

Asian Farmers Visit

INDONESIA



THE ASIAN FARMERS' EXCHANGE PROGRAM

The Asian Farmers' Exchange Program is AsiaDHRRA's major initiative in sustaining the dialogue, sharing of knowledge, and building of linkages among farmers and NGO leaders in Asia.

Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Facilitate the sharing of experiences and insights on local productivity systems development, rural enterprise development, and farmers' network building and strengthening;
2. Establish linkages between and among farmers' organizations and cooperatives from Asian nations; and
3. Initiate preliminary discussion on future united regional advocacy efforts on issues such as food security, sustainable agriculture, and farmers' cooperation.

Ultimately, the program's main success criterion is the formation of a strategic Asian rural alliance for greater advocacy and for the benefit of the poor Asian farmer.

ASIAN FARMERS VISIT INDONESIA



**A Chronicle of the Indonesian Leg of the
Asian Farmers' Exchange Program
16-26 March 2001**



AsiaDHRRA
Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia
MARCH 2001



FOREWORD



First of all, let us praise and thank God for all His blessings, guidance and will, that we may gather here with good health, full of cheerfulness and happiness.

Welcome to Indonesia! Welcome to the participants from friendly countries and welcome to Yogyakarta to all of us. Yogyakarta is known as a student town, a culture town and a town for struggles. A town for higher learning, it welcomes many students from all over Indonesia such that Yogyakarta can be called "mini- Indonesia". It is a culture town being one of the centers of Javanese culture and until today, it is the only kingdom existing in the country. It is a

town for struggles for here happened the fight for our independence in 1945. Yogyakarta was once the capital of the Republic of Indonesia.

With such a background, it is appropriate for this town to be the venue of the Asian Farmers Exchange and Visitation Program among farmers from ASEAN member countries and several other nations who are friendly and in solidarity, for farmers are fighters who never get tired and stop struggling. The farmers do this not for themselves but for the sake of their people. They always work hard to produce food for people worldwide, irrespective of countries or nationalities. Without the farmer's great efforts and hard work, which are incessant, this world will suffer, as not enough food would be available.

The history of farmers' struggle has been going on for a long time and is continuing. Ironically, the majority of farmers, particularly those in developing countries in the ASEAN and other Asian countries, have not enjoyed the fruits of their labor. Many of them still live in poverty.

So many problems are facing the farmers - backward technology, legislations that are not conducive to farmers' welfare, lack of facilities and infrastructures, inadequate credit programs - all these create burdens and cause troubles to farmers. On top of these is a chronic land problem. Meanwhile, farmers in East Asia like Taiwan, Japan and South Korea have crossed over and obtained higher welfare.

With such a background, the Asian Farmers Exchange and Visitation Program is very strategic and necessary. Through this coming together, the farmers are able to share their experiences, successes and failures to help and learn from each other.



AsiaDHRRA feels proud and happy to have this opportunity to organize and facilitate this program. Through this program, AsiaDHRRA can enjoy the farmers to continue struggling. AsiaDHRRA is hopeful that the objectives of this program will be achieved, that is to encourage the growth of solidarity among farmers in Asia, and to encourage the growth of networks among them to begin assisting each other. All these aim to improve the welfare of farmers and their families. They also aim to create a peaceful world.

During your stay in Indonesia, InDHRRA as the host has prepared various activities including home stay with Indonesian farmers. Through this program, the participants will experience to the full a typical farmer's life in Indonesia. Visits to interesting places with cultural relevance have also been planned. We hope the participants will enjoy the programs prepared.

This farmers' exchange program was organized because of the support of the ASEAN Foundation and Misereor of Germany. Therefore, AsiaDHRRA expresses its appreciation and gratitude to both partners. I hope that this would just be a beginning of more years of partnerships. To make Asian farmers successful in their struggles, we will need more assistance, and we hope that in the future, ASEAN Foundation and Misereor would be willing to support our future initiatives. AsiaDHRRA will continuously provide information and reports on the development of this program.

ASEAN Foundation and Misereor's enormous and meaningful support will not be fruitful without the hard work of the organizing committee. Therefore, AsiaDHRRA also forwards its gratitude to all the members of the organizing committee and resource persons, particularly our Indonesian partner, InDHRRA. Last but not the least, we thank the participants. Without your attention, this program will not be insightful and meaningful.

AsiaDHRRA and the organizing committee are working very hard to make this program a success. We hope that the participants will enjoy all the programs, share their experiences with each other and learn some lessons here. All these things aim to develop human resources in rural areas, a mission we in the AsiaDHRRA is deeply committed to.

Soetrisno Kusumohadi
Asiadhrara Vice Chairperson For Southeast Asia



WELCOME TO INDONESIA!

IT WAS HOT AND HUMID. THE AIR SMELLED OF KRETEK from the ubiquitous cigar puffing men. From a distance, the sound of gongs could be heard accentuated by tinkling chimes in a repertoire of gamelan music. On appointed times, Islamic chants would come out of the nearby mosques signaling the people to say their prayers.

Meanwhile, in the heat of the sun, men and women farmers in their colorful sarongs and pointed native hats attended to their fields. Some were starting to transplant their rice seeds while the others have already harvested their crop for the season, filling their jute sacks with golden grains. This is Indonesia, venue of the ten-day exchange and dialogue among farmer-leaders in Asia.

STRENGTHENING FARMERS' SOLIDARITY IN ASIA

The third leg of the Asian Farmers' Exchange Program was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia from 16-26 of March 2001. Forty-eight (48) farmer-leaders and NGO workers from 12 Asian countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam gathered together for the ten-day exchange visit. The main theme of the exchange program was "Responding to the Challenges of International Solidarity, Dialogue, Advocacy and Cooperation Among Asian Rural Communities and Farmers Organizations."



After the past exchange visits held in South Korea and the Philippines,

one common theme or call made in the two joint declarations issued by the participants referred to the need for solidarity among Asia's organized rural communities and sectors. A commitment was forged to pursue the call for regional solidarity among the participating farmers' organizations. The Indonesia leg of the visit provided the opportunity to discuss more in detail the resolution to form a "forum" at the regional level. In particular, the Indonesia leg of the program aimed to:

1. Discuss and decide on the next steps to regional solidarity;
2. Engage in dialogue with community members regarding their struggle for agrarian reform and rural development;
3. Deliberate on the realities and challenges of cooperation and solidarity at the local and international levels;
4. Identify concrete programs of action at the regional level towards greater advocacy and rural participation; and
5. Translate into local plans the regional agreements and consensus points reached.

GETTING TO KNOW INDONESIA

The Land and Its People

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago. Lying across the equator in the Southeast Asian region, it has more than 13,700 islands that cover 1.8 million square kilometers. Indonesia's population of about 203 million people is the world's fourth largest, and the island of Java is home to two-thirds of these inhabitants.

With 173 million Muslims, Indonesia is the largest Islamic country. Its population is divided among 300 ethnic groups speaking 250 distinct languages and dialects. The Javanese, the largest ethnic group in the country, represents 45 percent of the population.

The Economy

Indonesia is blessed with a diverse and rich natural resource. However, despite the growth rates of seven to eight percent attained in the early 1990s, economic progress has not occurred evenly throughout the country. There are wide

differences in income among individuals and regions. The economic stagnation is expected to increase the number and percentage of households below poverty line and subsequently place the most vulnerable groups at serious risks of survival, development and protection.

The Asian financial crisis showed the foundation of Indonesia's economy: a fragile banking system, high levels of private foreign debt, and an unstable political environment. Early in the crisis, Indonesia asked for help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but the country's economic prospects continue to be uncertain, with historically high unemployment, debt, and inflation rates.

Indonesia also faces many environmental challenges such as water and air pollution. In addition, it faces problems with human rights, good governance, especially concerning east Timor, which has recently won its fight for independence from Indonesia.

INDONESIA: LAND OF ABUNDANCE, LAND OF IRONIES

Straddling the equator in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago. Despite being blessed with diverse and rich natural resources, 75 million people or 75 percent of the rural population live below poverty line. Agriculture remains to be the pillar of the economy with its contribution to gross national product (GNP) reaching 55.6 percent. In 1993, average land ownership in the country was estimated to be at 0.83 hectares, giving rise to a class of small peasants in Indonesia. This situation, coupled with other inequities and injustices committed to the country's rural poor made Indonesia the perfect site for another fruitful and insightful exchanges and exposure among Asian farmer leaders on agricultural and rural development.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH INDONESIAN CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS

The ten-day exchange visit opened with inspiring words from the key leaders and representatives of the Indonesian Secretariat for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (InDHRRA), the main host of the Indonesia leg of the Asian Farmers' Exchange Program and from the ASEAN foundation, one of the sponsors of the program.

Soetrisno Kusumohadi, AsiaDHRRA vice-chairperson for Southeast Asia and board member of InDHRRA narrated how



Agriculture and Agrarian Reform

Agriculture remains to contribute the biggest chunk to Indonesia's national income with 55.6 percent share in GNP in 1993. Ironically, rural and agricultural development has been left behind in government's priorities leaving rural poverty unabated and unchecked.

Around 75 percent of the rural populace, or about 75 million people, live below poverty line. The level of income of those working in the agriculture sector, especially the peasants, has never significantly improved compared with the other sectors' income growth. This rural poverty and backwardness is essentially linked to the continuing inequity in the distribution of income and prosperity, and unequal access to political, economic and social opportunities. The historical injustice and inequity over land ownership and access to other life enhancing assets has served as roots of poverty in Indonesia. Average land owned shrunk from 0.98

hectare per peasant household in 1983 to 0.83 in 1993. The total number of peasants has increased over a 10-year period from 9.5 million to almost 11 million, giving rise to a class of peasant households and laborers. Likewise, total agricultural labor has almost doubled from 5 million to over 9 million workers.

As a predominantly agricultural country, a genuine agrarian reform is viewed as imperative to sustainable rural poverty eradication. The reconstruction of ownership of and access to land and other natural assets like rivers, forests, minerals, will not only respond to the economic dimension of rural development but also heal the many bitter years of inequity and injustice committed to Indonesia's rural poor.



befitting Yogyakarta was to be the venue of the exchange visit among Asia's struggling farmers. According to him, historically, the city was the political center of the country and the site of Indonesian struggle for freedom in the 1940s. He cited how impoverished the farmers in the southern region have remained despite their efforts to provide sustenance for the majority and ensure food security. He compared this to the relatively better conditions of farmers in the northern countries like Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, thereby making the conduct of the exchange program, and eventually the formation of a farmers' solidarity forum, relevant and necessary.



Mulyanah Kusuma, current chairperson of InDHRRA, expounded on the expectations and ascribed gains from the exchange program. According to him, the activity is seen as a venue for sharing among Asian farmers of their concrete experiences so that recommendations may be formulated regarding policies and law reforms on agrarian reform and rural development. He hoped that a meeting would be arranged among respective governments to present the results of the discussions so that they may be supported in terms of resource allocation and integrated in national programming as well. Meanwhile, Fr. Francis Wahono, another board member of InDHRRA, discussed the impacts of globalization on the farmers and the rural sector in general. He noted that the gathering of Asian farmers, in part, is also due to the globalization process. According to him, farmers in the region need to band together to address common problems and pursue common advocacies.



Finally, Ambassador Wisber Loies, executive director of the ASEAN Foundation, on his part reiterated the ASEAN's main objective of promoting cooperation among member countries in the economic, political, socio-cultural, scientific and technological spheres

especially in agriculture sector. According to him, ASEAN places high premium on solidarity building and that the farmers' exchange program is a fulfillment of this thrust. After the delivery of messages and some other preliminary activities, the main sessions of the ten-day exchange visit commenced.

COMPARING LIVES: AGRICULTURE AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN ASIA

While it was aimed that the real situation of Indonesian farmers be understood and appreciated by their fellow Asian farmers, analyzing the state of the sector in other countries in the region was of equal importance to program. Thus, prior to the exchange visit, participants in each country were asked to prepare a paper discussing the situation in the agricultural sector as well as the state of farmers' organizing in their countries. These were collated into one report and presented to the plenary. The report highlighted that while still predominantly agrarian in nature, Asian countries suffer from a declining agriculture sector with the land ownership structure remaining to be feudal and highly skewed. In countries that have implemented land reform, the program has contributed to making land ownership more equitable.

With regards to the peasant organizing, the reports showed that farmers' groups were products of historical events, may it be a rebellion against colonial rule or a struggle for farmers rights in the country. The formation of farmers' organizations was catalyzed mostly by social development agents or by the farmers themselves after recognizing the need for unity and solidarity in pushing for their concrete issues and concerns. In Indonesia and the Philippines, these local farmers organizations have become autonomous and independent as a result of major political events. They have also consolidated their ranks and are into expansion activities.

UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS

To get a more concrete handle on the status of peasant organizations in the region, the results of AsiaDHRRA's study on Asian farmers' organizations and their profiles were presented to the participants and guests. Supported by Agriterra, the project collated the basic organizational information of existing national farmers groups in seven countries including the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and South Korea. The study likewise provided insights on possible bases of unity for the Asian farmers' alliance that is being formed and support to the country representatives on organizing and strengthening peasant





organizations in their own countries.

Based on the output of the study, it was established that the participating organizations shared a common mission, which was to uplift the economic and socio-political status of farmers in their respective countries.

Even in terms of strategies, there were similarities like pushing for agrarian reform, increasing farm productivity through the use of appropriate technologies, protection of farmlands through sustainable agriculture practices, safeguarding biodiversity, organizing and strengthening for empowerment, and participation and influencing government policy making and advocacy.

WITNESSING THE LIFE OF INDONESIAN PEASANTS

Armed with an understanding of regional and national situation of farmers, the next three days of the exchange program focused on giving an opportunity to participating farmer-leaders for interaction and integration with local farming households belonging to two Indonesian farmers' unions: the Central Java Peasant Union (SPJT) and the Peasant Community Union of Qaryah Thayyibah (SPPQT). Three communities acted as hosts to the two-night integration. The participants were divided into three groups and assigned to one of the host communities of Salatiga, Kudus and Batang.

Each community and PO prepared its own list of activities but the main theme of the community integration focused on community based advocacy efforts and the role that farmers' solidarity played in the results of such hard work.



It was the participants' opportunity to witness and be part of a typical Indonesian day given all the local cultural and agricultural practices. During the reflection session, which was done through creative presentations, majority of the participants highlighted the unity and solidarity they witnessed among the farmers groups visited. They were also struck by the hospitality of their host families despite the latter's impoverished conditions. Aside from learning about indigenous farming practices, the participants noted the efforts of farmers in protecting and conserving the richness of their farmlands through environment friendly practices.

They also noted the absence of government support and inadequacy of agricultural infrastructures and facilities in the areas they visited. The need for developing the knowledge and skill of farmers were also highlighted during the reflection and sharing sessions.



SCANNING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS IN THE ASIAN REGION

Having had a thorough discussion of farmers' situation at the regional, national and community levels, it was now time to look into the immediate environment surrounding

AN ENVIRONMENT SCANNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS IN INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY, ADVOCACY AND COOPERATION

Culled from the presentation of Mr. Paul Sinnappan

The globalization process taking place in the world today has two dimensions - economic and technological. With economic globalization, free market economy prevails to be the dominant ideology with structural adjustments, financial liberalization, borderless trade and sustainable economy characterizing the processes taking place.

On the other hand, technological globalization is creating a global village accentuated by information technology, multi-media super corridors, cyber cities, and silicon valleys.

From such processes emerge new power centers: from GATT to WTO, share markets, currency trading, fund managers, foreign debts, privatizations, IMF and World Bank, networks and strategic alliances, and intellectual property rights.

New Realities of Asia

The diversity of societies in Asia is also reflected in existing economic systems. Countries have adopted varying economic strategies to attain industrialization including import substitution, export oriented systems, newly industrialized country economics, and newly opening economics. In the light of a globalizing world, an emerging issue, however, is that of creating an unregulated, open, and borderless economy given the existence of these economic systems.

For old democratic states, there is an emerging review of development processes and approaches. Existing political and economic systems are now in question. Transparency and accountability, corruption and cronyism, old and long term leadership, and impacts of development plans on the poor-these are just few of the issues being raised against old regimes.



the sector by identifying opportunities and threats to peasant organizing in the Asia. With the help of Paul Sinappan, a partner of AsiaDHRRA from Malaysia, the issues surrounding the globalization process was discussed thoroughly. According to him, globalization is now operating both in the economic and technological spheres. Because of this process, there is an emergence of new power centers resulting to movements for change in governments, people power, and a culture of demonstration. New democracies are now also emerging with economies facing transition and political systems

accommodating both the socialist and democratic ideals.

During his presentation, Paul acknowledged the positive contribution of globalization in the development of information technology, knowledge based human resource development, and the emergence of new management systems and researches. However, he also maintained that globalization has also impacted negatively particularly the issues pertaining to trade and liberalization of the economy or the GATT-WTO concerns.

Resulting from these questioning and debates is the emergence of people's movements to change governments. The culture of demonstration is becoming more and more pronounced among activists.

Meanwhile, in the new and emerging democracies, economies are in transition. While submitting to the demands of globalization, there is still persistence in maintaining socialist and communist ideologies. Politically, they remain to be a one party system where the policies, rules and regulations are still in the learning process.

Impact of Globalization

Globalization has both positive and negative impacts. On the brighter side, this whole shift in economic and technological systems brought about advancements in information technology, knowledge based human resource, telecommunications, as well as in management approaches, research, networking and business.

On the negative side, GATT and WTO remain to be the main issues being raised. At the international level, faceless governments are eventualities.

The role of multinationals and transnationals including the possible outcome of share markets, currency trading, privatization and new sciences like biotechnology are being questioned.

At the national level, issues are being raised regarding foreign debts, sustainable nationhood, sustainable agriculture, industrialization, share markets, banking, currency trading, and the role of overseas development assistance. Concerns are also high for government-business relations, participatory decision-making, and on the transparency and accountability of governments.

At the grassroots level, concern is raised over the negative impacts of globalization on indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, consumerism and materialism, job generation, rural urban migration, and health particularly HIV-AIDS. Major issues are also emerging concerning the lives of farmers, fishers, workers, and migrant workers. There are also issues of family, women, children, youth and community concern, concern for nature, and issues on cultural minorities. Men and women differently feel these impacts.

To wrap up his session, he shared the emerging development trend among civil society organizations to focus on community based, participatory and gender-fair and sensitive development programs. He also stressed the need for accountability and transparency even among NGOs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FARMERS IN THE ASEAN

To brief the participants with development opportunities in the Southeast Asian region, a presentation was made by representatives of the ASEAN. According to them, the main thrust of ASEAN is to facilitate the exchange of information, cooperation and solidarity among member nations. Concretely, they presented their project on the creation of an e-hub containing information regarding farming situations as well as monitoring of developments in the agriculture market including output, distribution and pricing of agricultural commodities. They also highlighted the possible cooperation between ASEAN and the alliance of Asian farmers that may result from the exchange program. Farmer-leaders in the exchange program, however, surfaced their reaction regarding the non-relevance of the e-hub program to small farmers given the absence of telecommunication infrastructures in many rural areas. They stressed that asset reform and productivity improvement concerns still remain a priority issue in their communities.



Who are we?

In the midst of an evolving global environment, it is necessary for us to ascertain our identity. Who are we? We are individuals, NGOs or groups. We are both formal and informal, having values and principles. We have a history and we are aware of what is happening to us and to our environment. More importantly, we too know where we are going --- to our own people.

In going back to the grassroots, we, in civil society, have a new thinking and an evolved way of doing things. Our work is now community based and participatory with high regards for principles of gender and development, accountability and transparency.

Opportunities and Challenges

The globalizing environment where we are working and our own understanding of our identities offer a number of opportunities to enhance our work with the poor. Among these are in the area of networking, strategic alliance building, NGO collaboration, resource sharing and credit management, cooperatives, micro-credit, and gender mainstreaming. Globalization also

affords to enhance international solidarities, bring forth new ideas and knowledge, and opportunities in newly opening economics.

However, a number of challenges loom ahead. At the individual level, there is a need for a mind shift, reflecting further on our own identities, where we want to go, and recognizing the need to change too while wanting to change others. Repentance and reconciliation are also necessary.

Collectively as a group or people, we need to revisit our values and principles and make alive our own and collective vision, mission and goals. We also need to update on development issues and move towards transformative leadership in NGOs.

Building a New World

In the end, what we must really strive for is cosmology centered development where harmony exist between people and nature, between man and woman, and among people of different race, ethnicity and religion, founded on and built by value based human beings and institutions.



GMOS AND COMMUNITY CURRENCY SYSTEMS

To update the participants on the emerging issues and initiatives in the agriculture and rural development, parallel sessions on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and community currency systems were conducted. The participants were asked to attend one of the sessions according to their interest.

In the session on GMOs, the participants were oriented on what GMOs are and the

implications and effects of these in their economic, political, health, socio-cultural, and spiritual lives. The effects of GMOs on the agricultural sectors were also expounded by the resource person Russell Culinae, capping his presentation with possible options to take against the promotion of GMOs and their products. Meanwhile, the participants of the community currency system simulated a local community trading with each other. In the reflection sharing sessions, the importance of self-reliance, mobilizing and preserving local resources within the community was highlighted.

STRATEGIC PLANNING TOWARDS SOLIDARITY BUILDING

To start the discussion on solidarity building, the experiences of two national organizations, PAKISAMA and FSPI, regarding networking and solidarity building were presented.

According to the two presentors, their work on building their links not only nationally but internationally has brought them greater leverage in international advocacy, capacity building opportunities for their leaders and members, and





contributed to generating and mobilizing resources for their organizations.

After the sharing, a workshop was conducted to assess the situation of farmers, the issues they are facing, and the possible actions or concrete steps that may be taken to address the issues both at the national and regional levels. The participants were divided into three groups according to their sub-regions --- Southeast Asia, Mekong Delta, and North Asia.

SURFACING RURAL CONCERNS AND TAKING ON THE CHALLENGE

The concerns raised in the workshop groups remained to be in the areas of land reform, increasing farm productivity through sustainable agriculture and human resource development, provision of production, credit, post harvest and marketing support, advocacy for farmers rights and the organizing of communities.

During the plenary, it was agreed that the following programs are to address the concerns of Asian farmers: Exchange (information, farmer-to-farmer, tours); Economic Cooperation (marketing of products, co-marketing, and other forms of economic cooperation between and among countries); Advocacy (farmers' rights, AR Conferences, pressures, research, dialogue); and Technology (technology transfers including organizing, sustainable agriculture, e-networking, leadership, etc).

LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND AGRARIAN CONTEXT IN ASIA

- ✿ Countries in Asia are predominantly agricultural with majority of the people living in the rural areas and engaged in farming and farm-related activities.
- ✿ In industrialized and industrializing countries, the share of agriculture both in population and income has been declining over the years.
- ✿ Land ownership is predominantly feudal and highly skewed with big land holdings owned and controlled by a small percentage of the population.
- ✿ As a result of land reform, there is more equitable ownership of land in countries where the program has been implemented. In some industrializing states like Malaysia, there is a trust to consolidate small farms to large-scale agriculture.
- ✿ Where the state is weak, land redistribution and support program delivery is also weak and problematic. Where the state is an instrument of capitalist interests and highly controlled by foreign institutions, agricultural policies highly caters in their favor over the small farmers. Where the state is dominant, agricultural policies and their implementation is strong.
- ✿ Local peasant movements are, historically, products of uprisings and struggles for farmers' rights. They act as pressure group for change in policies.
- ✿ Students and other NGO groups were catalysts in organizing the peasantry. The growth and expansion of peasant organizations predominantly came after major political upheavals like the Reformasi in Indonesia.
- ✿ Peasant organizations respond to concrete issue and needs of their constituents, whether on issues of productivity or land distribution, or farmers' rights.



During the workshop discussions, the farmers also reached consensus in building a formal alliance of farmers in Asia. This decision was also reaffirmed during the plenary discussion.

Furthermore, the participants formulated their vision for the Asian rural household to embody the following: the farmers own the land, practice sustainable agriculture, educated, self reliant, cooperate and participate in development initiatives, organized as coops or strong farmers organization, have access to credit facilities,

and can market their own products. With these, they envisioned a community that is free from hunger and poverty, food secure, prosperous, peaceful, happy and healthy.

To work on the details of forming an alliance of Asian farmers, a working group was created and mandated to meet in the following months composed of Ka Aning Loza from the Philippines, Subandi from Indonesia, and Phromma Keng Khla from Thailand. It was agreed that the output of the working committee would be presented during the next exchange visit in Japan.

NEXT STEPS, NEXT MOVES

Towards the end of the ten-day exchange visit, participants per country were asked to draft a re-entry plan covering a one-year time period. They were asked to list down country or organizational



GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS: WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Biotechnology or genetic engineering is the technique of producing new kinds of organisms by transferring the genes of one species to another species to produce a new organism with the desirable traits. Over the years, debates have continued over the merits and drawbacks of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) particularly in food and agricultural products.

Industry says GMO Crops are the Answer because...

- GMO crops are the only way to feed a growing population
- This technique is more precise and efficient than traditional crossbreeding and can increase food production through higher yields
- Can design crops to be virus and disease resistant, decreasing chemical use and increase yields
- Reduces the need for pesticide application, as plants have the ability to protect themselves from certain pests and diseases.
- Herbicide resistant crops decrease water usage, soil erosion and greenhouse emissions through more sustainable farming practices
- Reduce undesirable qualities in foods and other consumer products such as saturated fats in cooking oils and increase nutrients such as Vitamin A in rice

Civil Society says that GMOs are Not the Answer because...

- World hunger is not caused by a shortage of food
- Farmers will also need to buy chemical herbicides and fertilizers for without these, the genetically engineered (GE) seeds will fail to give good yields
- It is impossible for organic farming to stay free from contamination due to cross-pollination from genetically modified (GM) crops
- Instability in GE crop lines has already led to crop failures, which, unsurprisingly, have not been well reported by the industry
- Farmers will increase their bank loans and amounts borrowed
- Companies producing the seeds are controlling the harvest and harvest prices for certain GMO crops and providing easy and cheap loans for the farmers to gain acceptance of this product
- GMO crops will stimulate the evolution of "super weeds" and "super bugs" which will necessitate higher doses of chemicals or new, stronger chemicals or even new GMO crops, all helping only the companies that produce these products
- The out crossing of engineered traits to other crops or other species also poses a major threat to food production
- GMO crops is likely to reduce genetic diversity, resulting in fewer and fewer types of food crops
- A further loss of traditional farming techniques which are usually more environment friendly
- A further loss of traditional crop varieties, increasing pest and disease problems to farmers
- The antibiotic-resistant genes could be passed to the microorganisms that make us ill causing resistance of antibiotics to the disease
- Viruses can mix with genes of other viruses and retroviruses which can give rise to more deadly viruses
- Every country has different health and food safety requirements making the use and acceptance of GO crops even more complicated
- Farmers in Asia are not well enough informed of the entire issue surrounding GMO crops to make decision on whether to use the crop or not



activities that was already planned and which they wish to disseminate information to other farmers' organizations participating in the exchange program. They were also asked to list down those activities they want solicit the participation of other groups as well as those activities that would need support from AsiaDHRRA. The results of the planning were later on presented in plenary session.

As a final activity, Paiboon Chareonsap, AsiaDHRRA Chairperson for Mekong Delta sub-region, gave a closing message to the participants. He reiterated that a lot of learning have been generated and passed on through the exchange. As one of the leaders of

AsiaDHRRA, he vowed to present the results of the dialogues that transpired to members of AsiaDHRRA who would be having a general assembly following the farmers exchange program. He also assured the farmers of AsiaDHRRA's continuing support in terms of moral, information, solidarity with issues, technical, project development, and in the conduct of the next consultations. He ended his message with the challenge of building and strengthening solidarity among farmers groups that they may confronts the emerging issues in the region as one solid force.

FOLDING AND UNFOLDING FOR GREATER JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

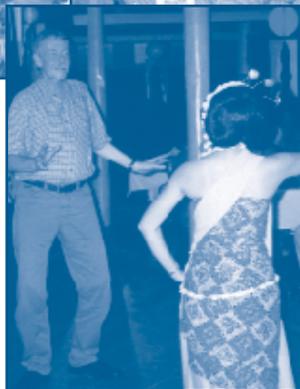
The sun is slowly setting in the west radiating a somber glow. From a distance, the sounds of gongs and chants can be heard signaling afternoon prayers among the faithful. After a day's work in the field, the farmer trails back to his home to rest, but returning still in the coming days to continuously cultivate his fields. After ten days of fruitful exchange among and with Indonesian farmers and civil society leaders, the 48 farmer leaders in Indonesia leg of the Asian Farmers Exchange and Visitation Program are also trailing back home to their own country, their own organizations and their own communities. Having sown the seeds for regional solidarity among Asian farmers, they too would be coming back to and meet again to nurture further the unity and relationships they have established among their peers. They would be regrouping again and again to advance the causes and interests of the million poor farmers towards a just, equitable and productive rural Asia.



ASIAN FARMERS VISIT INDONESIA



snapshots



THE PARTICIPANTS



INDONESIA

Mr. Mamat Rahmat, Mr. Dedy Suhendar, Ms. Tarosah, Mr. Subandi, Mr. Surame Hadi Sutikno, Mr. Roviq, Ms. Nur Hafsa, Mr. Erwin SQ Haripramono, Mr. Mamock Sugiatmo, Mr. Rois Noor, Mr. Samsul Hadi, Mr. Yasfin, Mr. Mugi



Cambodia

Mr. Ouk Sokha, Ms. Sok Seu, Mr. Sou Sery Da



VIETNAM

Mr. Pham Trung An, Ms. Sui H'an, Ms. Pham Thi An, Ms. Hoang Thi Binh, Mr. Nguyen Quang Huyen, Mr. Bui Tien Huynh



THAILAND

Mr. Phomma Keng Khla, Mr. Phachern Sing Pra Phan, Ms. Saowakon Klongklaew, Mr. Thawatchai Khayanying, Ms. Apaphan Sripon, Ms. Napasri Maneewong



MALAYSIA

Ms. Parvathi Letchumanan, Mr. Sakaran Palaniappan, Ms. Aminah Bt. Omar, Mr. Ravichandran S/O Muniandy



TAIWAN R.O.C.

Mr. Tsai Wei Su, Mr. Tzong-chig Chiu

MYANMA

Fr. Maung Than Taut



JAPAN

Mr. Shunetsu Togashi, Mr. Kisaku Uchida



SOUTH KOREA

Mr. Sang Jun Yoon, Mr. Jun Sang Yoon



PHILIPPINES

Mr. Ananias Loza, Mr. Mamerto Dinglasan, Mr. Mario Salazar, Mr. Ernesto Lim, Jr.



NEPAL

Ms. Surya Maya Danwar, Ms. Muna Manandhar



LAOS

Mr. Bounseun, Mr. Sengpaseuth Simmanivong, Mr. Kamkeo Phandanouvong, Mr. Phimmasen Khoussirivong



AsiaDHRRRA is a regional network of 11 development organizations from 10 Asian countries working in the rural areas.

AsiaDHRRRA Secretariat

2nd Floor Partnership Center
59 C. Salvador Street, Loyola Heights, 1108 Quezon City, Philippines
Phone: (632) 436-4706, (632) 426-6739
Fax: (632) 426-6739
Email: asiadhrra@pacific.net.ph
URL: <http://www.asiadhrra.org>

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Technical Support and Staff:

Rolly Asuncion, Jet Hermida, Sam Maduro and Menchie Vicencio

Monograph Production

Indonesian Exchange Documentor: Rolly Asuncion
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