

**1st STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
ASEAN-AVRDC REGIONAL NETWORK FOR VEGETABLE
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (AARNET)**



BANGKOK, THAILAND, 3 MAY 2006



**REPORT OF THE 1st STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF
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INTRODUCTION

- 1 The 1st Steering Committee Meeting of AARNET was held on 3 May 2006 at Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand. This Meeting was the result of a decision by members present at the 4th Coordinators' Meeting of AARNET, held at the same venue on 4 – 5 May 2005 to form a Steering Committee to assume governance of AARNET and take over the roles of AARNET National Coordinators.

- 2 At the 4th Coordinators' Meeting it was also agreed to consolidate existing AARNET projects into three projects, namely (i) indigenous vegetables, (ii) variety selection and (iii) pre-harvest and postharvest handling for safe and quality vegetables, with the last project submitted through ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) for funding. The Meeting also proposed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be signed between ASEC and AVRDC for strengthening the partnership within the AARNET framework.
- 3 This AARNET Steering Committee Meeting was organized to update members on the status of support of AARNET's action plans, as well as to report on the status of the projects and the actions to be taken to move them forward.
- 4 The Meeting was attended by delegates from seven ASEAN member countries, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, and AVRDC. A representative from the ASEC was also present. The list of delegates appears as ANNEX 1.

AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING OF THE MEETING

Agenda 1.1: Opening Address by Chairman

- 5 The Chairman of the Meeting welcomed all delegates to the 1st Steering Committee Meeting of AARNET co-organised by Singapore and the Asian Regional Center (ARC) of AVRDC. He thanked ASEC's representative, Mr Htain Lin, for attending the Meeting.

Agenda 1.2: Remarks by ASEAN Secretariat

- 6 The representative of ASEC expressed his thanks to AARNET for inviting him to attend the Meeting. He informed that the project on pre-harvest and postharvest handling for safe and quality vegetables had been sent to the Project Appraisal Committee. However, the Committee recommended that the project be broken into smaller projects with a focus on specific area of interest and more details on implementation activities and funding arrangements be furnished before ASEC can approach the donors.

Agenda 1.3: Remarks by Director of International Cooperation, AVRDC

- 7 The delegate from AVRDC, on behalf of the Director-General of AVRDC, expressed his appreciation to Singapore for organizing the Meeting. AVRDC had been actively expanding its activities to improve human nutrition, economic growth and alleviate poverty to the world, outside of Asia. However, AVRDC still have several projects in the region and would like to continue to work closely with partners in South-East Asia under the AARNET framework.

Agenda 1.4: Remarks by Director of Asian Regional Center, AVRDC

- 8 The Director of ARC was keen to coordinate AVRDC projects in the region and bring them in line with AARNET activities and to enhance cooperation within AARNET. ARC would support research work by focusing to enhance the managerial skills of research workers, particularly in the area of impact assessment.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF AGENDA

- 9 The Meeting adopted the Agenda which appears as ANNEX 2.

AGENDA ITEM 3: REPORT ON PROGRESS/STATUS OF PROJECTS

Agenda 3.1: Update by AARNET Chairman

- 10 AARNET Chairman reported that the 12th ASWGC and Special SOM-26th AMAF had agreed to AARNET's proposal to seek external funding through ASEC for the project on pre-harvest and postharvest handling of vegetables and the draft MOU between ASEAN and AVRDC - the World Vegetable Center. AVRDC made a presentation during the Special SOM-26th AMAF to inform the Meeting of its role in AARNET and further clarify the MOU. The update by the Chairman appears as ANNEX 3.
- 11 ASEC, in assessing the application for external funding, had suggested that the project be broken down into smaller projects so that proposed funding per project would be considerably small and easily manageable for the donors. A template to be used for ASEAN Cooperation Project Document appears as ANNEX 4.
- 12 On the MOU, ASEC, after consideration and guidance by the 27th AMAF, advised ASEAN not to proceed with the MOU. Nonetheless, the 27th AMAF reiterated that on-going cooperation between ASEAN and AVRDC through AARNET should continue, with or without a formal MOU.

Agenda 3.2: Report by AVRDC on Project "Selection of Superior Vegetable Varieties for the ASEAN Member States"

- 13 The delegate from AVRDC gave a presentation, which appears in ANNEX 5, of the activities under this project. AVRDC had begun coordinated regional trials to identify suitable varieties for specific locations through multi-location and multi-year trials.
- 14 AVRDC organized the workshop on "Conducting Trials of Promising Vegetable Varieties" at AVRDC Headquarters in Taiwan in September-October 2005. A total of 14 participants from seven AARNET member countries attended the workshop to be trained on the skills for conducting evaluation trials on vegetable varieties. Participants from five AARNET

member countries had immediately implemented trials in their respective institutions with the seed materials provided by AVRDC.

- 15 AVRDC also organized the “Review and Planning Meeting on Variety Selection in Southeast Asia” in Thailand in May 2006. The objectives were to review trial results, performance and problems, discuss plans for proven promising varieties as well as follow-up activities to be carried out. Some promising lines were identified but further evaluations were needed before these materials could be released to farmers. AVRDC could supply stock seeds, which could be multiplied by national partners for further testing and extension. All the participants agreed to continue with this type of activity and would like to seek support from AARNET Steering Committee and AVRDC.
- 16 AVRDC had scheduled another workshop on 16-27 May 2006 in Taiwan and had received confirmed attendance from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand.

Agenda 3.3: Report by Brunei Darussalam on Project “Utilization of Indigenous Vegetables - Ensuring Food, Nutritional Security and Conservation of Biodiversity In ASEAN Region”

- 17 Brunei Darussalam reported that it was awaiting the outcome of the proposed MOU between ASEAN and AVRDC before seeking funding from ASEC. But since the MOU was not supported at ASEAN+3, Brunei Darussalam would re-submit its paper for funding by other means, that is, possibly to the ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Furthermore, Brunei Darussalam had become the 65th member of Asian Development Bank (ADB) on 28 April 2006 and would be able to seek funding from ADB.
- 18 The delegate from Brunei Darussalam also reported that its Government had supported the indigenous vegetables project and national funds were available for organizing regional workshop/seminar(s). The Director of ARC indicated interest to co-organise a seminar on indigenous vegetables with Brunei Darussalam.

Agenda 3.4: Report by Malaysia/Thailand on Project “Pre-harvest and Postharvest Handling for Safe and Quality Vegetables”

- 19 Malaysia had been informed about ASEC’s suggestion to break up the proposal into smaller projects. After meeting in Singapore in April 2006, Malaysia had re-drafted the project proposal into four separate projects. The draft concept papers for these projects appear in ANNEX 6.
- 20 The Meeting discussed existing ASEAN projects and was cautioned about duplicating the scope and activities of other ASEAN projects. The representative of ASEC circulated a copy of the ASEAN Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) developed under the AADCP project on “Quality Assurance Systems for ASEAN Fruit and Vegetables Project”, which appears in ANNEX

7. The Meeting agreed to identify the areas that were not covered by the AADCP project when formulating the AARNET project. It was noted by delegates that the ASEAN GAP project is about developing regional and national standards in GAP for ASEAN members, while AARNET's projects on pre- and post-harvest would be on translating these standards into practical terms applicable to specific crops. The activities of the two projects should therefore complement each other.

AGENDA ITEM 4: DISCUSSION ON ACTION PLANS

Agenda 4.1: Vegetable Variety Selection

- 21 The delegate from AVRDC informed that further funding was required to support the activities of the project on vegetable variety selection. The Meeting agreed that AVRDC should pursue funding from the original donor, that is, the Agriculture Council of Taiwan, and other donors through the ASEC.
- 22 Members were requested to submit a copy of the status and national plan/programme for vegetable variety selection to AVRDC by the end of May 2006 so that AVRDC could coordinate and identify common denominators to put up a project proposal to seek funding from relevant donors. As an example, the delegate from Philippines briefed the Meeting on Philippines' national programme.
- 23 The representative of ASEC circulated a flowchart showing the process of appraisal and endorsement of project proposals in ASEC. The flowchart appears as ANNEX 8. The Meeting was informed to submit concept papers of the project proposals for the support of ASWGC Meeting in June 2006.
- 24 AVRDC would put up a concept paper on "Selection of Promising Vegetable Varieties" to submit to ASWGC by June 2006. Detailed proposal for external funding would be worked out subsequently.

Agenda 4.2: Indigenous Vegetables

- 25 To capitalize on the outcomes of ADB-funded RETA 6067 project, AVRDC would collect relevant research findings on indigenous vegetables through the project's conclusion conference in India from 8 May and provide feedback to Brunei Darussalam for reference in preparation of its project proposal.
- 26 Brunei Darussalam would formulate a concept paper through AARNET Secretariat for tabling at ASWGC in June 2006 and subsequent application for funds from ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Brunei Darussalam would host a seminar on indigenous vegetables, if necessary.
- 27 The representative from ASEC suggested a possible funding channel through the AADCP Regional Partnerships Scheme.

Agenda 4.3: Pre-harvest and Postharvest Handling for Safe and Quality Vegetables

- 28 The Meeting considered the draft concept papers prepared by Malaysia. The Meeting agreed that the overall theme for all the projects would still be on “Production of Safe and Quality Vegetables” and that the approach would be to look at the “Farm-to-Plate” process. The process would include the following stages: (i) Pre-harvest Handling, (ii) Storage Life, (iii) Transportation, (iv) Processing and Packaging, and (v) Marketing.
- 29 The AARNET projects would focus on pre-harvest and postharvest handling for specific crops and would complement the ASEAN GAP, which will be a generic set of guidelines for ASEAN (see Para 20 also).
- 30 The Meeting agreed to work, for a start, on the project proposals for the first two stages, namely, (i) Pre-harvest and (ii) Storage Life. Thailand and Malaysia were identified to be the project leaders for these projects, respectively. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand indicated interest to participate in both projects.
- 31 The lead countries would put up the concept papers (indicating which crop to work on by each country) by mid-May 2006, with focus on socio-economic impact of R&D to take care of the interests of donors.

AGENDA ITEM 5: OTHER MATTERS

Agenda 5.1: Update of AARNET Web-site

- 32 Philippines had set up and had been hosting the AARNET web-site at <http://www.bar.gov.ph/aarnet>. The delegate from Philippines appealed for updates from members to be loaded into the AARNET web-site. Members were requested to send the information to Singapore for co-ordination.

Agenda 5.2: Next Meeting

- 33 The Meeting agreed that the Steering Committee Meetings should be held, by rotation, in each ASEAN country and AVRDC. Singapore offered to host the next Meeting, tentatively to be held in April 2007.

AGENDA ITEM 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

- 34 The Meeting agreed to submit to SOM-AMAF the following recommendations:
 - a. Seek SOM-AMAF’s approval for the project on “Selection of Promising Vegetable Varieties” when the proposal is submitted.

- b. Seek SOM-AMAF's approval for the project on indigenous vegetables when the proposal is submitted.
- c. Re-submit the project proposal on "Pre-harvest and Postharvest Handling for Safe and Quality Vegetables" in the form of two separate projects on (i) Pre-harvest Handling and (ii) Storage Life, and seek SOM-AMAF's approval for these two projects.

AGENDA ITEM 7: ADOPTION OF REPORT

- 35 The Meeting agreed that AARNET Secretariat will circulate the draft Report to the members who attended via emails, and comments would be incorporated into the Report before adopting it by *ad referral*. The final Report will be submitted to ASWGC for their meeting in June 2006.

AGENDA ITEM 8: CLOSING OF THE MEETING

- 36 The delegates from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and ASEC expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to Singapore and AVRDC-ARC for the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting and for the warm hospitality accorded to them.
- 37 The Meeting was held in the traditional spirit of ASEAN cooperation and cordiality.