

SRI-Pilipinas Provincial Training Program, draft report

SRI-Pilipinas Terminal Report (Draft)

by Roberto Verzola, Coordinator, SRI-Pilipinas

Introduction

The national SRI training program was initiated by SRI-Pilipinas, an informal consortium of NGOs, academics and government researchers who are promoting the use of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in the Philippines in an organic context. The program was supported by the Department of Agriculture through a grant of P875,000. The grant fund was received for SRI-Pilipinas in trust by the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). The training program was supervised by SRI-Pilipinas coordinator Roberto Verzola, with the help of SRI-Pilipinas researcher Byron Resuello and SRI-Pilipinas national trainer Venancio Garde Jr.

Outputs and outcomes

This report covers the 50 trainings held by SRI-Pilipinas in 49 provinces throughout the Philippines. The trainings benefitted an estimated 1,000 farmers. Not all farmers adopted SRI, but we estimate around 5% (50 people) of the trainees mastered the method and are now in a position to conduct trainings themselves, providing SRI-Pilipinas with a core group of experienced SRI farmers and trainers nationwide who can help implement the next phase of the national SRI training program. SRI-Pilipinas fields trainers only after they have had at least two seasons of experience (one wet, one dry) in applying SRI practices.

Lessons:

- **One- to five-day training periods.** While a one-day training (half-day lecture, half-day hands-on) is sufficient good enough many farmers to pick up all the necessary information to try SRI themselves, some farmers need at least three, perhaps more, meetings for better transfer of knowhow and knowledge. We believe that the one-day training remains the most cost-effective approach in getting farmers to try SRI. Where longer training periods are tried, we propose as a maximum **five one-day sessions**, to cover the following essential topics:
 - **Session 1** – Organic fertilizer production with fermented activators, organic matter, soil life;
 - **Session 2** – Seedbed preparation, seed selection, varietal choices;
 - **Session 3** – Transplanting, water management;
 - **Session 4** – Weeding, pest management; and
 - **Session 5** – harvest, ratooning, diversification, field day.Where local authorities or the local hosts are willing to provide counterpart funds to support training periods longer than one day, SRI-Pilipinas can follow the above schedule. For a three-day training, Sessions 2, 3 and 4 can be collapsed into one. But the one-day training session remains our minimum goal, relying on our primer, training video, and the SRI Help Line (0908-2475-475) to do the rest. After all, SRI-Pilipinas has trained many farmers, who learned very well, with just one session. In fact, many have taught themselves SRI by simply reading our primer.
- **Look for farmer-innovators.** While the training program should serve as many farmers as possible, it should **focus on the innovators: farmers who are eager to immediately try out the method** in their farm, and leave for later those who just curious but non-committal or even highly sceptical and are ready to give up at the slightest problem, or those who mainly expect doleouts. Thus, SRI-Pilipinas will continue its approach of offering its trainings mainly to farmers, farmers' groups and local authorities who show a strong interest in the program, a commitment to allocate their own resources for the training, and who are ready to conduct a field trial at once.
- **SOFT SRI: Success-on-first-try SRI.** While a 100% success rate is not possible, the primer, video, other training materials, and the training program itself should **focus on attaining the highest**

probability of success for the farmer's first trial. *Success-on-first-try* (SOFT) means producing a significant number of high-tillering plants on the farmers' first trial plot. SOFT SRI raises farmers' confidence and morale immensely and is a major factor in securing a foothold in an area. For SOFT SRI, we need to maintain contact with the trainees throughout the planting season, either through regular face-to-face training sessions (FFS), individual farm visits, or SMS, the latter being the least expensive way of doing so.

- **Ideal group size: 25-35.** A smaller training group makes inefficient use of training resources and the trainer's time. A larger group becomes more unwieldy. A training group size of 25-35 farmers is ideal. The greatest advantage of a larger group is the higher possibility of seeing very impressive success-on-first-try SRI results (SOFT SRI) in some farmers, so that farmers who do not succeed on first try will not automatically conclude that the method itself does not work, but will instead try to analyse why they did not succeed while others did. Seeing a profusely-tillering rice plant is the most effective argument that convinces farmers of the viability of the SRI method.
- **Only three monitoring questions for farmers.** Farmers do not want to spend their time collecting data for researchers, and it is not fair to expect them to. The collection of agronomic and economic data for research should be assigned to researchers, if funds are available to hire them. If not, then the only information we need to get from farmers who are currently using SRI are: **i.) how many planting seasons have they been trying SRI, including the current one, ii.) what portion of their current rice production uses SRI, and iii) how does their SRI yield compare to their previous yields?** Confirmed repeat-users who are already using SRI in production are a clear signal that the SRI method is considered an improvement over existing farmers' practice. Valid and important conclusions can be made out of these two pieces of information alone. Production-level repeat users mean that SRI will soon be spreading by itself, diffusing from farmer to farmer, barangay to barangay.
- **Most cost-effective: SMS.** The most cost-effective method of promoting SRI among farmers is to announce that the SRI primer and training video will be sent for free by mail to those who text their mailing address to the SRI-Pilipinas Help Line (0908-2475-475). A determined farmer should be able to try SRI out simply by following the primer instructions carefully, as what several of our SRI trainers simply did. Still, these farmers should be strongly encouraged to convince their neighbors to try the method also. The more of them try, the greater the chances at least one of them will succeed. Farmers who try SRI this way can be encouraged to report their results, if we offer more free videos and/or manuals to those who do so. SRI-Pilipinas should allot sufficient budget for this option in the next phase of its training program.
- **Verifying farmer claims.** Farmers should be trained to expect regular third-party verification of their claims, whether it is a yield claim or a claim that they are using SRI methods or that they are using organic methods. It should be explained to them that independent verification is important for people who may be willing to pay premium prices for the farmers' organic produce. This will **prepare them for third-party certification or their organization's internal quality control system** that is so necessary for an organic production program that is credible to consumers and the market.
- **Nationwide.** Regardless of the level of funding available, **SRI-Pilipinas should continue its strategy of nationwide coverage of its training program.** After conducting trainings in almost every rice-growing province in the Philippines, SRI-Pilipinas can now service requests for training by sending a trainer from the same province or from a nearby province, reducing training costs further. The next phase of its training program is to conduct trainings – and thereby produce more accessible farmer-trainers – in any municipality that requests such training. As long as those who request the training manifest not only curiosity but a real commitment to actually try the method, no request for training to SRI-Pilipinas will be turned away,
- **Prompt fund releases.** Funds for trainings must be released promptly, because farmers follow very strict planting schedules, and delays can result in missing entirely the window of opportunity for implementing the program. For instance, when the first rains of the season start, farmers will proceed with the necessary farm work like plowing the fields, levelling the land, preparing seedbeds, soaking seeds, and so on. The weather waits for no one, least of all fund releases. Fund releases for farmers programs should

not be delayed. The full release of the DA grant was a key to the program's relative success. It would have been extremely paralyzing if the program had to wait for tranches to be released.

Problems:

- **Delays**. The fund was received March 2006, too late for the 2006 dry season. Program implementation began April 2006. Only a few provinces were covered in the second half of 2006 due to problems in implementing SRI during the rainy season. Many groups contacted for the first half of 2007 were too busy in the national elections. We therefore adjusted the program to enable trainings even in during the rainy season. Thus more trainings were conducted in the second half of 2007 and throughout 2008, when the training program was finally concluded.
- **Low budget**. The original budget was meant to spend around P9,500 per one-day training in as many rice-producing provinces as can be covered. Because of the delays in the release of the funds and general inflation, the actual costs have gotten higher when the project began in earnest. A frequent response among some NGOs and farmers' groups was that the fund was too small for a one-day training. There was a positive side to this small budget: it acted as a filter, where those who were mostly interested in the funding stayed away, and the program was left with groups who were truly eager to try out the method and were even willing to allot some of their resources to make the training happen. This problem actually gave the program its most valuable lesson.
- **Lack of provision for full-time implementors**. The original program design, because of the pressure to keep the project proposal at the least possible cost, did not provide for full-time implementors, only for a trainer who will actually conduct the training. This resulted in a slower than usual implementation of the project, which was compounded by complications arising from the election period, changing weather patterns, low budget, etc. While keeping project costs as low as possible remains a valid goal, provisions for full-time implementors must be made in order not to hobble the project itself.
- **Changing weather patterns**. A number of scheduled trainings had to be postponed or cancelled altogether due to unseasonal rains or dry spells, as well as major floods that washed out seedbeds and newly-planted fields. This is probably already the impact of climate change and there is very little that can be done except to learn how to adapt to a more fickle climate.

Next step, next phase

This program has planted the seeds of SRI in most of the major-rice producing provinces in the Philippines, in the form of at least one SRI practitioner-farmer that is potentially a trainer/model-farmer in their province as well as neighboring provinces. The SRI-Pilipinas requirement for a qualified SRI trainer is one who has done SRI for at least two straight seasons (i.e., a wet and a dry season).

The **next step is to gather all SRI trainers and some potential trainers** who have been part of the program, to sum up their SRI implementation as well as training experiences, and to tap their collective wisdom to improve the SRI training module and its various components. The main goal of the module remains the same: the put into the SRI primer, training video, curriculum and other materials everything that is needed to **ensure the highest possibility success-on-first-try** (SOFT).

This national SRI training evaluation meeting should then initiate the **next phase of the SRI training program: to replicate the previous trainings in municipal-level trainings**, incorporating the improvements adopted from the SRI trainers' meeting. We hope to conduct around 1,500 such trainings in the rice-producing municipalities/cities of the Philippines, with the possibility of two or more trainings among the top rice producers. This phase will be conducted in ten identical sub-phases of 150 trainings at a time. Summing up, evaluation and planning will be conducted at the end of every season, to keep collecting lessons and improving the training module. The details and costs of this phase will be worked out at the first national SRI trainers' workshop.

The future

When the municipal-level phase of the program is done, we will be ready to do training in every rice-producing barangay in the country, tapping the trainers we have developed at the municipal level.

Conclusion

SRI-Pilipinas has two “winners” on hand: 1) The SRI set of practices itself is proving to be easily implemented, widely applicable, and farmer-friendly. It has been diffusing gradually among farmers, despite efforts from some sectors of the rice industry to discredit it. 2) The SRI Pilipinas low-cost nationwide approach to training and field trials, which has enabled us to extend our nationwide reach with little funding. The low-cost approach and nationwide coverage of the SRI-Pilipinas training program is a relatively unique experience which offers lessons for other non-government organizations as well as government agencies. It is an important political capital of the consortium, that enhances its credibility in fund-raising as well as training. It is also consistent with the SRI principle of “more with less”, of getting more benefits with lower costs, more outputs with less inputs.

SRI-Pilipinas is hopeful that the Department of Agriculture, given its public commitment to convert at least 10% of all ricelands in the country to organic production, will continue supporting the SRI-Pilipinas training program, as it enters its next phase.

Drafted by:

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Appendix K: Financial Report

SRI National Trainers' Conference-Workshop Sep. 28-30, 2009 / Nov. 20-22, 2009

	Breakdown of Actual Expenses					
	Total	Lodging	Travel/ food	Training materials	Honoraria	Others
Budget (= BPI Deposit)	250,000.00	98,000	107,500	17,500	9,000	18,000
Actual Expenses (Row total)	250,128.75	1,500	167,779	18,980	15,200	46,669.75

Date	Chk No.	Withdrawals (see bank statements)	Withdrawals				
09/22/09		Bank charges	175.00				175
09/23/09	0420701	Airfares, ACT Travel OR#0256	45,565.00	45,565			
09/25/09	0420702	SRI Book, DGR Bookbinding, OR#17876	6,000.00		6,000		
09/29/09	OTCounter	Reimbursements for travel, food (see A.)	34,922.00	34,922			
09/29/09	0420703	SRI Book, DGR Bkbinding, missing OR	8,280.00		8,280		
09/30/09	ATM	Advance to VGJ for misc expenses (see A.)	1,900.00	1,900			
10/01/09	0420706	Honorarium for secretariat (RSVerzola)	5,000.00			5,000	
10/01/09	0420704	Food catering, GNP Foods OR#3381	32,500.00	32,500			
10/02/09	0420705	Airfares, ACT Travel OR#0320	7,100.00	7,100			
10/07/09	0420708	Reimb. to VGJ for expenses (see A.)	1,408.00	1,408			
10/23/09	0420709	Honorarium for secretariat (VGardeJr)	4,000.00			4,000	
10/30/09	0420710	Airfares, ACT Travel OR#0407	11,654.00	11,654			
11/16/09	0420711	Reimb/Advance to RSV (see B.)	45,000.00	1,500	31,930	0	3,000
11/17/09	0420712	SRI Book, DGR Bookbinding, OR#17876	4,700.00			4,700	
12/27/09	ATM	Reimb/Honorarium for VGardeJr (see A.)	4,000.00		800		3,200.00
12/27/09	0420714	SRI Report/B00k DGR Bkbinding, OR#18375	37,796.00				37,796
		Total Withdrawals (Column total)	250,000.00				

Detailed explanation of A (34,922 + 1,900 + 1,408 + 800 = 39,030) above

A.		Lodging	Travel/ food	Training materials	Honoraria	Others
A.	Manila pax reimbursements (c/o VGJ)	39,030.00	39,030.00			
	Venancio Garde	870.00	870.00			
	Jaime Tadeo	144.00	144.00			
	Demetria Mauro	1,414.00	1,414.00			
	Agaton Milagroso	360.00	360.00			
	Ernesto de la Pena	645.00	645.00			
	Cesar Bartolome	28.00	28.00			
	Rene Jaranilla	546.00	546.00			
	Felipe Gabriel	490.00	490.00			
	Emerson Tupaz	1,370.00	1,370.00			
	Rene Enriquez	1,200.00	1,200.00			
	Salvio Makinano	5,055.00	5,055.00			
	Domingo Porte	1,014.00	1,014.00			
	Gerry Garingalao	1,706.00	1,706.00			
	Nilo Uclaray	1,620.00	1,620.00			
	Pio Escarcha	2,514.00	2,514.00			
	Juanito Poliquit	1,945.00	1,945.00			
	Virgilia Ilao	1,010.00	1,010.00			
	Manuel Jayectin	1,410.00	1,410.00			
	Crispin Aguelo	760.00	760.00			
	Noe Ysulat	2,200.00	2,200.00			
	Ronello Barsatan	1,346.00	1,346.00			
	Carmelita Cervantes	2,380.00	2,380.00			
	Zosimo dela Rosa	2,052.00	2,052.00			
	Wilson Orino	2,450.00	2,450.00			
	Joselito Tambalo	1,836.00	1,836.00			
	Willy Benosa	2,665.00	2,665.00			

Detailed explanation of B (= 45,000) above

	Total	Lodging	Travel/ food	Training materials	Honoraria	Others
B. Manila + Mindanao expenses (c/o RSV)	45,128.75	1,500.00	31,930.00	0.00	3,000.00	8,698.75
Manila expenses (RSV advance)	12,378.75	0.00	680.00	0.00	3,000.00	8,698.75
09/01/09 Transport expenses	340.00		340.00			
09/10/09 Fax to VSU, CSSAC	100					100
09/14/09 Tricycle to AER and back	60.00		60.00			
09/15/09 Fax to BSWM	20					20
09/15/09 Load for phone calls/text	300.00					300.00
09/18/09 Tricycle to AER and back	60.00		60.00			
09/21/09 Tricycle to AER	60.00		60.00			
09/24/09 Laser cartridge/toner	2940					2940
09/25/09 PLDT long-distance calls	502.50					502.50
09/26/09 Smart load	100.00					100.00
09/27/09 Smart load	300.00					300.00
09/27/09 Office supplies	3,510.25					3,510.25
09/28/09 Taxi to UP Shopping Ctr	160.00		160.00			
09/29/09 Taxi (60+200+160+60)	480					480
09/29/09 Photocopying	96					96
09/29/09 Photocopying	106					106
09/30/09 Smart load	100.00					100.00
12/15/09 Additional honorarium for RSV	3,000.00				3,000.00	
12/20/09 Photocopying	144.00					144.00
	Total	Lodging	Travel/ food	Training materials	Honoraria	Others
Mindanao expenses (c/o RSV)	32,750.00	1,500.00	31,250.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
11/17/09 Taxi, residence to domestic airport	250.00		250.00			
11/17/09 Terminal fees	400.00		400.00			
11/17/09 Taxi, airport to hotel	150.00		150.00			
11/17/09 Meals	150.00		150.00			
11/17/09 Lodging, Davao, OR#22109	900.00	900.00				
11/18/09 Meals	171.00		171.00			
11/18/09 Taxi, hotel to bus terminal	80.00		80.00			
11/18/09 Bus fare	432.00		432.00			
11/20/09 Reimbursement of pax expenses	10,450.00		10,450.00			
11/20/09 Food catering, OR#1650	18,040.00		18,040.00			
11/20/09 Bus fare	432.00		432.00			
11/20/09 Taxi, bus terminal to hotel	80.00		80.00			
11/20/09 Meals	87.00		87.00			
11/20/09 Lodging, Davao, OR#260184	600.00	600.00				
11/20/09 Meals	65.00		65.00			
11/21/09 Meals	113.00		113.00			
11/21/09 Taxi, hotel to airport	150.00		150.00			
11/21/09 Terminal fee	200.00		200.00			

Explanation:

1. The total fund of P250,000 from Oxfam-GB was deposited in a BPI checking account on Sep. 22, 2009.
2. Most withdrawals were made by issuing checks (as reflected in the attached bank statements, except two which were made by ATM because the amounts were needed right away.
3. Withdrawals are supported by official receipts or (in the case of one missing OR) a photocopy of the encashed check.
4. P39,030 was disbursed through SRI-Pilipinas Training Coordinator Jun Garde. The supporting papers detailing how this amount was spent are included in this report.
5. P45,000 was disbursed through SRI-Pilipinas Coordinator Roberto Verzola. The supporting papers detailing how this amount was spent are also included in this report. The total expenses exceeded the

P45,000 by P128.75.

6. SRI-Pilipinas is expecting a refund from the ACE Travel Agency for two unused tickets (by Edward Judilla of Bacolod City and Victoriano Tagupa of Cagayan de Oro City, both of whom cancelled their trips at the last moment). As of Jan. 29, however, the agency was still unwilling to specify how much the refunded amount will be after various penalties are deducted by Cebu Pacific, and when the refund will be released. We propose to use any refunded amount for photocopying additional copies of the SRI Book and of this report.