



Workshop Evaluation Report

Post-Workshop evaluation of the training course “Group Facilitation Skills for Participatory Decision-Making”

November 6-9, 2007, Los Baños, Philippines

Compiled by Cristina Sette

July 2008

Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative - c/o Bioversity International
Via dei Tre Denari 472°, 00057 Maccarese (Fiumicino), Rome, Italy
Tel: (39) 0661181, Fax: (39) 0661979661, email: ilac@cgiar.org, URL: www.cgiar-ilac.org

The ILAC initiative fosters learning from experience and use of the lessons learned to improve the design and implementation of agricultural research and development programs. The mission of the ILAC Initiative is to develop, field test and introduce methods and tools that promote organizational learning and institutional change in CGIAR centres and their partners, to expand the contributions of agricultural research to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Citation: ILAC (2008) Evaluation Report on the Group Facilitation Skills for Participatory Decision-Making Workshop held at IRRI, November 6-9, 2007, Los Baños, Philippines, Rome, Institutional Learning and Change Initiative.

Summary

The Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), co-sponsored a training workshop entitled Group Facilitation Skills for Participatory Decision-Making.

The training course was held at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) headquarters in Los Baños, Philippines from 6-9 November, 2007. This report presents summary results of a participant evaluation carried out six months after the workshop.



ILAC Facilitation Workshop, November 6-9 2007, Los Baños, Philippines

First row (left to right): Noel Magor (IRRI); Rachid Serraj (IRRI); Ahmad Salahuddin (Consultant/IRRI); Buffy Balderston (Community at Work); Jeffrey Oliver (Bioversity)

Second row (left to right): Helen Leitch (WorldFish); Maria Luz George (Bioversity); Elisabetta Gotor (Bioversity); Sarah Fisk (Community at Work); Erlene Manohar (Philippine Coconut Authority); Florencia Palis (IRRI); Nerlie Manalili (VECO); Marietta Nadal (CIP); Vida Grace Sinohin (Bioversity); Natasja Sheriff (WorldFish)

Third row (left to right): Jose Bacusmo (Visayas State University); David Johnson (IRRI); Nigel Ruaraidh Sackville Hamilton (IRRI); Fangming Xie (IRRI); Stephan Haeferle (IRRI); Alexey Morgounov (CIMMYT); Dindo Campilan (CIP); Tonya Schuetz (IWMI)

The objectives of this course were to encourage participants build skills and knowledge that help them:

- Facilitate meetings in ways that increase their effectiveness
- Manage conflict and disagreement
- Build consensus, and

- Promote and encourage virtual teams

The event was attended by twenty one professionals from 6 CGIAR centers (Bioversity, CIP, CIMMYT, IRRI, IWMI, and WorldFish) and 3 partner organizations (Philippine Coconut Authority, Visayas State University, and a Belgium NGO VECO-Asia). Participants included 9 Senior and Middle-level Managers, 9 Research Scientists, 2 Administrators and 1 Technical Support staff member. A complete list of participants is included in the Annex to this report.

In general, participants indicated that they were very satisfied with the skills and knowledge gained, with the workshop methodology, and with the experienced trainer. They found the workshop very useful and relevant. They expressed their gratitude to ILAC for providing this opportunity. Participants indicated that they require further, on-going opportunities to practice the skills they have now acquired or improved since they attended the workshop.

Dr. Sarah Fisk, of Community at Work (San Francisco, California), who delivered the training is a recognized leader in consensus decision-making and co-author, with Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi and Duane Berger of *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (2007). Dr. Fisk was assisted by Buffy Balderston from Community at Work.

Introduction

Facilitation skills are strategically important because professionals are increasingly called upon to manage teams and participatory processes involving people from diverse backgrounds, disciplines, nationalities and cultures. Such processes pose many challenges for effective communication and decision making.

Throughout the four-day training workshop participants are exposed to a variety of techniques to assist the group in working their way through the decision-making process. They also have the opportunity to practice and receive feedback from other participants and from the trainer.

Evaluation Methodology

Approximately six months after the workshop ended, participants were asked to rate various aspects of the workshop through an online survey. A web-based service, *Survey Monkey*¹, was used to administer a custom-made survey. Participants were asked to respond to seventeen questions, eight of which required a rating and nine an open ended, essay-type response. A qualitative data analysis program (NVivo²) was used to help analyze the responses. Eighteen of the twenty one participants completed the survey -- an 86% response rate.

General Reaction

A summary of the responses is presented here.

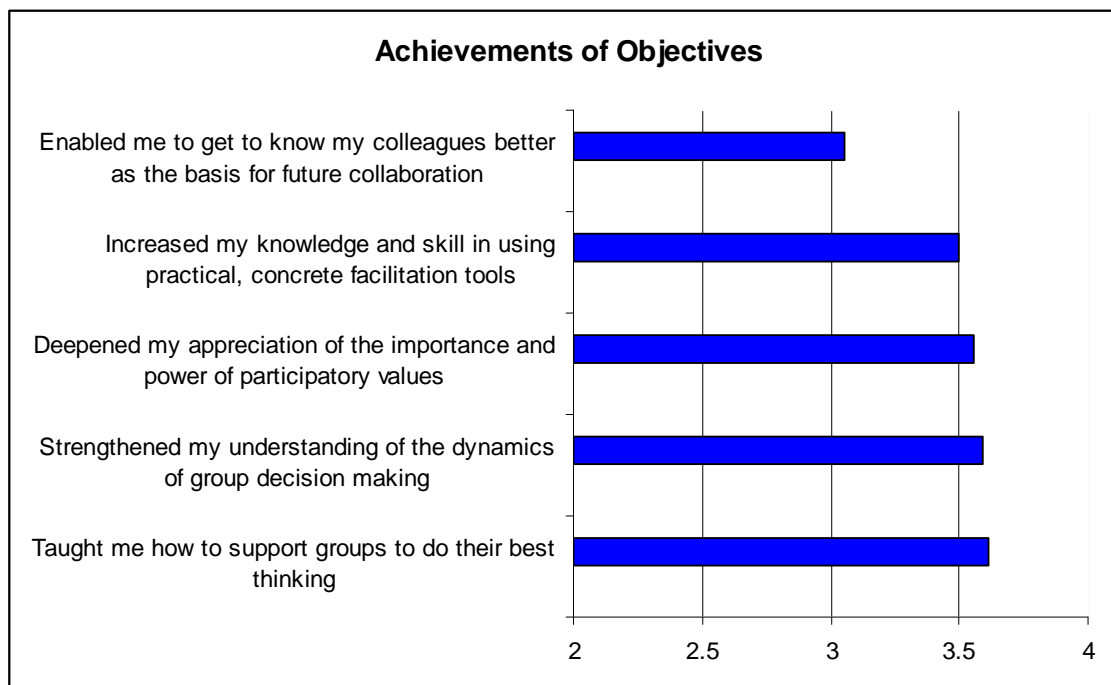
1. Training objectives:

The overall purpose of this workshop had been to build capacity to facilitate meetings, teams, and group decision-making processes among researchers and project managers. Participants indicated that the workshop had achieved the intended objectives (Figure 1).

¹ www.surveymonkey.com

² http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx

Figure 1. Participants' general assessment of the training (average participant scores on a 4-point scale)



2. Comments about how the training addressed participants' personal objectives:

As is normal, participants had come to the workshop with their own expectations and personal objectives. Respondents indicated that the training had increased their confidence in facilitation and awareness of dynamics in group decision making, as well as provided them with a theoretical background from which to better understand and manage facilitation.

Participants' comments included:

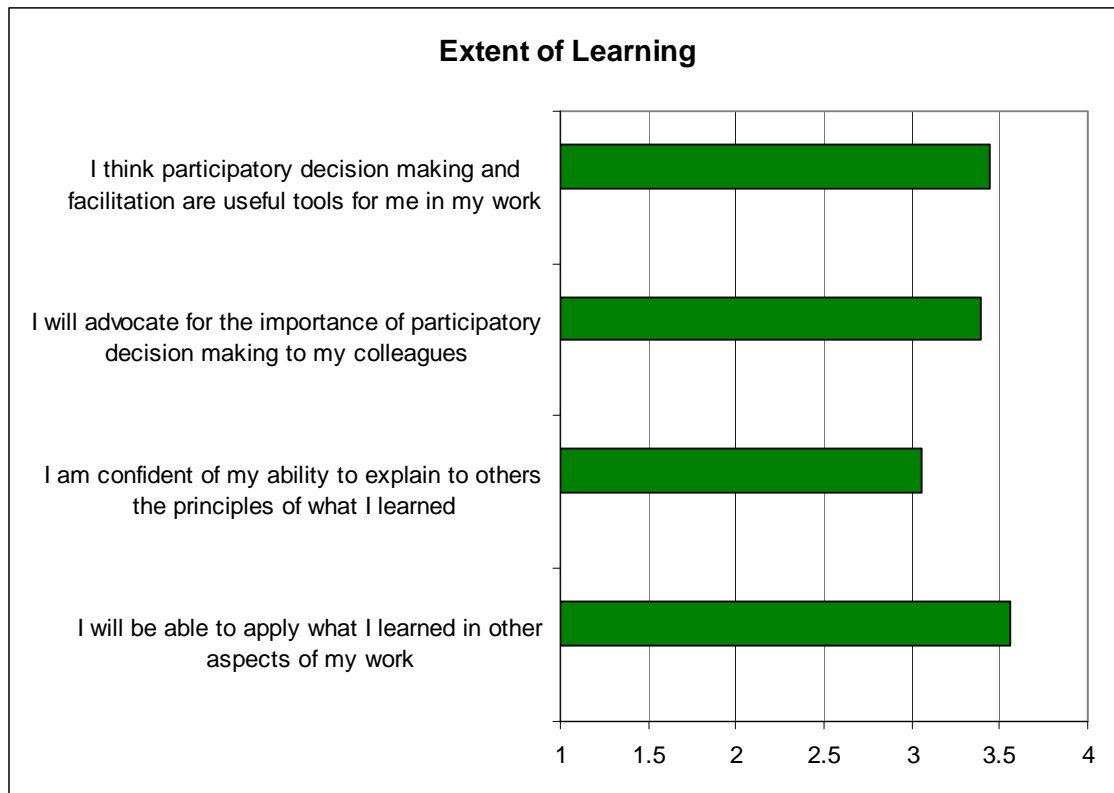
"It strengthens me as a person and as a scientist".

Highly recommended for CGIAR scientist like me, in learning better ways of working with partners".

3. Assessing individual learning.

Respondents reported that they had learned a great deal from the training and had been able to use participatory decision-making and facilitation tools when they returned to work (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Extent of learning (participant scores on a 4-point scale. 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree)



Respondents also reported that the heterogeneity of the group contributed to the learning process. Despite the fact that some had already been exposed to facilitation tasks and concepts, they reported that they still had gained from participating in the workshop.

4. Comments about current attitude to participatory decision making and facilitation:

The findings indicated that, as a result of the workshop, respondents now felt better equipped to facilitate participatory processes with their newly-acquired or improved skills. Some participants report that they now believe participatory values are important to successful collaborative research and so encourage greater participation than they had previously. They point out that such efforts, however, to be optimally effective, may require more resources from within their organizations.

Participants' comments included:

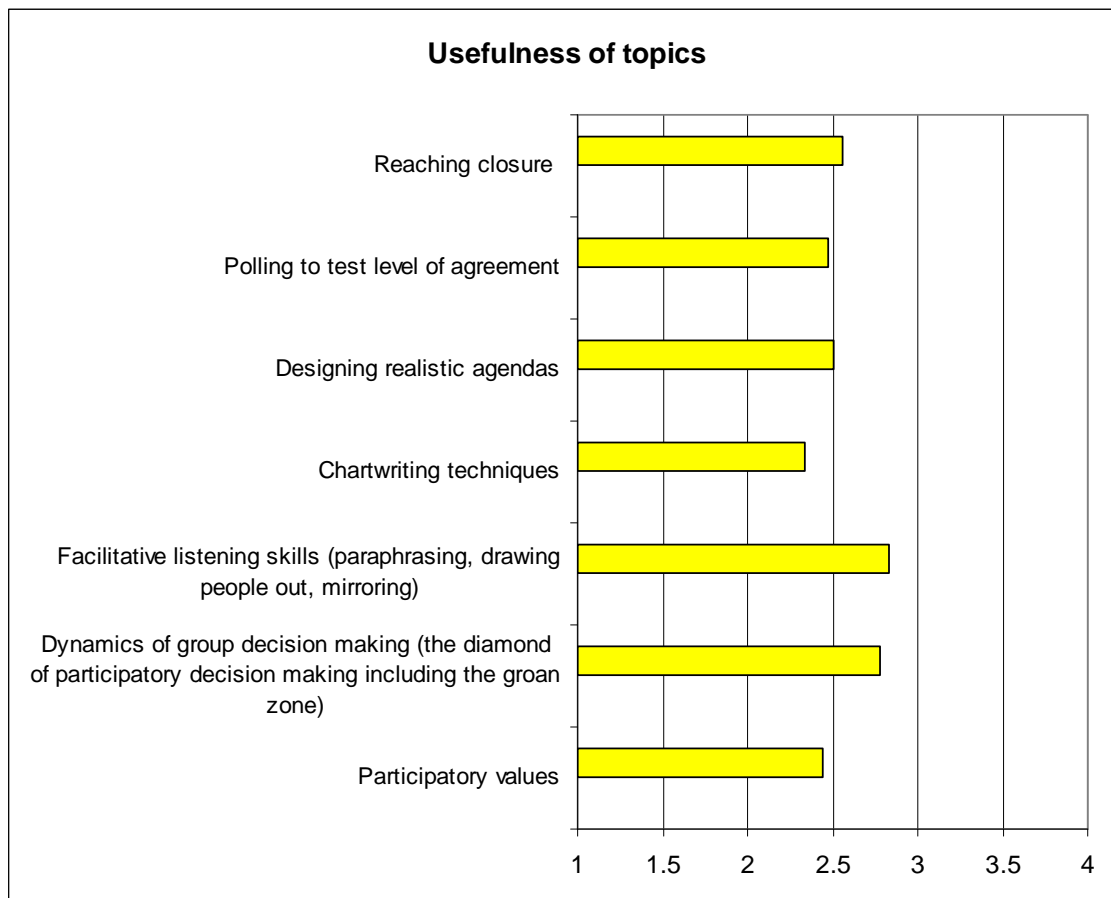
"I am more patient now in terms of handling the groan zone".

"Now I know better how to facilitate exchange of ideas and better prepared to handle the process when emotions start rising".

5. From the inventory of topics presented during the training, participants were asked to indicate how useful each was for their job and professional development.

Participants felt that the topics presented during the workshop were very useful. Of the various topics covered, facilitative listening and group decision making were considered to be the most useful (Figure 3).

Figure3. Usefulness of the topics covered (average score on a 3-point scale with 1 being of limited use and 3 being very useful)



6. Comments on the most useful aspects of the workshop

Frequently mentioned useful aspects of the workshop were related to gaining skills on facilitating groan zones, group dynamics, the framework illustrating the different stages of group decision process, and conflict resolution. Commenting on how the workshop itself had been conducted, participants had found it useful to have a diverse group and an interactive learning environment. They also valued the role-playing exercises.

7. Comments on the least useful aspects of the workshop

A few respondents indicated that some exercises or skills had been less useful than others. The conflict simulation exercise, chart writing, planning future activities, and tools for listening were the activities that had been found least useful. One respondent suggested that more time should be allocated for this training workshop in the future.

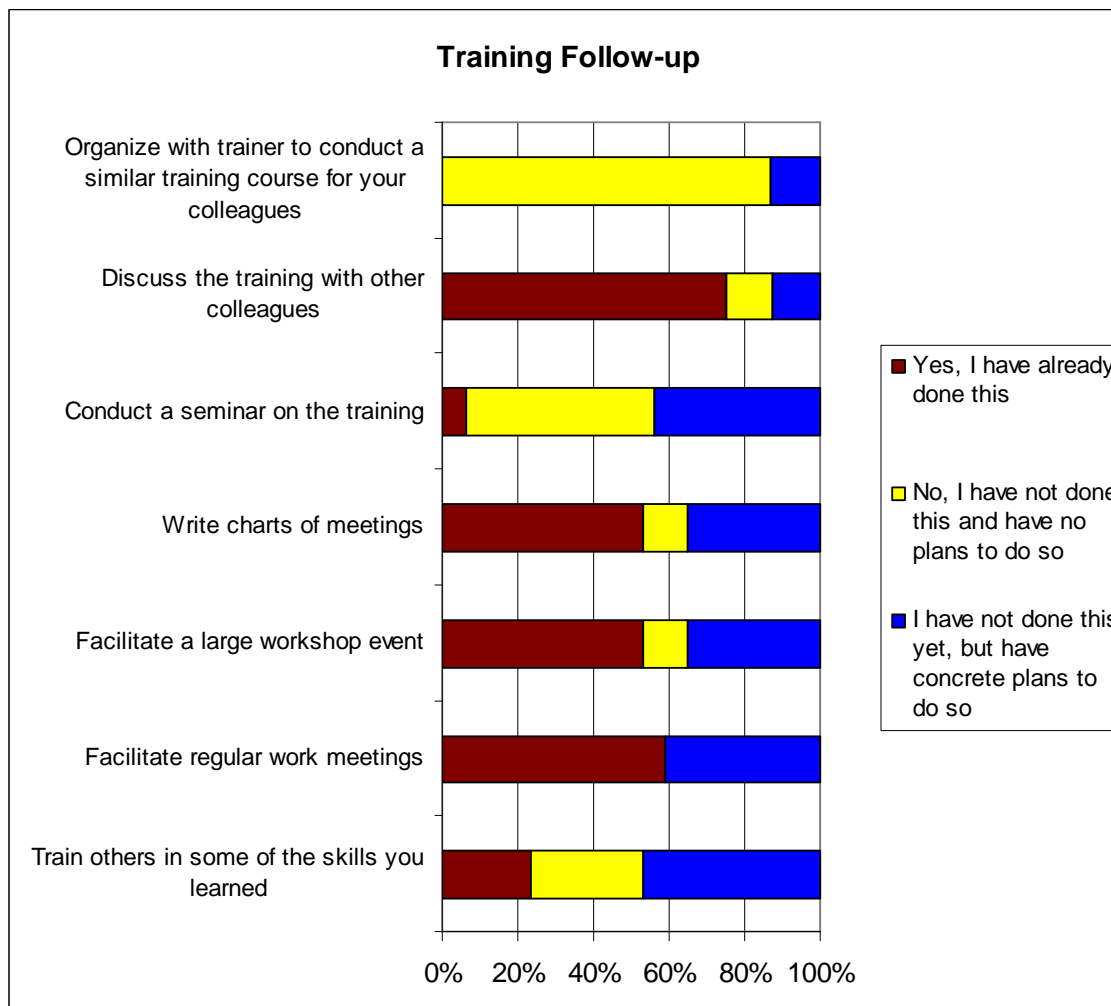
8. Follow-up actions after the workshop

Asked about follow up activities using the skills they had learned, 75% of the respondents had discussed the training with other colleagues and over 58% had facilitated meetings in their place of work (Figure 4). The majority of follow-up activities engaged in by participants were reported to have been in facilitating training workshops, engaging in field work, managing internal and external meetings, and in their day to day responsibilities. One respondent indicated that still more practice is needed to apply the skills gained in optimal ways.

Participants also reported that they have, since the workshop ended, trained others or given seminars on a variety of topics requiring participatory decision making, such as outcome mapping, seed systems, agribusiness, and impact assessment to audiences consisting of CGIAR staff and partners.

Asked if they had difficulty in applying what they had learned in the training, respondents indicated that the major obstacles they had faced were cultural, sufficient time for preparation to include participatory decision making in their work, and the need for constant practice to improve their skills.

Figure 4. Training follow-up by participants.



9. Comments on how well the facilitator delivered the training

Participants were very satisfied with the way the training had been conducted by Dr. Sarah Fisk and her assistant, Buffy Balderston. Participants agreed that the trainer was knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They appreciated the well-organized sessions and the highly participatory nature of the course (Figure 5).

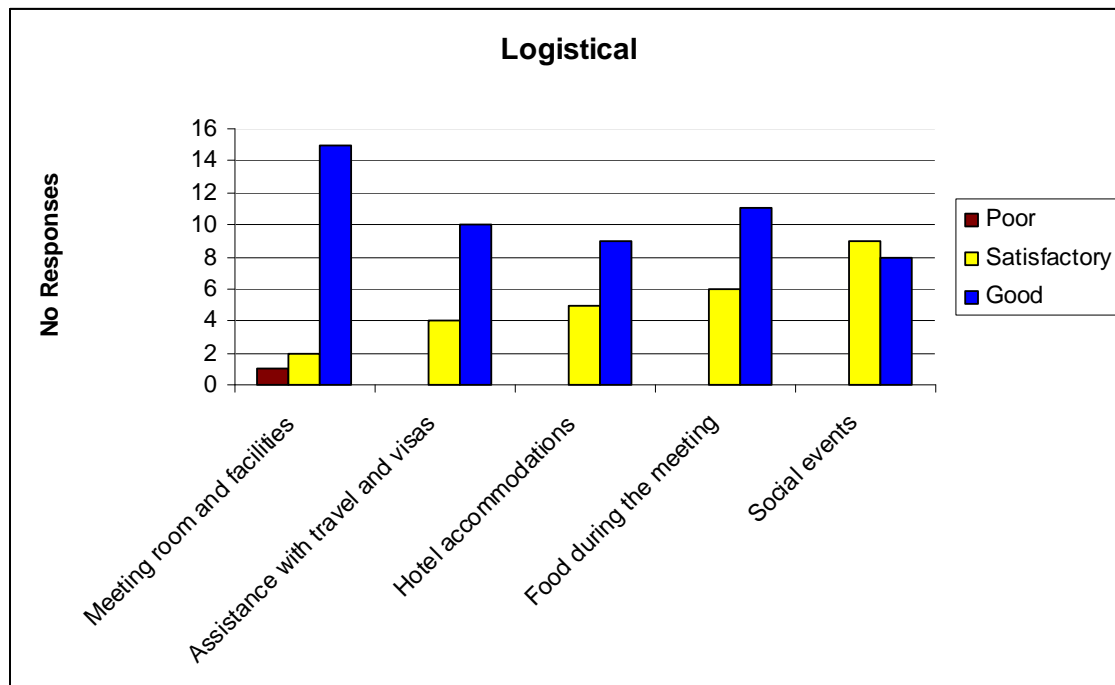
Figure 5. Evaluation of the training delivery by the facilitators (on a 4 point scale with 1 being strongly disagreeable and 4 being strongly agreeable)



10. Comments on logistic support aspects of the training

In general participants found the logistic support aspects of the training good or satisfactory (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Logistic support aspects of the training



Recommendations for Future Facilitation Training

The training delivered during the workshop was highly recommended by those who attended. Asked if they would recommend additional training courses of this kind (facilitating participatory decision making) for CGIAR staff and managers, 100% of the respondents replied in the affirmative.

Participants' comments included:

"I think this training should be a requirement to management level staff. Most of the people in these positions have no idea of the immense potential of a group when members are enabled to contribute."

"This particular training should be more promoted to scientists in the CG centers."

"There is a need for ILAC to make more people aware of training opportunities such as this."

List of Participants

Ahmad Salahuddin

Consultant

IRRI

Bangladesh

salahuddin@irribd.org

Alexey Morgounov

Wheat Breeder/Liaison Officer for Turkey

ICARDA-CIMMYT Wheat Improvement

Program

Turkey

a.morgounov@cgiar.org

David Johnson

Weed Scientist

IRRI

Philippines

d.johnson@cgiar.org

Dindo Campilan

Leader, UPWARD Partnership Program

CIP-Philippines

Philippines

d.campilan@cgiar.org

Elisabetta Gotor

Impact Assessment Specialist

Bioversity

Italy

e.gotor@cgiar.org

Erlene Manohar

COGENT project leader

Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)

Philippines

ecmanohar@yahoo.com

Fangming Xie

Senior Scientist

IRRI

Philippines

f.xie@cgiar.org

Florencia Palis

Post-doctoral Fellow

IRRI

Philippines

f.palis@cgiar.org

Helen Leitch

Director, Business Development and

Communications

WorldFish Center

Malaysia

h.leitch@cgiar.org

Jeffrey Oliver

Bioversity

Philippines

jeffrey.oliver@cgiar.org

Jose Bacusmo

Plant breeder and vice-president (academic affairs)

Visayas State University

Philippines

joebacusmo@yahoo.com

Maria Luz George

Coordinator Cogent

Bioversity

Malaysia

m.george@cgiar.org

Marietta Nadal

Office Manager, UPWARD Partnership

Program

CIP-Philippines

Philippines

cip-manila@cgiar.org

Natasja Sheriff

Regional Coordinator

WorldFish Center

Malaysia

n.sheriff@cgiar.org

Nerlie Manalili
Regional Marketing Advisor
VECO-Asia
Philippines
dmerlie@yahoo.com

Nigel Ruaraidh Sackville Hamilton
Head, T.T. Chang Genetic Resources
Centre
IRRI
Philippines
r.hamilton@cgiar.org

Noel Magor
HR Manager
IRRI
Philippines
N.Magor@cgiar.org

Rachid Serraj
Senior Scientist
IRRI
Philippines
R.Serraj@cgiar.org

Stephan Haefele
Senior Scientist
IRRI
Philippines
s.haefele@cgiar.org

Tonya Schuetz
Program Manager
IWMI
Malaysia
t.schuetz@cgiar.org

Vida Grace Sinohin
Assistant Manager I
Bioversity
Philippines
v.sinohin@cgiar.org