

December 7, 2015

Opening address for Lao People's Democratic Republic

Address:

- H. E. Mr. Bounkhouang Khambounheuang, Vice Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)
- Mr. Chantha Thiphavongphan, Deputy Director-General, Department of Agriculture, MAF, Lao PDR
- Mr. Katsumi Yamaguchi, Director, Plant Variety Protection Office, Intellectual Property Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan

I would like to express my thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for inviting UPOV to contribute to this Plant Variety Protection Awareness Seminar. I would also like to express my thanks to the government of Japan for the assistance that it has provided in bringing distinguished international experts to this important event.

We are participating in this seminar at a time when World leaders have gathered in France for the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. It is therefore timely to recall that, throughout the World, agriculture is faced with an unprecedented challenge of providing food security and economic development in the rural sector at a time of climate change and the evolving needs of a growing human population. At this seminar I believe that we will see how new varieties of plants are one of the most valuable tools to meet those challenges.

Plant breeding has a proven track record in meeting the needs of farmers and society as a whole. For example, in France in the century from 1850 to 1950, before the advent of scientific plant breeding, the yield of wheat only increased from 1.0 to 1.6 Tonnes/ha, despite the agricultural revolution. Between 1950 and 2000, the yield per hectare increased almost 5 fold - from 1.6 to 7.4

Tonnes/ha¹. Plant breeding, in the form of new high-yielding varieties, accounted for half of that increase.

However, it is important to understand that the benefits brought by plant breeding extend much wider than just yield increases. Plants, such as canola, have been bred to become sources of animal feed and human food and have been further improved to improve their nutritional value. Plant breeders have produced varieties of agricultural crops, vegetables, fruit and ornamentals that have enabled farmers to improve their incomes from the supply of local and global markets. Furthermore, for decades breeders have been successfully adapting crops to grow in new climates, e.g. maize in northern Europe, canola in Australia, soybean in equatorial Brazil.

The evidence of the past is clear, plant breeding is a corner-stone of food security, improving the livelihoods of farmers, meeting the needs of consumers and responding to climate change. It is equally clear that all of these challenges are increasing and, therefore, there is a greater need than ever to support plant breeding.

The UPOV Convention provides the basis for its members to encourage plant breeding by granting breeders of new plant varieties an intellectual property right: the breeder's right.

There are many examples of how the UPOV system encourages plant breeding in a way that delivers great benefits to UPOV members. These benefits are not just seen in developed countries. In some developing countries in Africa and Latin America the value of production arising from new plant varieties amount to billions of dollars in certain key crops alone. In the course of this seminar we shall also hear about the benefits that have been experienced in Japan, Viet Nam, the European Union, the United States of America and France.

The UPOV system provides incentives for all types of breeders. This includes incentives for local breeding, whether by individuals, farmer-breeders, research institutes or seed companies. The UPOV system also provides substantial advantages for national,

¹ "The Development of Plant Breeding and Plant Variety Protection", Mr. Bernard Le Buanec; Symposium on Plant Breeding for the Future, Geneva, October 21, 2011

public breeding institutes in achieving maximum public good, not least through partnership with the private sector. A dynamic, diverse and thriving community of breeders will provide farmers with varieties to improve agricultural productivity and provide access to valuable markets, domestically and internationally.

However, I should also like to explain that there is an international dimension to developing a successful system of plant variety protection. The UPOV Report on the Impact of Plant Variety Protection (see http://www.upov.int/export/sites/upov/about/en/pdf/353_upov_report.pdf) demonstrated that in order to enjoy the full benefits which plant variety protection is able to generate, both implementation of the UPOV Convention and membership of UPOV are important. Amongst the benefits, it was seen that a country's membership of UPOV is an important global signal for breeders to have the confidence to introduce their new varieties in that country. Put simply, UPOV membership means that farmers, growers and breeders can have access to the best varieties produced by breeders throughout UPOV member territories. Membership of UPOV also provides important technical assistance and maximizes opportunities for cooperation, which enables PVP to be extended to the widest range of plant genera and species in an efficient way.

I am looking forward to participating in this seminar to learn about the plant variety protection system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and to discuss, if requested, how UPOV can play a role in supporting the process for UPOV membership, in order that Lao People's Democratic Republic can maximize the benefits from this important system.

Thank you.