

Training Philippine educators in agriculture to lead in good practices

The APO provides support to member countries in organizing follow-up activities to its multicountry projects. One of the most useful forms of support is the Technical Expert Service (TES) Program, under which an expert is dispatched to an individual member country to provide his/her expertise to local productivity initiatives. This article, contributed by Dr. Cely S. Binoya, PASSAGE Ex-Officio Board Member, vividly illustrates how TES integrates a local project effectively with parallel national and multicountry projects.

The Philippine Association of Agri-environment Educators and Entrepreneurs (PASSAGE) began at the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture in 1982. In the past 25 years, its more than 600 members have advocated sustainable agriculture and environmental protection. It has had a voice in shaping the national agricultural agenda to address changing demands and provided continuing education to its members. Biennial conferences are held to share knowledge and discuss issues confronting agricultural practice.

In 2007, PASSAGE focused on greening production chains to reduce environmental damage caused by agriculture. Extensive use of chemical inputs is increasingly disastrous for both the environment and humanity. It is thus necessary to shift to better agricultural practices. Progress in greening the production chain over the last decade was insignificant. Problems include the lack of inorganic input substitutes and perceived poor productivity resulting from their use. These problems have been complicated by the twin pressures of a growing population and reduction in agricultural land due to residential development. This means that educators and other stakeholders face a stark choice: pursue green agriculture with environmental benefits but perceived unstable productivity; or pursue input-based farming that can assure food sufficiency for the growing populace, but at a cost to the environment. How can good agricultural practices (GAP) be integrated into the agricultural food production and supply chain? How can educators facilitate information dissemination to ensure community participation in GAP?

These questions guided the discussions and knowledge sharing during the 13th biennial PASSAGE conference on the theme Agriculture Educators and Entrepreneurs for Gender Empowerment toward GAP held at the DAP Conference Center on 19 September 2007. Training in Facilitation for Community Development, 20–21 September, aimed to enhance the use of facilitation tools to hasten the adoption of GAP. The conference-cum-training event was spon-

sored by the APO under the TES Program, DAP, Commission on Higher Education, Institute of Community Education (ICE) of the University of the Philippines Los Bamos, and Department of Agriculture Bureau of Agricultural Research. The 75 participants included directors of extension services and their staff, agribusiness managers, professors, graduate students, and local government planners from around the Philippines.



APO TES expert Mohan explaining the concept of facilitation

DAP President Antonio D. Kalaw, Jr. and PASSAGE President/ICE Director Dr. Carolina P. Santillana gave the welcome address. Senator Loren Legarda's keynote speech emphasized each stakeholder's role in agriculture and that the rural economy, particularly the development of agriculture and fisheries, held the key to poverty alleviation, equitable access to opportunities, and food security. Plenary presentations focused on "Good agricultural practice required by the market of agri-entrepreneurs," "Good agricultural practice through kaizen," "Best practices for balancing environmental integrity and agricultural productivity," and "Gender empowerment for enterprise development and good agricultural practice through *barangay* sisterhood." Two parallel sessions were followed by a field visit to Gourmet Farm to give participants insights on the commercial value of sustainable agriculture.



Newly elected PASSAGE officers sworn in

Mohan Dhamotharan, an expert deployed by the APO through TES, was the major resource person and facilitator for the training on Facilitation for Community Development, along with other facilitators, Dr. Alene Solitario of ATI Region IV, Joselito Gonzales of PRRM, and Dr. Cely Binoya, who were all trained under Dhamotharan in an APO course in Fiji in November 2006. Lectures, workshops, and simulation using some facilitation tools made the participants appreciate their value for community development. 