

Sugar experts help identify areas for future CFC funding

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Establishing groundwork for a strategic work plan to address sugar's development, the Common Fund for Commodities invited key industry stakeholders from 16 Asian, African and Latin American countries to participate in the International Sugar Development Forum hosted by PHILSURIN on April 24.

"The forum demonstrates the need to obtain first-hand input from the key players in the design of our operational program for the commodity," CFC Managing Director Ambassador Ali Mchumo said. He added that stakeholder participation "will reduce the period between project identification and approval as there would be a clearer definition of the priority areas for CFC assistance during a given period."

The gathering was convened against the backdrop of the Netherlands-based institution's Five-Year Action Plan which focuses on reducing the economic imbalance between developed and developing countries; diversifying commodity production and trade; and improving productivity in a sustainable manner.

CFC is a financial institution created to improve structural conditions in commodity markets, enhance productivity through research and development, and heighten international competitiveness. In tandem with the International Sugar Organization, it funded the recently concluded CFC/ISO/20: Sugar Variety Improvement in Southeast Asia and the Pacific project. The 2 organizations also work together on 4 other regular sugarcane projects, as well as 4 fast track programs.

In a whole day program held at the New World Renaissance Hotel in Makati City, Ambassador Mchumo, ISO Executive Director Dr. Peter Baron, Department of Agriculture Secretary Domingo Panganiban, and PHILSURIN Chairman Bernardo Trebol each gave their welcome remarks. CFC Chief for Policy Programme Management and Evaluation Getachew Gebre Medhin presented the roles and functions of the CFC, while ISO Senior Economist Lindsay Jolly discussed new strategic initiatives in the world sugar market.

After the presentations, CFC Project Manager Eltha Brown led group discussions on recommended areas for CFC project assistance. The participants were divided into 2 working groups, the first group tasked to tackle general commodity development issues and challenges for sugar, with the second group focusing on issues and challenges faced by small-scale sugar producers.

Jamaica-based Sugar Industry Research Institute Agricultural Services Manager Trevor Falloon reported that Group One identified low productivity, managing the supply chain, and diversification due to policy change, globalization, renewable fuels, the Kyoto Protocol and oil prices, as the development issues confronting the industry. Among the interventions they recommended to address the issues raised are variety improvement, the development of projects which will promote efficiency during the harvesting process, as well as increasing the flow of technology transfer.

Companhia DeSena SARL Agronomist Charles Patrick Sweet reported Group Two's proposed projects which include increasing sugarcane productivity by propagating and distributing healthy improved varieties for specific regions, and diversification. The group also recommended that a pilot study be made on the problem of transportation in the supply chain. Also proposed were block farming and coordination with farmers' organizations to address the issues such as land area management.

The CFC will review the recommendations gathered, and use them as basis for building a funding program. "From all indications, sugar will continue to be a commodity that occupies a key slot in the Common Fund's development agenda. We stand ready to play our part in supporting sugar to enable it to realize its full potential in the economic development of our member countries," Ambassador Mchumo said.

For his part, Dr. Baron encouraged the participants to come up with more creative sugarcane projects for future funding.