made a clarion call to the Southeast Asian nations to shift their current focus from mere agricultural development to holistic rural development in order to ensure sustainable livelihoods to the people of the region. The happy augury had been that the Conference ended on a positive note with a back- at- work blueprint of action for all the stakeholders concerned.



MY IMPRESSIONS

The Conference was replete with richness in the conceptualization and implementation details. SEARCHA needs to be complimented for the organization of this focused and fruitful ARD 2014. Some of the important factors behind this interesting conference were as follows:

Careful selection of participants: The presenters and discussants were stalwarts from the Southeast Asian region and this ensured high quality deliberations.

Clarity on the outcome: The cornerstone of the Conference was the vision document and the roadmap for the Southeast Asian Economic Community proposed to be put in place by the end of 2015.

Application of new concepts and practices: The emerging concepts and practices in rural development such as Cross sectional Land Use Planning (CLUP), ridge to reef framework of development, climate proofed agricultural systems, Research Into Use (RIU), cooperatives in business and business in cooperatives, research for policy and research on policy, Regional Rice Reserves, Zero Hunger Challenge

etc are useful pointers to the developmental initiatives in this regard.

Field tours: The visits, particularly to the Makiling Botanical Gardens, the Rice World Museum at IRRI, the University of Philippines, and the SEARCA at Los Baños and the Gourmet Organic Farm at Tagaytay, were not only informative, but reassuring too. The innovations such as Climate Smart Villages, Climate Field Schools, Climate Smart Rice, High - Iron and High - Zinc Rice, the Bell and Bottle Technology of Community-based Early Warning System, Ecological Engineering, Low External Input Rain Shelter Agriculture, Inclusive Value Chains in medicinal spices farming etc. are examples that deserve upscaling to the similarly situated farming populace all over the world. The field tour organized as an optional component, in my humble view, must have been an integral component of the Conference, for many a delegate had missed the golden opportunity of seeing concepts in practice.

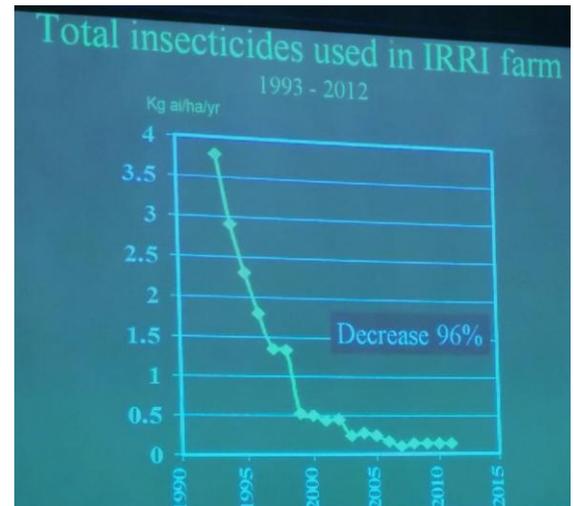


Low-Cost Rainshelter Cultivation of Vegetables in Gourmet Organic Farm

Lessons for practice: I learnt from a presentation from IRRI that they could reduce their chemical pesticide use by 94% during the last 30 years through ecological engineering. During the same period, India increased import of pesticides by 250%. This clearly illustrates the extension gaps which could be effectively bridged by effective extension and advisory services.

In summary, the ARD 2014 International Conference far exceeded my expectations in the matters of organization, quality of deliberations and possible impacts.

Kudos to SEARCA, the Conference organizers and to the delegates who made the event memorable and worthy indeed.



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