

GlobalSeaweedSTAR Capacity Building Fund Completion Report

Awardee Details

Grant reference ID	GSS/CBF/025
Full name/title	Rajeena Sugumaran
Position held	Research Assistant
Organisation	Biotechnology Research Institute, Universiti Malaysia Sabah



Details of Capacity-Building Activity

Name of activity	12th International Phycological Congress (IPC 2021)
Date held	22 nd -26 th March 2021
Organiser/provider	International Phycological Congress

Biography

I'm a Research Assistant at the Biotechnology Research Institute (BRI), Universiti Malaysia Sabah working on a project funded by GlobalSeaweedSTAR. The research group is led by a team at our Research Institute and joined by our industrial seaweed collaborator, Seadling Sdn. Bhd.

Together, we are using bacteria residing in seaweed to improve red seaweed cultivation in Sabah, Malaysia. Coming from an academic background in Marine Science and Molecular Biology, I am glad I got a chance to learn about the social and economic impacts of seaweed towards coastal communities. For as long as I can remember, my interest has always been towards conserving our wildlife and the environment. Although I like spending my time in the lab, I do enjoy the outdoors. I have a curiosity bug that I can't shake off, and a thirst for learning and experiencing new things. I know there is so much more out there to learn and you bet, I'm excited for it!

On a special note, I am happy to inform that this seaweed project recently won a Gold Medal at the National Level Innovation Competition.

Report on Capacity-Building Activity

I was an online attendee in the 12th International Phycological Congress (IPC2021). The overall experience was very informative and it was a pleasure to meet all the big names in the seaweed research field. I found a couple of presentations that were similar to the scope of my project and I reached out to them to exchange contact information. Hopefully, this could lead to some sort of collaboration or information sharing between the different countries involved in Kappaphycus research. I was very impressed to learn about projects that have been ongoing for decades, joined by various partnership groups, industries and seaweed-producing countries. Talks from the plenary and keynote lectures were a real eye-opener. One that stood out was about how climate change drastically affected the algae population in New Zealand's coastal regions. It was interesting to hear about the occurrence of invasive species affecting seaweed population and the impact of ocean acidification. I had some initial goals and expectations for this congress. I wanted to know more about the ongoing research, new obstacles faced in seaweed farming and the current techniques used to improve cultivation. I am happy to say that the event exceeded all my expectations. I was delighted to see presentations from other Malaysian research groups and I'm looking forward to seeing more participation from groups like them in the future. I realised that what that we do, no matter how big or small, can make a significant impact when we work hand-in-hand with stakeholders and seaweed communities. Overall, the virtual concept was a huge success. It gave students and young researchers, like myself, the chance to reach out personally to the presenters to pose questions regarding their work, thoughts and ideas. This would have been a daunting task if it were a face-to-face conference. There were over 360 presentations to view and thankfully, we all had access to them for up to a month. Last and most importantly, everything I have mentioned above would not have been possible without the gracious funding from GlobalSeaweedSTAR and I am very grateful for the opportunity.