



Event Covered: Sustainable Rice Platform 5th Plenary Meeting and General Assembly held in Manila and Los Baños, Philippines, October 27-29, 2015



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Sustainable Rice Platform 5th Plenary Meeting and General Assembly

This report covers the 5th Plenary Meeting and General Assembly of the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) held in Manila and Los Baños, Philippines from October 27-29, 2015. Events included the plenary, thematic breakout group discussions, national roundtables to develop SRP action plans for Cambodia and Vietnam and a field trip to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). The General Assembly was held on the second day of the event at IRRI headquarters in Los Baños, Philippines. The IRRI and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) inaugurated the SRP in December 2011 as a multistakeholder partnership to promote resource efficiency and sustainability throughout the value chain in the rice sector. By the end of 2017, the SRP will put in place a system of sustainability standards, practices and alternative incentive mechanisms to facilitate wide-scale adoption of sustainable best practices in the rice supply chain.

The meeting was marked by the launch of the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation, the world's first standard for sustainable rice. Discussions highlighted the importance of the standard and its performance indicators for sustainable rice cultivation, and addressed the challenges faced in its development and implementation along the supply chain. Over 120 participants from around the world attended the event, which was opened by Isabelle Louis, UNEP Deputy Regional Director for Asia-Pacific, and Matthew Morell, Deputy Director-General for Research, IRRI. Among the main conclusions, as highlighted by SRP Chair James Lomax of UNEP, are the potential for the standard to drive innovation and change practices for private sector supply chains, as well as, at the policy level, to incentivize the development of national action plans.

SRP Plenary

Isabelle Louis, UNEP Deputy Regional Director for Asia-Pacific, stated that the SRP fits closely with UNEP's mandate, including support for private-public sector partnerships, and is aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. She highlighted the challenges of rice production in the context of global food security, stating that the SRP standard begins to address sustainability in the sector. Matthew Morell, IRRI, stated that the SRP has progressed well and has been supported by an experienced group of experts. He explained that performance indicators help measure progress towards sustainability goals and emphasized the important interface between the IRRI and the SRP.

Keynote addresses were given by Calixto Protacio, Director of Philrice, Philippines Department of Agriculture, and by Atty. Analiza Rebuelta-Teh, Undersecretary and Chief of Staff at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines. Both speakers described how their departments planned to contribute to the SRP initiative through joint efforts and shared commitments. The Department of Agriculture of the Philippines also announced its interest in joining the SRP.

SRP Standard and Performance Indicators Launch

While launching the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation, the world's first standard for sustainable rice, SRP Chair James Lomax emphasized that the standard is compact and practical, with potential because it is "absolutely about measuring impacts" and is based on indicators and a data collection tool. Lomax said that the development of the standard will enable innovation and changes in practices within private sector supply chains and public policy-making.

The standard allows any rice system to be assessed for sustainability through 46 requirements grouped under eight broad themes (health and safety, labour rights, farm management, pre-planting, water use, nutrient management, pest management, and harvest and



Media briefing for the SRP Standard and Performance Indicators Launch

Sustainable Staple Food

The importance of rice production for feeding the world's increasing population and its socioecological impacts are widely recognized and were directly addressed during the SRP plenary. According to the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** "the world has over 50 000 edible plants. Just three of them, rice, maize and wheat, provide 60 percent of the world's food energy intake."¹ For this reason, the addition of a new standard tailored to better address the specificities of sustainable rice cultivation is both essential and necessary.

Designed to address sustainable rice cultivation in specific parts of the world, the SRP standard is built on a rigorous sustainability measurement system. The standard was born out of leading international scientific research on rice made available from IRRI, with expertise in agricultural voluntary sustainability standard (VSS) development provided by Aidenvironment, UNEP and UTZ Certified. It is different than other rice cultivation standards, as it is built on a unique set of indicators used to measure progress towards sustainability. Moreover, the standard and indicators have been piloted in different countries to adequately adapt them to specific rice cultivation contexts.

The SRP standard joins an expanding set of existing agricultural VSSs, which have proliferated significantly in recent years, covering more commodities and geographic locations. Ensuring that staple food production remains sustainable is imperative for global food security. Consequently, the SRP establishes a model for developing rigorous and contextually relevant agricultural VSSs for staple food cultivation.

postharvest). The SRP standard and indicators, developed by members led by UTZ Certified, Aidenvironment and IRRI, reflect experiences gained in the design of other VSSs worldwide for commodities such as cotton, coffee and palm oil.

James Lomax underlined the importance of standard validation activities, noting that the standard is currently undergoing piloting activities. Following the pilot project in Pakistan, SRP activities were extending to Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. A scaling-up phase is planned for 2017, when the standard will be extended to a wider group of stakeholders.

Public and Private Perspectives

Plenary speeches pinpointed the relevance of the standard for both private and public sectors. Kristin Hughes, Global Director, Nutrition & Wellness and Sustainability Mars Foods, announced the company's commitment to 100 per cent sustainable sourcing of rice by 2020 and stated that Mars will use the SRP standard to assess its supply chain and initiate pilot programs in Pakistan and India. Chan Phaloeum, Deputy Director General of Cambodia's General Directorate of Agriculture, expressed his country's willingness to translate the standard into national policy after it had been validated at the farm level in Cambodia.

Media Briefing

The media briefing on the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation outlined the current piloting stage of developing the standard; the strategy for promoting the standard (i.e., workshops to explore market mechanisms); the definition of sustainability for SRP through a set of performance indicators; the goal of the standard to make rice production more profitable to farmers taking into account sustainability practices; and the knowledge the SRP will gain from having the Philippine Department of Agriculture as a member.

Sector Transformation

Jan Willem Molenaar of Aidenvironment presented the outcome of his review of the SRP business model and governance structure based on the **Sector Transformation Model**. The following main conclusions for the rice sector were observed: millions of unorganized farmers, scant concentration in the supply chain, relatively small trade flows to Europe and the United States and few significant non-governmental organization (NGO) campaigns to increase consumer awareness of rice sustainability issues. The plenary followed his presentation with a discussion that led to recommendations for consideration during the SRP General Assembly on the final day.

¹The FAO tracks what people eat and their staple foods, including rice, in all parts of the world (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/u8480e/u8480e07.htm>).

²According to the *The State of Sustainability Review 2014* the emergence of international agricultural VSSs can be tracked to the 1970s. The turn of the 21st century has seen a rapid proliferation of agricultural VSSs, which have tended to focus on single commodities.



National Roundtable breakout sessions – IRRI Headquarters

Incentivizing Adoption: A Business Case for Sustainable Rice

Pieter Rutsaert, Agricultural Economist, IRRI, presented the results of a business case study for sustainable rice and the implications for the SRP, including the need for: stakeholder investment to align profits with sustainable practices, the SRP to provide tools and evidence of sustainable practices to stakeholders, and enhance communication and visibility of the standard.

The Way Forward

After the launching the standard, Wyn Ellis, SRP Coordinator, initiated discussions related to recent developments of the SRP standard. Some conclusions are that fundraising efforts should be a priority and that validation of the standard and governance should be improved. In this respect, there is a need for mechanisms to incentivize adoption of the standard, improve the secretariat capacity and develop assurance mechanisms for smallholders.

SRP Chair James Lomax, UNEP, presented the following Advisory Committee recommendations: UNEP and IRRI would continue to co-convene the SRP; IRRI would be represented at the level of Deputy Director General; the SRP would explore options for an independent chair; UNEP would continue to house the secretariat and IRRI to host the Technical Coordinator; and the Technical Work Streams would be revitalized. He noted the financial challenges of developing a new and credible standard with a complex governance system.

Field Visit

Sarah Beebout, IRRI Crop and Environmental Sciences Division Deputy Division Head, welcomed participants to IRRI headquarters in Los Baños, Philippines, and gave an introduction to IRRI work, followed by a question-and-answer session. Delegates visited the Riceworld Museum and IRRI's field experiment site, including the [Long-term Continuous Cropping Experiment](#), the world's longest-running rice research project. Participants had the opportunity to tour IRRI experimental fields where research plots are used to test the SRP performance indicators. Some participants noted that these fields at IRRI headquarters are only able to test the standard and indicators in one agro-ecosystem, which suggested the need for piloting and implementation in other ecosystems and countries.

Breakout Session Recommendations

The day at IRRI headquarters included three thematic breakout groups covering key topics in the supply chain. Two groups formed national

roundtables to develop action plans for the implementation of the SRP standard in Cambodia and Vietnam. The following outcomes of the discussions were presented in the plenary as recommendations to the SRP on the third day of the meeting:

Use of the Standard: For the SRP standard to advance the adoption of sustainable practices both in the private and public sectors, it needs to be translated into best farming practices. In this respect, the SRP should not only rely on price premiums to increase the uptake of the standard or to encourage a shift to more sustainable practices. Adopting the standard and implementing best farming practices must make business sense to farmers.

Assurance and Communication: Assurance schemes must be flexible to account for different national contexts, and the SRP needs to start piloting assurance models as soon as possible. The SRP needs to align some definitions and make them clearer in their communication strategy. The group presented some possible tools to develop guidelines on how to communicate the standard during the piloting phase.

SRP Member Services and Knowledge Tools: Developing communication and market strategies needs to be prioritized to strengthen SRP visibility and credibility, and the SRP must leverage its network to communicate the value of the standard among diverse stakeholders.

Cambodia Roundtable: The group identified key stakeholders to implement a national SRP action plan for Cambodia to pilot and implement the standard based on a variety of outreach models, including working with farmer groups via local non-governmental organizations and companies, as well as contract farming between individual farmers and agricultural cooperatives.

Vietnam Roundtable: The group laid out an action plan to implement the piloting phase by the end of 2015 and recommended a close partnership with the private sector. Vietnamese company and SRP member Loc Troi Group proposed to implement the standard and provide a platform for SRP piloting. Reference was made to the agriculture programs of the Government of Vietnam that support the SRP.

General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) took place at IRRI headquarters on the second day of the event, with an agenda to approve new members; elect officers to the 2015–2017 Advisory Committee; and endorse the Advisory Committee recommendations, the SRP Action Plan and the budget for 2015–2016. Four new members were approved, representing



Participants of the 5th SRP Plenary, Manila, Philippines

the Wildlife Conservation Society, Vredeseilanden/VECA, Syngenta and Loc Troi Group Joint Stock Company. Four organizations (Dow Agrosciences, the Department of Agriculture of the Philippines, the National Food Authority and the National Food Development Center) expressed their interest in applying for SRP membership. The GA endorsed the nomination to the Advisory Committee of Paul Nicholson, Global Sustainability and Risk Manager of Olam International, and Peter Sprang, Regional Representative Indonesia of Vredeseilanden/VECO Indonesia.

The GA agreed on key elements of the SRP governance system, such as the need to: improve the capacity of the secretariat, develop a more cohesive fundraising strategy and put in place a working group to improve the communication strategy. The GA also agreed to act on the priority areas recommended by the Advisory Committee, such as field validation, revision of the standard and indicators, and development of a verification and communication/outreach model.

Stakeholder Perspectives and Priorities

In this session, different stakeholders outlined the impacts of rice cultivation and described their efforts to build a more sustainable value chain. They also presented how their activities are aligned with SRP and the ways they can contribute to the implementation of the SRP standard.

Alma Linda Abubakar, Regional Office for Asia and Pacific of the FAO, underlined the scope for collaboration to bring sustainability standards to FAO programs, such as the Regional Rice Initiative. Huynh Van Thon, Loc Troi Group, noted the contribution of the SRP to achieving

the company's goal to empower farmers, enhance living standards and promote the sustainability of the rice value chain. He stated that Loc Troi Group planned to implement the SRP standard in 30,000 farms, accounting for 50,000 hectares of rice under cultivation.

Referring to the importance of experience sharing, Simon Mahood, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), said the WCS would reflect on how to use SRP guidelines and develop biodiversity indicators to improve the sustainability of farms. Christ Vansteenkiste, Vredeseilanden/VECO, outlined methodologies and tools based on sustainable and inclusive business models used by VECO. Several participants noted the importance of involving farmers in piloting and implementing the standard and providing incentives for farmers to adopt best practices. Matthias Bickel, GIZ, described the Better Rice Initiative Asia and potential cooperation with the SRP to set the framework for sustainability for its operations and to improve rice value chains. Nguyen Minh Le, Oxfam, discussed Oxfam's support to farmers in several South Asian countries, noting the importance of small-scale farmers.

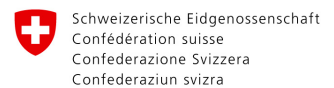
Closing Remarks

SRP Chair James Lomax of UNEP closed the meeting by noting that the discussions throughout the three days clearly illustrated the challenges of integrating sustainability along the supply chain in the rice sector. There is work to be undertaken on financing, communication and national-context platforms for both the SRP standard and performance indicators for sustainable rice cultivation.

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