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| **REPORT OF**  **THE 16TH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE ASEAN-AVRDC REGIONAL NETWORK FOR VEGETABLE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (AARNET)**  **June 30, 2022**  **Virtual Meeting, hosted by FAVRI, Vietnam** |

**REPORT OF THE 16TH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE ASEAN-AVRDC REGIONAL NETWORK FOR VEGETABLE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (AARNET)**

**30 JUNE 2022**

**VIRTUAL MEETING**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The 16th Steering Committee Meeting of AARNET was held on 30 June 2022, via Zoom video conferencing platform that was hosted by Fruit and Vegetable Research Institute (FAVRI), Vietnam.
2. The Meeting discussed the progress of AARNET proposals, proposed project “Open Network for Asian Vegetables (ONAV)” by World Vegetable Centre (WorldVeg) and learned about WorldVeg’s work in the ASEAN region.
3. The Meeting was attended by delegates from the ten ASEAN member states (AMS) namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and representatives from WorldVeg. The list of delegates appears in ANNEX 1.

**AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING OF MEETING**

***Agenda 1.1: Welcome Remarks by Dr. Nguyen Ha Hue, Vice Director of International Cooperation Department (ICD), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam***

1. Dr. Nguyen Ha Hue, Vice Director of International Cooperation Department (ICD), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam welcomed delegates to this Meeting.
2. He highlighted that under increasing market demand and requirements for quality and safe produce, innovative solutions were crucial to help farmers raise productivity while ensuring long-term environmental sustainability. International and regional partnerships in R&D, especially in vegetable production could leverage strengths and expertise of AMS, and collaborations as AARNET could significantly contribute to regional food security. He looked forward to a fruitful discussion and productive outcome of the Meeting.

***Agenda 1.2 Opening Remarks by Ms Melin Lim, AARNET Chair and Senior Director, Singapore Food Agency***

1. Ms Melin Lim, Senior Director of Urban Food Solutions, Singapore Food Agency, and AARNET Chair welcomed all delegates to this Meeting and expressed her pleasure that all ten AMS were attending the virtual Meeting which also reflected ASEAN’s continuing support for AARNET. She thanked FAVRI Vietnam and WorldVeg for coordinating the Meeting.
2. She shared that issues faced in ensuring food security for all have been exacerbated not only by the COVID-19 pandemic but also other global developments such as trade disruptions and food export limitations. She reiterated the importance of the work of AARNET in contributing to regional food security through partnerships in R&D. She hoped that all delegates would participate actively in the discussions and make this a successful and fruitful meeting.

***Agenda 1.3: Remarks by Mrs Delphine Larrousse, WorldVeg Regional Director for East and South East Asia***

1. Mrs Delphine Larrousse, WorldVeg Regional Director for East and Southeast Asia welcomed delegates to this meeting.
2. She emphasized the importance of AARNET as a coordination platform among AMS for vegetables research and development. She thanked FAVRI and AARNET Secretariat for hosting and coordinating the meeting, as well as all AMS for their participations, and looked forward to the fruitful discussions that would take place.

### AGENDA ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF AGENDA

1. The Meeting adopted the Agenda, which appears as ANNEX 2.

## AGENDA ITEM 3: UPDATE ON WORLDVEG’S WORK IN THE ASEAN REGION

***Agenda 3.1 Update on WorldVeg’s work in the ASEAN region by WorldVeg***

1. Mrs Delphine Larrousse, WorldVeg Regional Director for East and South East Asia (ESEA) shared that WorldVeg had re-designed its work around three global flagships that address the entire vegetable value chain: Vegetable Diversity and Improvement, Safe and Sustainable Value Chains, Healthy Diets, and one cross-cutting flagship, Enabling Impact.
2. ESEA has the Global Cucurbit Breeding program, which was growing in a very sustainable way, in partnership with the public and the private sector. It started with bitter gourd and expanded to pumpkin, luffa, and now bottle gourd and okra. ESEA’s Kamphaeng Saen campus has 6.7 ha of field facility which were suitable for plant disease field trials. The on-going field trials include cucurbit, chili, tomato and okra to combat diseases for tropical climate in the region.

1. The Meeting noted that Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia were already working with WorldVeg in the global cucurbit programme and enquired if other AMS could also join the programme as WorldVeg would consider working with other interested AMS.
2. The Meeting noted WorldVeg’s participation in OneCGIAR initiatives:
   * Fruit and Vegetables for Sustainable, Healthy Diets (FRESH)
   * Sustainable Healthy diets through Food Systems Transformation (SHiFT)
   * Resilient Cities through Sustainable Urban and Peri-urban Agrifood Systems
3. The Meeting learned that WorldVeg adopted the push-pull-policy framework, which comprises expanding supply and affordability of healthy foods (push), stimulating demand for healthy foods (pull) and improving enabling conditions for food systems supporting human & planetary health (policy).

***Agenda 3.2 Update on concept note “Open Network for Asian Vegetables (ONAV)” by WorldVeg***

1. Dr Maarten van Zonneveld presented the ONAV concept note, which aimed to promote the utilization and conservation of Asian vegetable biodiversity through regional collaboration.
2. The Meeting noted that South East Asia was a hot spot for vegetable biodiversity and hence it was crucial to conserve biodiversity of neglected vegetable varieties as useful germplasm sources for future breeding programmes to develop climate resilient and pest/disease-resistant crops.
3. The Meeting noted the objectives of ONAV as follows:

* Regional assessment - Understand opportunities and bottlenecks to access, exchange and conserve genetic resources in Southeast Asia
  + Capacity building - Strengthen the research capacity and technical skills of national seed banks
  + Conservation and multiplication - Save, multiply and share quality seed to farmers and other seed users
  + Regional collaboration - Facilitate collaborative research on vegetable diversity in Southeast Asia

1. The Meeting supported the ONAV project with views summarized below:
   * Brunei: would try to have an exchange with their existing germplasm collection and would get back to WorldVeg
   * Cambodia: shared that they could exchange their germplasm collection.
   * Malaysia: need to check nationally to see whether sharing of germplasm would be feasible.
   * Myanmar: shared that they have genebank and would like to know what type of vegetable lines were available for the exchange.
   * Singapore: important to list down the focus crops for ONAV to streamline the work for ONAV and to align with AMS' common interests.
   * Vietnam: have existing projects with WorldVeg on bitter gourd and pumpkin and keen to get more lines on tomato, chili, pepper and cucumber
2. The Meeting discussed and considered the two options to move this project forward:
   * Option 1): To put up a formal proposal through ASEAN project proposal format,
   * Option 2): To kick start the project through collaborating on activities that required minimal funding e.g., start germplasm exchange with WorldVeg.

1. The Meeting agreed to proceed with Option 2 while WorldVeg continue to review the ONAV proposal such as refining the objectives and activities, and to reach out to other donors.

## AGENDA ITEM 4: UPDATE ON AARNET ACTIVITIES BY AARNET SECRETARIAT

***Agenda 4.1 Update on progress of AARNET activities and review on relevance of projects***

1. Ms Chia Siok Hiang, AARNET Secretariat, updated that the progress report of AARNET 2021 was submitted to ASEAN Working Group on Crops (ASWGC) in July 2021.
2. The Meeting noted the following updates:

* For the project on “Going wild in finding insect-pest resistance for tomato breeding in Southeast Asia”, ASEC informed in Sep 2021 that Japan had decided not to support it under JAIF, as a similar project “Improved Coordination and Strengthened Capacity to Deal with the Invasive Insect Pest *Tuta absoluta* in Mainland Southeast Asia” was being implemented by the same Implementing Agency.
* For the project on “Sustainable and eco-friendly protected cultivation of vegetables in Southeast Asia” and “Promoting biocontrol-based integrated pest management strategies for safer vegetables in the ASEAN countries”, AARNET Secretariat had sought ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC)’s assistance to explore other funding sources and was pending ASEC’s response.

1. The Meeting discussed views on whether AARNET should continue seeking funding for the three projects or withdraw them and work on other projects that might be more relevant. Noting that this was the first AARNET meeting for many members, the Meeting agreed for AARNET Secretariat to circulate the latest versions of the three project proposals and seek AMS’ views on whether to continue with or withdraw these projects via email.
2. The Meeting also discussed ways to improve on communication and publicity of AARNET activities/developments. WorldVeg suggested reactivating the AARNET website and updating it with AARNET Steering Committee Meeting reports (summarized versions), AARNET Steering Committee member details, related AMS vegetable research institutes etc. AARNET Secretariat would check with ASEC whether ASEAN related meeting reports and documents could be shared publicly.

**AGENDA ITEM 5: OTHER MATTERS**

***5.1 Update of AARNET Steering Committee Members***

1. AARNET Secretariat updated the list of AARNET Steering Committee Members which appears in ANNEX 3.

***5.2 Venue of Next Meeting***

1. In accordance with the ASEAN practice of rotating the host country by alphabetical order, Brunei Darussalam would be the host for the next AARNET Steering Committee Meeting, with the date to be confirmed later.

### AGENDA ITEM 6: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ASWGC and SOM-AMAF

1. The key points of the Meeting are summarized below, which would be submitted to ASWGC for information:
   * For project “Open Network for Asian Vegetables (ONAV)”, all AMS supported the project and agreed to kick start the project through collaborating on activities that required minimal funding e.g. start germplasm exchange with WorldVeg, while WorldVeg continue to review the ONAV proposal such as refining the objectives and activities and to reach out to other donors
   * For the three proposals seeking funding through ASEC, the meeting agreed to decide on whether to continue seeking funding or to withdraw these three proposals, through email consultation
   * Brunei Darussalam would host the next AARNET meeting on a date to be confirmed.

**AGENDA ITEM 7: ADOPTION OF REPORT**

1. The Meeting reviewed and adopted the Report ad referendum, for submission to ASWGC and SOM-AMAF.

**AGENDA ITEM 8: CLOSING OF THE MEETING**

1. AARNET Chair closed the meeting and thanked all presenters, speakers and delegates for contributing to the meeting.
2. The delegates from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to Singapore, Vietnam and WorldVeg for the excellent arrangements made for the virtual Meeting.
3. The Meeting was held in the traditional spirit of ASEAN cooperation and cordiality.

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