

# Report on the improvement of Organic PGS Certification



Myanmar Organic Grower and Producer Association



ORGANIC

## Introduction

Conventional agriculture practices have had strong adverse effects on people's health and on the environment across Myanmar. The growing utilization of agro-chemicals is currently depleting soil fertility and threatening the sustainability of agriculture productivity. Small holder farmers are also very vulnerable to the strong impacts of Global Warming in Myanmar. Rising temperatures, decreasing soil fertility, water shortages and more frequent extreme weather events are challenging the actual farming systems and limiting the productivity of farmers in the country. Agroecology practices, including organic farming, propose innovative solutions to face these different challenges. By maximizing the utilization of natural resources of the ecosystem, agroecology allows to produce diversified high quality food while avoiding the contamination of the environment by chemical inputs. The broad adoption of sustainable practices by local stakeholders would therefore be a chance for them to protect their environment, save money by limiting expenses in chemical inputs, and protect the health of their communities. The initiative studied here and implemented by the Myanmar Organic Producer Association aims at fostering the adoption of organic practices through the development of PGS certifications.

The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification consists in farmers working together along with other stakeholders to apply organic standards, manage the quality control process and certify their products. PGS are specifically designed to help smallholders gain better access and recognition in local and regional markets by providing consumers with food they can trust. This certification process is less costly and less bureaucratic compared to Third Party Certification options that are currently available in many parts of the world. According to the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), PGS can be defined as locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks, and knowledge exchange. IFOAM promotes PGS as a support to small farmers to have access to markets and as a guarantee for the integrity of organic products. PGS are also a key to facilitate local production and consumption of organic food.

PGS history started before the emergence of Third party certification. It was developed and practiced independently in different countries around the world (e.g. France, Brazil, New Zealand). In 2004 IFOAM and MAELA organized an international workshop on alternative certification in Torres/Brazil. During that meeting, participants realized that they were following the same basic approach and sharing many common elements. PGS as a concept was born. Since 2004 there has been a steady growth in the number of PGS initiatives launched every year. MOGPA (Myanmar Organic Grower and Producer Association) is proud to take part in this movement by supporting PGS certification systems in Myanmar and in other ASEAN countries. Through its work on PGS, MOGPA is working on the emergence of sustainable and secure food systems and agro-ecosystem that protect human's health and respect the environment in South East Asia.

# The Myanmar Organic Grower and Producer Association : vision and main activities

The Myanmar Organic Grower and Producer Association (MOGPA) is a non profit organisation which works mainly on knowledge sharing and gives direct technical support to organic farmers. MOGPA's team is strongly convinced that sensitization to organic agriculture will support the economic development of the agriculture sector in Myanmar. The association is currently working to support Myanmar people's education on sustainable organic food and farming to improve the humans' health and to protect the environment. MOGPA also produces and communicates credible, evidence-based science to foster advance understanding about health and environmental benefits and to support the adoption of sustainable organic food and farming. Finally, the different training implemented by the associati are directly helping Myanmar people to improve the efficacy and sustainability of organic farming methods.

## Presentation of the initiative

### *1- MOGPA past activities on PGS certification*

Organic PGS certification system was developed and practiced independently in different countries around the world (France, Brazil, New Zealand). The IFOAM and MAELA workshop organized in Brazil in 2004 resulted in a joint effort to standardize and disseminate the concept across the borders. PGS systems are now considered as regional development tools for small holder farmers. Capacity building is key to foster the adoption of the PGS system since the certification process can be complicated. Sharing knowledge and know-how is also crucial for farmers to get access to markets. Myanmar started being involved in capacity building on PGS certification in the early 2010s.

MOGPA has been supporting the introduction of PGS since it was established in 2013. Since, then, the association has been working on awareness and trainings on PGS certification on a monthly basis in Yangon, and occasionally in different parts of Myanmar. However, organic training activities started even earlier, in 2010, before the emergence of the association. The fact that MOGPA implemented organic technical training and PGS awareness trainings so early was a chance for the association to get rooted in various locations in Myanmar. Many alumni were already working on the field since 2010 and their experience and organizing capacities helped MOGPA to extend organic farmer groups in their regions.

Between 2014 and 2017, MOGPA took part to 3 main activities related to PGS in Myanmar. In Nay Pyi Taw and Pyin Oo Lwin farmers were trained to PGS certification by the project ADB TA8163 on Climate Smart Agriculture by the Department of Agriculture, Planning Division. MOGPA took part to this project as an external consultant for PGS training implementation. The farmers from Nay Pyi Taw and Pyin Oo Lwin were required to continue some steps to be completed and were therefore chosen by MOGPA as beneficiary target for the studied PGS initiative.

MOGPA also took part to an awareness training In Ywa Ngan (Southern Shan State) at the request of Genius coffee, a social enterprise working on coffee production. Genius invited MOGPA to give public talk on organic farming in Lal Kaing Village in 2015. After that, some farmers were interested in organic farming and willing to change their coffee farm. The farmers involved in these three locations were chosen as target audience for the PGS project supported by the ALiSEA small Grant.

## *2- The PGS initiative: supporting the implementation of the PGS procedure through awareness trainings and certification pilot areas*

MOGPA association started its activities on PGS in 2014 without any financial support. In 2017, the association finally had the opportunity to extend its activities on PGS thanks to the financial support from ALiSEA: MOGPA was indeed selected by the ALiSEA Network to benefit from a Small Grants in 2017. The activities developed under the small grant initiative were focusing on the implementation of the PGS procedure, from awareness trainings to certification pilot areas. The main objective of the activities implemented by MOGPA under this initiative consisted in:

- Providing a credible organic guarantee to consumers seeking organic produce at a reasonable cost for the farmer
- Motivating active participation on the part of the stakeholders results in greater empowerment but also greater responsibility.
- Having many other positive effects like improved knowledge sharing.

### **1. Awareness training**

MOGPA has been working on awareness training on PGS since 2010, and has already sensitized about 5000 alumni to PGS certification process across Myanmar. Under the PGS project funded by ALiSEA, MOGPA continued its activities and organized an important PGS awareness training. The event took place in Yangon, at the Land Use Division from the Department of Agriculture in Yangon, and gathered 53 alumnis.





Figure 1 : PGS training in Yangon, December 2016

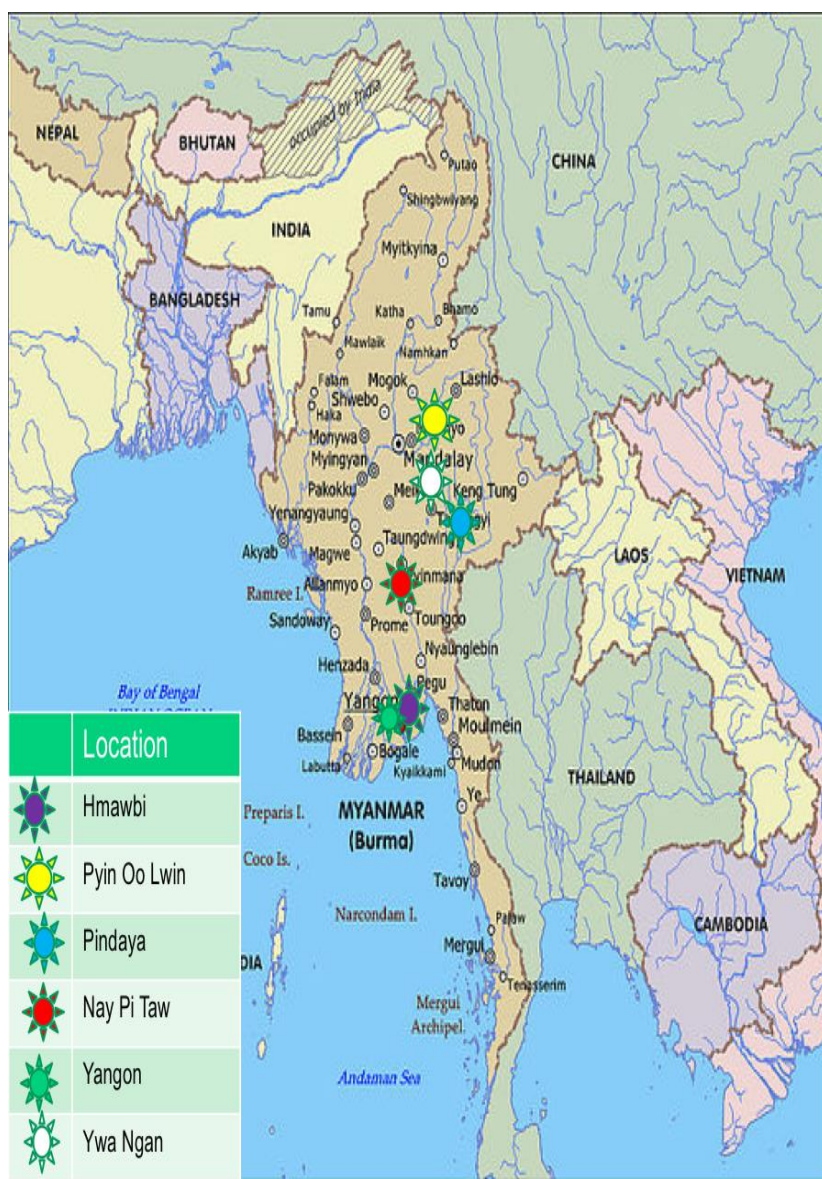
## 2- Certification pilot areas

The MOGPA project activities were also related to the establishment of certification pilot areas. The work consisted in supporting farmers to develop and implement PGS certification systems. The selected areas included:

- Yangon and Hmawbi in Yangon region
- Ywa Ngan Township and Pindaya township in Southern Shan State
- Nay Pyi Taw and Pyin Oo Lwin townships in the Mandalay Region

Figure 2 : Mapping of the different locations of the project activities

The target beneficiaries were the farmers previously involved in MOGPA's activities on PGS. Therefore, beneficiaries included farmers from In Ywa Ngan who showed interest in organic agriculture following the MOGPA training. Beneficiaries also included targeted farmers from the previous TA-8163 ADB project in Nay Pyi Taw and Pyin Oo Lwin. MOGPA had indeed participated to the project together



with Government staffs until the step of Pledges, but some farmers still needed more support to complete the PGS certification process.

The activities of the PGS initiative first focused on the implementation of a Training of Trainers. Participants came from all over the country; from Shan State, Magway Region, Rakhine State, Mon State, Pego Region , Mandalay Region and Chin State. As a result, 55 PGS trainers were trained to implement the PGS certification at local level.



Figure 3 : Power Point presentation for the ToT

The PGS certification process follows many steps and the process can be complicated to understand for small-holder farmers. Trainers have therefore a key role to play in capacity building. The different PGS certification steps have been identified by MOGPA as the following:

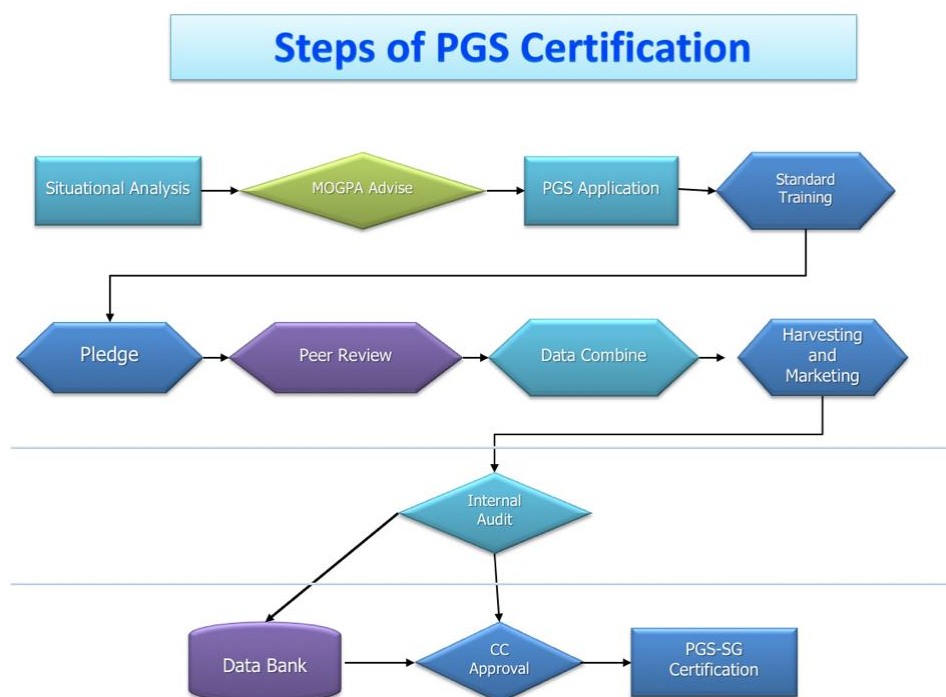


Figure 4 : identified steps for PGS certification

Following the Training of Trainers (ToT), several activities were implemented in order to support the farmers in the field all along the PGS certification process. This support focused on the following activities :

- Public talk for organic awareness to project area .
- Fix organic national standard to their farm.
- Introduce PGS system with regional training.
- Organize PGS farmers group
- PGS community trainings.
- Pledge of farmers group
- Inspection with peer review.
- Internal audit
- PGS certification and local market formation .

Other activities included filling up the farmers' detailed documents and internal monitoring record. Documentation and peer review are difficult to understand and to fill up for farmers as they can be quite complex.

MOGPA accompanied in total 157 farmers to achieve PGS certification in Myanmar. These farmers were involved in different types of production as mushrooms, fruits, vegetables, coffee and tea.

No.	State / Region	Township	Village	Crop	No. of Farmers
1.	Yangon	Yangon	Tharkayta	Mushroom	2*
2.	Yangon	Hmawbi	Bwat Gyi	Vegetable	3*
3.	Mandalay	NayPyi Taw	The Kaw Gyi	Vegetable	4
			Thar Yar Gone	Vegetable	14
4.	Mandalay	Pyin Oo Lwin	Moe Gye	Strawberry	8*



			<b>Pin Lain</b>	<b>Carrot</b>	<b>6*</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Southern Shan State</b>	<b>Pindaya</b>	<b>9 Villages</b>	<b>Tea, Cabbage</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Southern Shan State</b>	<b>Ywa Ngan</b>	<b>Lal Kaing</b>	<b>Coffee</b>	<b>54*</b>
				<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>

Figure 3 : categorisation of the different beneficiaries of the PGS project based on their agriculture activity

At the end of the activities, the PGS certification process was completed for Yangon, Ywa Ngan and Pying Oo Lwin farmers groups. However, farmers in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Hmawbi encountered some difficulties, and must therefore continue their efforts to complete the PGS process.

The following graph illustrates the completed steps for each farmers group, with green colors for steps to be completed in the future.

<b>Farmers Group</b>	<b>Situational Analysis</b>	<b>Standard Training</b>	<b>Pledge</b>	<b>Peer Review</b>	<b>Internal Audit</b>	<b>Data Bank</b>	<b>MOGPA Approval</b>	<b>Certification</b>
Yangon Hmawbi	January 2016	Feb	Mar					25 <sup>th</sup> May 2017
Nay Pyi Daw	January 2016	Feb 2017	Mar 2017	April 2017	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2017			
Pyin Oo Lwin	2016 January	February	Mar	April	2016 2018	6 <sup>th</sup> May	September	16 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2017
Ywa Ngan	Since 2016	February	March 2017	Mar 2017	April 2017	May 2017	May 2017	25 <sup>th</sup> May 2017
Pindaya	Since 2016	2016 2017	29 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2017	Dec 2017	May 2018	May 2018	June 2018	July 2018

Figure 4 : table of the PGS certification steps completed for each group of farmers

### 3- Challenges for the implementation of PGS certifications in Myanmar

During the project, several risks and difficulties regarding the development of the project and the adoption of PGS in general were identified. Concerning the sound implementation of PGS programs, the following difficulties were listed:



- Defavorable government policy and lack of positive cooperation;
- Need for specific technical support to integrate organic practices in the farming plan;
- Need for a list of pest and disease for relevant crops with detailed Integrated Pest Management measures;
- Competition of local market formations in their region;
- Responsibility and skillful manpower;
- Climate change

Moreover, one of the key challenges to the development of PGS across the country remains the issue of market access. The demand for safe and non-contaminated food products is rising in South East Asia. PGS show the advantage of guaranteeing the safety of agricultural products to the consumer while at the same time limiting the cost of the certification. However, it is still difficult to link organic growers to consumers because of limited infrastructure and lack of knowledge and capacities. The enhancement of farmers capacity in marketing and selling of products must be supported. Knowledge sharing tools among farmers must also be handed over in order to favor the adoption of organic practices after the project.

#### *4- Main achievements of the initiative*

The PGS certification is a crucial tool for supporting the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. The transition to organic agriculture gives many opportunities for local farmers: they can benefit from increased soil fertility and better agroecological conditions which can result in higher yields. PGS also favour the protection of the environment and communities benefit from a healthier environment and help families involved in organic agriculture to have a trustful relationship with consumers. Producers can therefore increase their revenue by benefiting from a premium price. Furthermore, the PGS certification process fosters community development by pushing for cooperation between farmers, strengthening producer-consumer relations and stimulating community knowledge exchanges.

The benefits of PGS for small-holder farmers as identified by MOGPA include:

- Stronger relations between producer-consumer
- Access for small producers to quality assurance systems
- Stimulates learning and community development
- Collective tool for development for local market
- Ownership and collective responsibility (Empowerment) for quality of organic crops
- Low direct costs and less bureaucracy: accessibility
- Favours diversified production systems in respective region
- Promoting strong organic values



*Figure 5: Follow up meeting and documentation on PGS system, Pyin Oo Lwin, May 2017*

Overall, 157 farmers have benefited from the support of MOGPA on PGS certification process through certification pilot area. At the end of the project, MOGPA managed to issue PGS certifications for two mushroom farms, one coffee farm from Ywa Ngan and one vegetable farm in Yangon. Three other group of farmers are still working in the procedure. All of the groups of farmers involved in the projects have finished their peer review checks and data collection, and successfully passed the MOGPA internal audit visit. The farmers who benefited from the support of MOGPA are now working on linking their production to organic markets and on placing their products in neighboring countries' markets.

In order to close the process of PGS certification for successful farmers' groups, MOGPA organized four PGS certification celebration ceremonies to celebrate the successful effort of farmers all along the project.



*Figure 6 : First PGS certification ceremony at UMFDDI, May 2017*

## Conclusion

MOGPA has been strongly involved in supporting organic agriculture in Myanmar. Its approach focuses on ecological processes, biodiversity and natural cycles adapted to local conditions. MOGPA is supporting organic agriculture as organic practices allow to combine traditions, innovations, and science in resilient farming systems. Organic agriculture is a key to guarantee a safe environment and a good life quality for all Myanmar people, especially small-holder farmers.

PGS certifications are crucial to foster the emergence of localized organic market. They are a guarantee of safe production standards for consumers and a tool for producers to meet the demand for safe products. PGS are recognized as a suitable alternative to third party certification for small-holders as the cost of participation is much lower. The certification process also supports community development by fostering capacities and cooperation at local level.

The project has been successful in helping numerous farmers to benefit from the PGS certification: 4 groups of farmers have already benefited from the PGS certification thanks to MOGPA's initiative. The PGS certification will help these farmers to increase their income by selling their products with a premium price. The awareness trainings and certification pilot areas also fostered knowledge and capacity building at the community level to put the beneficiaries at the center of the quality control. Finally, by increasing capacities and knowledge at local level, this project may in turn jeopardize the growth of the organic movement in Myanmar.

Therefore, MOGPA expresses a sincere thanks to ALiSEA small grant facility. MOGPA is willing to work together for future collaboration not only in Myanmar but also in South East Asian Region.