

Welcoming Remarks, SANREM CRSP 2008 Annual Meeting

Los Baños, Philippines, May 26-29

Speaker: Dr. S.K. De Datta, Associate Vice President for International Affairs and Director, Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIRE), Virginia Tech; and Administrative Principal Investigator, SANREM CRSP

Good morning, everyone. On behalf of the SANREM CRSP Management Entity at Virginia Tech's Office of International Research, Education, and Development, allow me to extend a warm welcome to this year's annual meeting. We are aware that some of you have traveled a considerable distance to attend this important meeting. We particularly wish to welcome Dr. Luis Rey I. Velasco, Chancellor of the University of the Philippines-Los Baños, as well as other officials representing different agencies of the Philippine government. We are also pleased to welcome Dr. Willie Padolina, Deputy Director of the International Rice Research Institute, who graciously agreed to give keynote remarks in this opening session. Finally, we wish to welcome the USAID/EGAT CTO for SANREM CRSP, Dr. Harry Rea, who recently took over this leadership role. The objectives of this annual meeting will be discussed subsequently by my colleague, SANREM CRSP Program Director Dr. Theo Dillaha.

The current phase of the SANREM CRSP was competitively won by a Virginia Tech-led consortium on Sept. 30, 2004. For 11 years prior, the University of Georgia was the Management Entity. SANREM CRSP has two distinct components: sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. These are not disparate topics but an interdependent continuum. To paraphrase the World Food Program, sustainable agriculture calls on us "to allow for future generations, requires that we preserve our remaining resources, and ... heal or rehabilitate resources that have been treated carelessly in the past. To do these things systematically is to follow a path of environmentally sustainable development." The concept of sustainability was developed in the context of economic development by the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Brundtland. According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In the current phase of SANREM CRSP, we are past the halfway mark with just over a year and quarter to go. We have made significant progress to meet objectives and deliverables. In these efforts we have engaged 20 U.S. universities, 16 host countries, nine international agricultural research centers, and eight non-governmental and private volunteer organizations since September 2004. A multidisciplinary long-term research program is addressing the food security, natural resource management, and ecosystems protection needs of resource-poor people through collaborative research in 11 developing countries.

Collaboration with the IPM CRSP successfully produced the International Symposium on Biodiversity in Agriculture in Dominican Republic in 2006. These efforts resulted in a workshop and produced a sourcebook on environmental services. The SANREM Knowledgebase has also become a respected source and repository of data and information about sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

To address the current food price and supply crisis, all SANREM CRSP long-term research activities are directing their efforts toward livelihood and food security issues in developing countries. Four of the long-term research projects are addressing sustainable production systems. This in turn contributes to reducing risks associated with production systems involving staple food crops such as potatoes and corn. To enhance livelihoods and income security, SANREM is incorporating production systems that include high-value horticultural crops and medicinal plants. Through economics and other social sciences, as well as research including focus on gender, SANREM is addressing policies that promote the sustainable management of forest and agricultural resources. Our training programs are dealing with capacity building for technical and decision-making capacity in the collaborating host countries.

After reviewing SANREM's progress during the current phase, the External Evaluation Panel has made a number of recommendations to focus on the important unfinished tasks for the remaining period and for the future. The panel recommended that the project be renewed for five additional years starting Oct. 1, 2009. In March of this year, SANREM CRSP was also reviewed by the USAID-EGAT appointed Administrative and Management Review (AMR) team. This team has submitted its report to USAID/Washington. The AMR has recommended that the SANREM CRSP project should be renewed for five additional years beginning in Oct. 1, 2009. This report has been sent to SPARE, a committee appointed by BIFAD. The recommendation from the SPARE will go to BIFAD, which in turn will make the final recommendation to USAID/Washington. USAID-EGAT will then make a final decision. We are optimistic that the five-year extension beyond the current phase will happen.

In the meantime, we urge all our PIs to focus on impactful results for the remaining period of this phase. When the renewal process is initiated, we shall identify Phase IV research priorities and vision for technology transfer by taking inputs from the USAID-EGAT, USAID Missions, and from our current and future collaborating partners.

In this annual meeting, we shall take stock of successes and failures of the past year to generate transparent discussion toward developing a plan for addressing priority issues. Naturally, there will be some changes in order to focus on priority issues and regions such as food security, climate change, soil and land degradation and remediation, water use efficiency, and gender equity, to name a few. We plan to develop a targeted research, education, and technology transfer plan for SANREM activities in Africa. Our modality in developing the future plan will be transparency, improved collaboration, and openness to bring together the best plan for impactful results in Phase IV. We value our collaboration with all of our present and future partners in developing and implementing the next phase of SANREM CRSP.

With these remarks, I thank my colleagues in the Management Entity and local partners who worked hard to plan this annual meeting. Once again, thank you for your attendance to this meeting and your kind attention.