

Summarize of apprenticeship model on agroecology farming

Patrick D'Aquino,
February 2018

Lao PDR is face to huge challenges for a nationwide spreading out of agroecology practices and value chains. There are many stories success at the local level in the country, but how launching *a momentum that will progressively reach to spread these successful experiences at a nationwide level?*

In Lao PDR, many market-based social organic farms have shown their abilities to accompany smallholder farmers in developing agroecology farming technics and to link them to markets. They have also shown their own abilities to promote agroecology products and to get consumers trust. They are operating at small scale, with few smallholder farmers, which seems the best way to success.

However, how can enlarge this small-scale successful practice at a nationwide scope without losing its quality? A way could be to support them to double their capacities to host farmer apprentices. This is a progressive but sound way to spread out progressively smallholder agroecology farming in the country.

The support that these farms are already giving to their smallholder partners can be structured in an apprenticeship scheme, with a financial support that allows to double their hosting capacities: a financial support (see details below) for the small farms' hosting cost of apprentices and a for setting-in grant for smallholder apprentices after the training period (for land, irrigation, and a 1st year working capital).

1. Purpose: **using farming and marketing experience and networks of market-based social enterprise to train young farmers and insert their production in profitable value chains:**
 - Transferring (1) farming technics and (2) marketing skills and networks to trainees
 - Making the trainees benefit from, and learn from, the market opportunities of the involved enterprise
 - to set a lasting partnership between the trainee and the enterprise beyond the apprenticeship period, in order to insert the trainee in market opportunities the enterprise has developed (after the apprenticeship period, the enterprise continues to support former apprentices by providing selected seeds, technical advices, and market opportunities)
2. Apprenticeship scheme: a learning-on-the-job period, where trainees are hosted by a market-based social enterprise dealing with agroecology farming and agroecology products marketing.
 - 1st level of apprenticeship (Market gardening -5/6 usual products): 3 months
 - 2d level of apprenticeship (two years after the 1st level), for high-value products (cherry tomato, capsicum, radish...): 3 months
3. During this period, apprentices are grouped in cluster of six to work together on 1 hectare. They are coached by the enterprise staff and receive regular trainings, from the enterprise staff and from external key trainers, on topics from farming techniques to market abilities. External key trainers will be selected from national practitioners that have a long field experience.
4. Volunteer trainees: request to benefit of this apprenticeship has to be an individual initiative, and will be selected by the involved market-based social enterprise.
5. Summarize of the apprenticeship course:
 - Learning-on-the-job:
 - Farming practices: Management of a profitable production system. Currently, the concept developed by the enterprise is to be able to generate an average of 500 USD turnover for each "rai" (1,600 sqm) farmed – this in turn should provide a net revenue to farmers of around 300 USD/month.

- Marketing practices: visit to the enterprise clients to understand their needs, visit to organic market, and visit to successful partner farms.
 - Training sessions:
 - Production of organic fertilizers
 - Seedling process and definition of production plan
 - Understanding production cycle
 - Integrated Pest Management
 - Production of organic pesticides – identifying pests and applying relevant pesticides
 - Harvest and quality process
 - Land protection, intercropping and living fences
 - Basic finance – business planning
 - Marketing partnerships and agreements
6. A monitoring of the learning process is implemented by a team that brings together market-based social enterprises and the key trainers that are involved in the apprenticeship.
7. Cost per trainee:
- **Apprenticeship cost per level:**
 - **Level 1: 3 months = 1,950 USD**
 - Trainee allowance: 100 USD/month
 - Enterprise training cost: 400 USD/month (food will be paid by the enterprise for apprentices and the enterprise will provide accommodation)
 - External trainers: 150 USD/month (1day/month/6 trainees x 150 USD)
 - **Level 2: 3 months = 2,850 USD**
 - Trainee allowance: 200 USD / month
 - Enterprise training cost: 600 USD / month
 - External trainers: 150 USD / month
 - **Apprentice land access during training** (6 trainee per hectare): from 6000 USD (Vientiane) to 1500 USD (in provinces) – this should be sufficient to cover costs of renting agriculture land in given locations – in case the enterprise cant provide land of its own.
 - **A setting-in grant after the training period** (land, irrigation, plus 1st year working capital): 7000 USD; an assisted investment optional loan (2 buffaloes for organic manure) 2000 USD.