

Consolidated account of the 4 national multi stakeholder workshops on agroecological transition in the Mekong Region



Supported by:



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1. Introduction

As part of the inception phase of ACTAE project, CIRAD and GRET have jointly organized national multi-stakeholder workshops addressing Agroecological Transition in the Mekong Region in each of the 4 countries aiming at sharing knowledge, information and actions between agricultural development stakeholders.

- Yangon, Myanmar, on the 7th and 8th of March 2016
- Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on the 30th and 31st of March 2016
- Hanoi, Vietnam, on the 5th and 6th of May 2016 (organized together with PHANO)
- Vientiane, Lao PDR, on the 2nd and 3rd of June 2016

2. Workshops' objectives

The workshops' objectives were:

- To officially launch the ACTAE program and present the 2 complementary networks that it supports: Conservation Agriculture Network in South East Asia (CANSEA) & Agroecology Learning alliance in South East Asia (ALiSEA)
- To build and envision a broad coalition of stakeholders involved in the promotion of agroecology
- To share information, knowledge and experience:
 - o Initial studies carried out in the framework of ALiSEA (agroecology stakeholder mapping and policy framework review)
 - o Knowledge management and experience sharing web platforms (ALiSEA)
 - o Case studies from various stakeholders
- To identify national critical issues to be addressed for supporting agroecology
- To draft a collective action plan for 2016 supporting agroecological transition in each country

3. A broad diversity of stakeholders and a rather good attendance

Invited participants were key stakeholders that are involved in the field of agroecology. They comprised farmer associations, Non Profit Associations (NPAs) / Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), private sector representatives, government officials, research center, scholars and development partners that have been working on sustainable agriculture sector in each country.

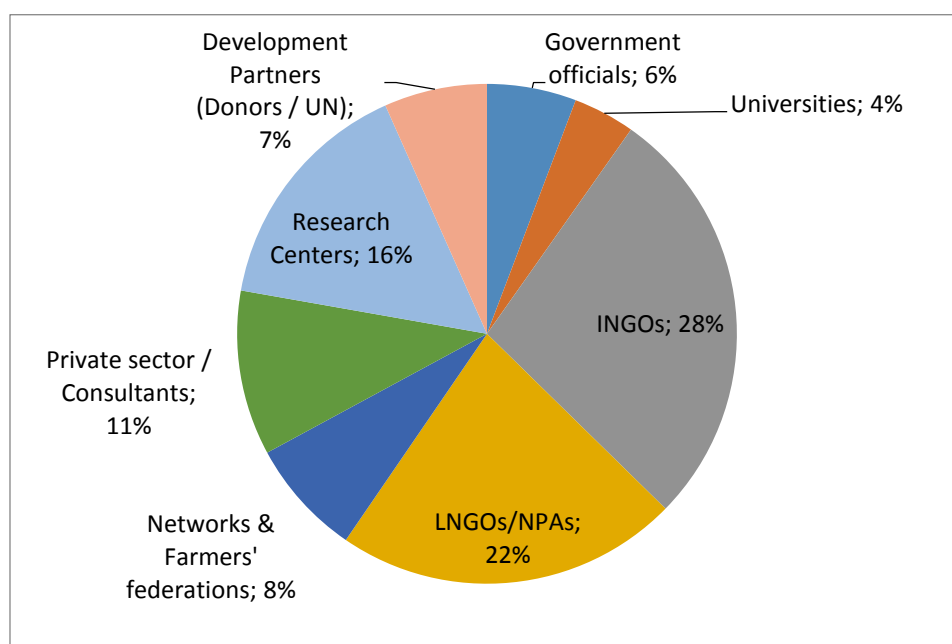
A total of **225 cumulative participants** attended the workshops as below

Country	# Participants
Cambodia	66
Laos	62
Myanmar	48
Vietnam	49

Stakeholder repartition across the 4 national workshops:

	Cambodia		Laos		Myanmar		Vietnam		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Government officials	2	3%	5	8%	6	13%	0	0%	13	6%
Universities	0	0%	2	3%	3	6%	4	8%	9	4%
INGOs	20	30%	15	24%	14	29%	13	27%	62	28%
LNGOs/NPAs	20	30%	11	18%	10	21%	9	18%	50	22%
Networks & Farmers' federations	5	8%	5	8%	4	8%	3	6%	17	8%
Private sector / Consultants	8	12%	7	11%	5	10%	4	8%	24	11%
Research Centers	8	12%	11	18%	2	4%	14	29%	35	16%
Development Partners	3	5%	6	10%	4	8%	2	4%	15	7%
Total	66	100%	62	100%	48	100%	49	100%	225	100%

Stakeholders' repartition for the 4 workshops combined:



Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) including LNGOs/NPAs, INGOs & Farmer federations, accounted globally for nearly **60 % of the participants** (ranging from 50% in Laos to nearly 70% in Cambodia). This is somehow not surprising since agroecology has long been supported and promoted by CSOs.

At the contrary, it can be noticed that representatives from the **academia and from policy makers** (government officials) were rather **well under-represented** with respectively **4% and 6% of the participants in average**. Such participation level ranged from 0% in Cambodia to 8% in Vietnam for representatives from the academia and from 0% in Vietnam to 13% in Myanmar for representatives from the policy makers.

All stakeholders were equally invited to the workshop and such difference in attendance can highlight **a lack of interest, a lack of understanding for the agroecology concept or a lack of human resource in capabilities to participate** from policy makers and representatives of academia.

4. An Agroecology concept not yet very clearly defined

As far as the **concept of agroecology (AE)** is concerned, several definitions were provided during each workshop highlighting a need for further collective work on elaborating a shared and inclusive definition.

It was mentioned for instance that in Vietnam, there is often confusion between Agroecology and Ecological Agriculture.

In addition, many words exist (safe or clean agriculture, organic agriculture, agroecology, climate smart agriculture...) so it is needed to clarify and identify a way to define AE that would be understood by everyone. In this regard, it was mentioned that it is needed to **translate the concept of AE into words that would be understood by everyone, from farmers to consumers including policy makers**. It is necessary to develop locally appropriate terms, taking into consideration each country's agriculture culture and history. In Cambodia, it was mentioned for instance that the current term for Agroecology is relying on Pali-Sanskrit origin, not connecting easily with farmers.

However, all participants seem to have gained a fair overall understanding of the underlying principle of such concept. Thus, most participants agreed that key AE principles were in line with the following concepts:

- Sustainable resource management
- Environment protection
- Ensured food security and food safety
- Social equity

In addition, participants agreed that definition of agroecology should also encompass 2 extra dimensions:

- The 'Respect for the mother of earth'
- The fact that AE is not 'new' concepts; that it is relying on empirical learning processes and knowledge transfer from generation to generation (and combined with scientific research for a better understanding and use of ecological processes operating in the farming systems)

Hereafter are few examples of definitions that were provided by participants

Country	Definitions
Cambodia	➤ AE is an agriculture which is technically, ecologically and economically sustainable ➤ AE is a natural agriculture allowing farmers to be self-reliant on inputs access and sustainable use, ensuring economic growth and environmentally friendly
Laos	➤ AE is an agricultural development suitable for present and future with guaranty over sustainability, safety, and justice ➤ AE is a system / approach that provides small scale farmers with sustainability, good health and environmental conservation ➤ AE is an agricultural production that helps having sustainable land management ➤ AE is a friendly agricultural production system in regards to environment, social and economics dimensions
Myanmar	➤ AE is a climate friendly agriculture ➤ AE is the adoption of agriculture practices in line with agroecological principles ➤ AE is a sustainable agriculture production and consumption ➤ AE consists in managing optimum inputs and outputs, and fostering interaction

	and recycling of by products for sustainable natural resource management ➤ AE is a way of farming combining natural system such as climate, natural resources, environment, plants and animals, ensuring sustainable agriculture and production for growers and consumers ➤ AE covers agriculture practices that do not destroy the environment
Vietnam	➤ AE is a scientific system in line with natural resource management ➤ AE is an agriculture that maximize ecological processes ➤ AE is an agriculture that follows principles that supports ecosystem functioning ➤ AE is a farming system with efforts in minimizing external input uses

5. An impressive diversity of ongoing agroecology initiatives

A total of **49 case studies** (and **3 short movies**) were presented by the stakeholders in the different workshops. Although the time allocated to each presenter was rather short (10 min), it helped showcasing different initiatives and fostered networking process bringing together stakeholders from different background / circle but with similar interest for agroecology promotion / dissemination. It is anticipated that such session will initiate and support further collaborations between different stakeholders.

All case studies and brief overview of each workshop can be found on the ALiSEA website as hereafter:

- **Yangon, Myanmar:** <http://ali-sea.org/1st-national-multi-stakeholder-workshop-addressing-agroecological-transition-in-myanmar/>
- **Phnom Penh, Cambodia:** <http://ali-sea.org/1st-national-multi-stakeholder-workshop-addressing-agroecological-transition-in-cambodia/>
- **Hanoi, Vietnam:** <http://ali-sea.org/1st-national-multi-stakeholder-workshop-addressing-agroecological-transition-in-vietnam/>
- **Vientiane, Lao PDR:** <http://ali-sea.org/1st-national-multi-stakeholder-workshop-addressing-agroecological-transition-in-laos/>

6. Some priority issues raised during the national multi stakeholder workshops

Through group works organized in the different workshops, several national critical issues were collectively identified, drafting a sort of roadmap for further actions to be taken in the framework of CANSEA & ALiSEA networks co-funded activities (small grants, thematic workshops, dedicated studies...) or side activities jointly implemented by some of ALiSEA & CANSEA members.

Myanmar, 5th & 6th March 2016

- Decreasing soil fertility due to monocropping, and over/misuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides
- Poor farmers' knowledge in pest and disease management / strong lobby from agrochemical companies
- Need for strengthening production of local good quality seed varieties (drought, flood, salt tolerant varieties)
- Need for consumers and stakeholders awareness in safe and quality products
- Promotion of PGS, GI and other collective control on produce quality and safety

- Agricultural policy focused on conventional agri-business, ignoring importance of small farmers and their needs
- Limited knowledge of farmers in land laws and implementation

Cambodia, 30th & 31st March 2016

- Need for advocacy & lobbying regarding agroecology promotion
- Support local organizations to make their voice heard and understood at provincial and national levels
- Support marketing and increased added value for agroecological or organic products
- Promote consumers awareness and support linkages between producers and buyers
- Document case studies of successful agroecology farming systems compared to chemical agriculture
- Document investment cost & gross margin for supporting adaptability / mass adoption of agroecology practices
- To support information dissemination & mainstreaming agroecology concept at farmer level through farmers federations

Vietnam, 5th & 6th May 2016

- Overuses of chemical fertilizers / pesticides combined with weak legal system allowing counterfeit fertilizers / pesticides on the market
- Land degradation (monocropping, chemical uses, reduced returns of biomass (incl. manure / composts))
- Lack of consumer's trust, confidence in the credibility and legal enforcement of quality assurance
- Lack of legality of agroecology → To include agroecology concept in MARD's restructuring orientations
- Need for understanding consumer's demand for agroecology products and preference of quality assurance (communication technology / innovations)
- Building and relying on networks to expand production scale, diversify products, responsiveness to market demand

Laos, 2nd & 3rd June 2016

- Need for research, cases, dialogue about new metrics for measuring progress in the agriculture sector
- Need for mass communication efforts (video, radio, internet etc.) to promote the value of farmers and farming (giving greater respect to the crucial roles of rural people in development)
- Need for developing strategies aiming at informing and persuading others stakeholders... not just internal sharing
- Enhance connection between the agroecology network, Land Issue WG and other initiatives such as Mekong Region Land Governance, and the GIZ pilot activities in Huaphan
- Need for research about the relationship between tenure, the adoption of agroecology practices, and the success or failure of Community based natural resource management (Identify success factors).
- Bring good cases to the national level... possible through other platforms

7. Way forwards

Several decisions were taken at the end of each workshop in order to move forwards in the emergence of a vibrant and member driven agroecology network across the Mekong region.

Amongst all decisions and actions, we can highlight few of them that have either already materialized or have gathered enough interest to ensure their coming implementation.

- a. Creation of national level ALiSEA working groups. This was done in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos bearing the expectation to take the Agroecology Learning Alliance forwards in the coming months
- b. Drafting of an ALiSEA Charter (currently under consolidation after receiving feedbacks from each working group) & ToR for national level ALiSEA secretariat
- c. Publication of full proceedings of the different workshops on the ALiSEA online library (<http://ali-sea.org/online-library/>)
- d. Launching of ALiSEA small grant facility (1st July 2016, <http://ali-sea.org/updates/>) and identification of national expert for the selection committee (together with advisory role to ALiSEA)

In addition, few collective actions were identified at national or regional level that should be pursued in the coming months:

- Consultation process with farmers' federations / associations, academia and private sector in order to clarify the concept of AE (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam)
- Thematic workshop bringing together scientists and development practitioners in order to develop new performance indicators regarding agroecology impacts (synergy anticipated between ALiSEA and CANSEA networks) (Laos)
- Joint study on pesticide use patterns & drivers of pesticide use (and roadblocks to biological control, agro-ecological approaches and pesticide-free management) at national and regional level (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam)