

**2010 SANREM CRSP Kick-off Conference
Welcoming Remarks**

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Good morning to our SANREM CRSP colleagues and welcome to Virginia Tech, particularly those of you visiting our campus for the first time. We have with us today a large number of PIs and collaborating scientists from the U.S. and host-country institutions around the world. To all of you, I want to personally thank you for making time to attend our kick-off meeting.

First off, there are a few people that I want to introduce. We are delighted to welcome back SANREM CRSP USAID AOTR Harry Rea. We appreciate all that he does on behalf of the project out of his Washington office. I would also like to recognize the chair of the board during the last phase of the project, Dr. Alton Thompson from North Carolina A&T. As you know, new board members are being chosen for the current phase of the project. When the board convenes, its members will select a new chair. Alton, thank you for your excellent leadership over the last four years and welcome back to our campus. Finally, the chair of our External Evaluation Panel, Dr. Ron Cantrell, retired Director General of IRRI, former Director of the CIMMYT Maize program, and former Chair of the Agronomy Department at Iowa State University. Since the EEP will remain the same for Phase IV of the project, we expect you to provide insight on how it will evaluate each of the sub-awards. Ron, we are delighted you could join us for this important kick-off meeting.

I want to take this opportunity to explain who we are and how projects such as SANREM CRSP fit into the university's international vision. Virginia Tech has an International Strategic Plan approved by the administration and our Board of Visitors. CRSP programs such as SANREM, IPM, and Peanut, which Virginia Tech is participating in, are an integral part of that plan. These are not stand alone projects managed by disparate university teams. These projects are an integral part of the discovery, learning, and engagement missions of Virginia Tech, and are thus managed centrally through the Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIRE) with the full support of the university.

Now, let me turn my attention to SANREM CRSP, and some of the tasks and challenges which lie ahead.

As you know, SANREM CRSP has two components, Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management. They should not be treated as disparate issues, rather intertwined issues that must be addressed together. I believe that it should be Natural Resource Management FOR Sustainable Agriculture. I also believe that Sustainable Agriculture should be treated as a short-term topic, focusing on food security with definable impacts, which are achievable during the current phase of this project.

We have had 16 years of SANREM CRSP, of which 11 years were administered under the University of Georgia's leadership and the rest under Virginia Tech. Our success has been achieved by building upon our past work. Natural Resource Management issues require long-term research in order to develop appropriate knowledge and interventions for program success; however, the phases of our cooperative agreement are for five-year periods, and continuation from one phase to the next is not guaranteed.

When Virginia Tech received the Phase III SANREM CRSP award in 2004, approximately one-and-a-half years were required to initiate the long-term research program, leaving only three-and-a-half years for the research itself. We worked diligently in 2009 after receiving word from USAID that there would be a Phase IV and issued RFAs well before the start of the phase so that our researchers would have the maximum amount of time possible to conduct their research. As a result, most of our long-term research awards were made within three months of our award, leaving you with four-and-a-half-years or more to conduct SANREM CRSP research and demonstrate impacts.

In the current phase of SANREM, we chose a common research focus in consultation with USAID on conservation agriculture production systems, which we believe and you believe offer significant potential to improve smallholder food security and livelihoods through increased agricultural productivity and reduced risk to climate change impacts. In addition, we believe that successful conservation agriculture will have significant ecosystem service benefits. Your job and ours is to now conduct quality research to develop conservation agriculture production systems that will achieve these desired impacts. No matter who says what, the bottom line for USAID is results and impact. Who benefits from these USAID funded projects, by how much, and how? By 2012 and your midterm project review, you must be demonstrating preliminary results showing the benefits to the stakeholders. You need to be asking yourself now and not in 2012, how can we create results and impacts by 2012? With that in mind, we need to balance our program between short-term and slightly longer-term research.

The second point I wish to make is the appropriate financial management of sub-awards. It is absolutely critical that each university or research institute sends invoices to us on a timely and regular basis. If there is a big pipeline (according to USAID's definition) the CRSP funds will be redeployed elsewhere because the deficit will be placing increased pressure on USAID's budget. It is our choice to protect the small amount of funds we receive rather than lose it because of lack of timely invoicing. Our ME team is here to assist you, but if there is a large pipeline amount, the funds will be redeployed where the burn rate is higher for approved program implementation. We already have severe constraints in our ME budget. If the allocation is reduced, that will seriously hamper our ability to manage the project considering the fixed costs associated with the ME budget.

Now, I want to say just a few words about the ME team. I am Dr. S.K. De Datta, and I serve as the Administrative PI of the SANREM CRSP. I oversee this project as well as all other sponsored projects our office manages.

We have recruited Theo Dillaha to serve as the Program Director. He is responsible for the day-to-day management of the program. In addition to being a hydrologist and water management

specialist, Theo is a tenured faculty member in the Biosystems Engineering Department here at Virginia Tech. Dr. Keith Moore, a rural sociologist by training, serves as the Associate Program Director. Dr. Michel Bertelsen is an agricultural economist who gives part of his time to the ME. Mike provides leadership in both economics and policy. Dr. Maria-Elisa Christie is a geographer who serves as the project's Gender Specialist. Last but not least, we have an outstanding Financial Manager in Jane Lee.

To accommodate the demands of the current phase, we have made some changes to the ME since Phase III ended in October. We recognized that our ME team had a strong social sciences background, but was weak when it came to technical issues, particularly in soil and crop management. We corrected this deficiency by bringing on Michael Mulvaney, a soil scientist/agronomist, as the Assistant Program Director. Michael just started a little over two months ago, but I believe that he has already added value to our program leadership. We also recruited an excellent web designer, who works part-time for the project. He will help us keep the project website up-to-date and enhance usability. We are currently recruiting a top-flight communication and publication manager, who will also have a background in agriculture. With all of these strong team members in place, we are managing the project with 20% of the budget, while the rest is cost shared by Virginia Tech.

This brings me back to the SANREM CRSP project. All of the LTRA teams won sub-awards through a competitive process led by our outstanding EEP panel. We have a little more than four years to complete the project. After that, if the SANREM CRSP is to continue, it will be through a new RFA and a new competitive process. Virginia Tech hopes to compete for the next phase with partners who help in the success of the current phase.

With these few words, I welcome everyone to the 2010 SANREM CRSP kick-off meeting. I also want to remind you about the dinner reception at my residence this evening. If you need directions, please see my administrative assistant, Brad. For those of you staying at The Inn, our staff will provide transportation both to and from the dinner, which will allow you to meet several of our university and college officials.

Wrapping up, I know that the entire SANREM CRSP ME is excited about the next few days, and again, thank you for coming.