

**OPENING ADDRESS*****Dr. Suthep Limthongkul******Deputy Director General******Dept. of Agriculture of Thailand***

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture in Thailand we welcome you as participants of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regional Cassava Workshop. I hope that you will have a pleasant stay and will enjoy our Thai hospitality.

I understand that the objective of this Workshop is to increase the efficiency of cassava production, to improve processing of cassava-based products and to identify new markets for these products. This is a very laudable objective as millions of farmers in Asia depend on this crop as their main source of income, while in some countries cassava continues to be a very important food, especially for the poor.

During the past 15 years the Asian Cassava Research Network has already held six Workshops similar to the present one, each one in a different country, so that every three years one country can highlight their particular problems and present their strategies to overcoming the existing constraints. By sharing our knowledge and experience in all the different aspects of cassava, from land preparation to marketing and consumption, we can all contribute to overcoming those constraints.

In the past, one of the major constraints in the cassava sector of Thailand was the reliance on a single variety, Rayong 1, which was planted in over one million hectares. Now, through our collaboration with CIAT, we have introduced thousands of seeds from Latin America to substantially broaden the genetic base of cassava, which allowed us to breed, select, and release eight new high-yielding varieties over the past 20 years. At least 3-4 of these are now widely planted in over 90% of the cassava area in Thailand. I understand that some of these have also been released in other countries and have become quite popular. We are happy that our work has contributed to the well-being of farmers in other countries as well, and maybe some day, Thai farmers can benefit from varieties developed by some of your breeding programs. However, we have to remain very vigilant that no disease or insect problems are introduced through the careless movement of cassava vegetative planting material from one country to another.

Another constraint in Thailand, as well as in many other countries, is that continuous cassava production on the same land, may lead to soil degradation through nutrient depletion and erosion. Convincing farmers to use soil conservation practices is not an easy task. However, the farmer participatory approach used by the Nippon Foundation project has shown that it can be done, that farmers are more than willing to invest their time

and money in improved soil management practices once they have seen on their own fields that soil erosion is indeed a serious problem and that various simple practices are highly effective in reducing erosion while also increasing yields and income. This project has achieved remarkable levels of adoption of improved practices in various countries in the region. The success in Thailand was at least in part the result of a highly effective collaboration between the Departments of Agriculture and Agricultural Extension, the Department of Land Development, Kasetsart University and the Thai Tapioca Development Institute, which all joined hands with CIAT, to not only develop but also disseminate those practices.

We are convinced that this kind of Workshops, with participation of people from so many different countries and from different organizations within each country, has contributed in the past to overcoming serious problems and constraints in the cassava sector. We hope that this will continue also in the future.

With this I declare this Workshop as opened.

I wish you all a successful meeting. Thank you.