

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT PROJECTS WIN ASIAN PRIZES

A scheme that has allowed farmers in the Philippines to double their income by applying science-based agricultural techniques is one of this year's six recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay Awards, Asia's highest honour for humanitarian achievements.

Romulo Davide, a retired professor from the College of Agriculture, at the University of the Philippines Los Baos (UPLB), will receive the \$50,000 award for starting the Farmer-Scientists Training Program (FSTP) in the Philippines.

The programme, which began in 1994, aims to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of farmers by adopting scientific methods. Farmers participating in the programme have doubled their annual incomes, enabling them to build new houses and buy new appliances, Davide told *SciDev.Net* in an email interview.

Davide said he still teaches farmers how to become scientists, observing that many of them are underproductive, poor and hungry. Very little science-based information reaches them, he explained, adding that we need more scientists to participate in the transfer of developed technologies to farmers.

Another prize winner is agronomist Yang Saing Koma, who is recognised for founding the Cambodian Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture, now the largest agricultural nongovernmental organisation in Cambodia. The centre helped thousands of Cambodian farmers improve their rice yields by shifting to organic fertiliser.

Other winners include India's Kulandei Francis, recognised for both his Integrated Village Development Project in Krishnagiri that built 331 small dams in 60 villages, and for launching an all-women movement that has a loan portfolio of US\$435 million and a reserve fund of US\$8.9 million.

Bangladeshi lawyer Syeda Rizwana Hasan is recognised for pollution-related litigation pursued by the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, and Ambrosius Ruwindrijarto of Indonesia is honoured for campaigning against illegal logging.

Chen Shu-Jiu, a vegetable vendor in Taitung City, Taiwan, is another recipient, praised for her frugal lifestyle and selflessness, which led her to make a US\$320,000 donation to charities working in the care and education of impoverished children.

The Ramon Magsaysay award is named after the popular former president of the Philippines, who died in a plane crash in 1957. It was created to honour people in Asia who have helped change their societies for the better. After five decades of the annual awards, India tops the list of the number of awards won, with a tally of 51.

The award is also given to non-Asians who have made significant contributions in Asia. For example, the American Harold Watson, who came to the Philippines as a Baptist missionary and established the Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Center in central Mindanao, received the 1985 award for developing Sloping Agricultural Land Technology that restores productivity to wasteland.

Source: <http://www.scidev.net/global/farming/news/agriculture-and-environment-projects-win-asian-prizes.html>