



Agroecology Futures **Regional Forum**

Dates: 6th – 8th November 2018

Location: Siem Reap, Cambodia

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Context

ASEAN countries are following a path of intensification due to rising demands for agricultural products that increase pressure to simplify crop production and agricultural landscapes, increasing the vulnerability to climate change and promotion of monoculture crops. Such vulnerabilities are even exacerbated under some agroecological zones where most agriculture is rain-fed and climate change has a potentially large influence on productivity and profitability.

Depending on their respective history, demographic changes, economic development patterns and agroecological potential of their landscapes, agriculture intensification has evolved at different pace and had variable ecological and social impacts throughout the region (i.e., land degradation and biodiversity depletion associated with the generalization of input-intensive cropping practices).

In lowlands and floodplains, rice production can be increasingly constrained by water scarcity and climatic events (i.e., floods, drought, and sea level rise in the deltas). High dependency on energy, technologies, engineered landscapes, and infrastructures may also increase the fragility of the rice farming systems. In addition, climate change has become an important issue for countries and regions exposed to extreme flooding and/or drought. Rice farming is facing a dual challenge of delivering sufficient and nutritious food to meet the projected demands of population growth and markets, and overcoming issues such as climate change, soil fertility depletion and water scarcity. In the mid to upper watersheds, land degradation and soil erosion are linked with deforestation, fast agrarian changes from swidden systems to intensive cultivation of monoculture crops like maize, cassava, banana, among others. On large areas in the uplands, soil fertility depletion is progressing at a rapid pace with sometimes extreme social, economic (low profitability, increasing debts) and environmental consequences. This environmental degradation is both a result and a driver of social change.

Intensive farming (rice and others commodities) has provided huge productivity gains under conditions of intensive resource use and a controlled, predictable environment. It is however essential to recognize the inherent limits and contradictions of agrochemical-based production. The process of agricultural intensification, both in the lowlands and in the uplands, increases the systemic dependency of smallholder farmers on fossil fuels. By relying on fossil fuels for both energy-intensive production and agrochemical inputs, several farming systems in the region are trapped into a constant need for maintenance and thematic adjustments (i.e., agro-chemical inputs, plant genetic and mechanization) to environmental attributes that are becoming unstable, and changing at an accelerating rate.

In the coming decades, agriculture in the region will be shaped by a complex set of social, economic and environmental drivers becoming more significant every year. Population growth, urbanization, international trade and investments will impact food production systems. To meet future food needs, it is imperative to transform agriculture to deliver food security and safety, restore ecosystem services, sustain economic growth and provide larger opportunities for small-scale farmers and youth. Achieving these goals will demand to design and promote innovative farming systems, to explore new methods of intervention as well as innovative institutional and financial mechanisms. In this dynamic, a shift towards an agroecological transition is widely emphasized and expected in the region.

Towards Agroecological transition

Agroecology is a holistic approach that aims at addressing complex and interrelated challenges of poverty, malnutrition, environmental degradation and climate change. Agroecology intends to move towards integrated sustainable development in its three dimensions – environmental, social and economic and places the co-generation and sharing of knowledge as the cornerstone of the intervention, combining science, traditional and practical knowledge of smallholder

farmers and others stakeholders. Agroecology is based on territorial approach combining ecological, economic and social science¹.

In 2013, a regional study was conducted by GRET² in the six countries of the GMS to give an overview of practices, actors and experiments related to agroecology with the objective of widening the initial focus on Conservation Agriculture by including other approaches such as organic agriculture, agroforestry, agroecological pest management, among others. The study was the foundation of the design of the project *Towards Agroecological Transition in South-East Asia* (ACTAE). Such regional initiative to agroecology was deemed necessary (i) to open existing initiatives to other schools and stakeholder, (ii) to provide more flexibility and reactivity to the existing networks, and (iii) to strengthen national agroecological networks and develop synergies.

ACTAE, *Towards an Agroecological Transition in South East Asia*, is funded by AFD (2015 – 2018) aims at building durable and effective networking mechanisms to facilitate synergies among agroecology initiatives³. ACTAE is implemented by CIRAD⁴ (coordination ACTAE and CANSEA) and GRET⁵ (ALiSEA: Agroecology Learning Alliance in South-East Asia) with their national and regional partners in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. It supports and promotes the initiatives of various actors in the field of agroecology: from smallholder farmers to consumers, research, development, advocacy to support agricultural policies, private sector, education and civil society, through their networks.

The activities of ACTAE include the production of knowledge in the field of agroecology through the accompaniment and co-financing of initiatives to encourage multi-stakeholder collaborations and thematic studies (i.e., assessment of agroecological practices, perception of consumers in regards to agroecological products, crop-livestock integration, agroforestry, participatory certification, analysis of institutional frameworks, among others). The sharing and networking of experiences is organized through an online knowledge sharing platform (<http://ali-sea.org/>), the organization of thematic workshops pooling together a range of actors at national and regional scales. Another line of intervention concerns improving the visibility of the agroecological movement among policy makers and consumers through the implementation of dedicated communication tools.

The ACTAE project networks national projects and facilitates exchange of experience, capitalization and dissemination of results at national and regional levels. It thus helps to develop an advocacy on agroecology with decision-makers increasing the chance of a political carry-over of the agroecological transition.

Challenges to scale-up Agroecology

Across South-East Asia, there is a strong-shared interest for bridging and synergizing existing agroecology initiatives, in order to share and enrich experiences, to increase the visibility of the practices and scale up their adoption by farmers. Meanwhile, there is a need also to integrate such practices in agricultural policies, and to increase main agroecology stakeholders' capacity for fund raising in order to strengthen existing activities.

¹ Scaling up agroecology initiative transforming Food and Agricultural Systems in support of the SDGs'. A proposal; prepared for the international symposium on agroecology, 3-5 April 2018 / Catalyzing dialogue and cooperation to scale up agroecology: outcomes of the FAO regional seminars on agroecology. FAO, 2018. ISBN 978-92-5-130464-8

² Jean-Christophe Castella and Jean-François Kibler, 2015: Towards an agroecological transition in Southeast Asia: Cultivating diversity and developing synergies. Edited by Pierre Ferrand (Coordination/ALiSEA). 96p. GRET

³ 2015, CIRAD and GRET, ACTAE Towards an agroecological transition in South East Asia, project leaflet

⁴ <https://www.cirad.fr/>

⁵ <https://www.gret.org/>

However, dissemination of agroecological practices is slow and transition process requires changes at different levels (i.e., field practices, day-to-day management, planning, marketing, connection between producers and consumers) based on farming systems in place and path of intensification.

Investments should be made (i) to foster experience and knowledge sharing, collaborative research and innovation, (ii) to raise awareness among policy-makers, (iii) to strengthen the involvement of research, education and extension, (iv) to strengthen coordinated actions between actors and among sectors to achieve coherence through a landscape and territorial approach, (iv) to promote markets for agroecological products, and (v) to identify political and economic mechanisms to prioritize the transition to agroecology.

Thus, this necessary transformation of agriculture based on agroecology principles and actions requires concerted efforts and investments that place actors (youth, smallholder farmers, traders, scientists, extension, consumers, policy-makers) at the center, combining research, education, training and technology with adequate policies and innovative financial mechanisms.

Meanwhile, smallholder farmers face high pressure for changes in a context of fast agrarian transitions. Thus, there are some needs to:

- Strengthen a holistic approach including agricultural production factors analysis as potential bottlenecks for dissemination;
- Support the agroecological transition for agricultural production, in order to i) ensure the sustainability of smallholder farmers and their resilience to market fluctuations, and ii) enhance ecosystem functions that ensure the sustainability of farming systems and the protection of natural resources;
- Link and combine a range of agroecological approaches and skills on issues related to climate change and rapid agrarian transitions;
- Develop efficient linkages between value chains stakeholders and improve connections with markets and agro-industries to pull the innovations.
- Contribute to the design and the implementation of an ASEAN policy framework to foster the dissemination of agroecology practices.

Objectives of the Regional Forum

Overall objective: The overall aim of the forum is to build a momentum around the different dimensions of Agroecology that should be addressed, and consolidate a Regional Agroecology stakeholders' coalition.

Specific objectives

Wrapping up the achievements of ACTAE project (Towards an Agroecological Transition in South-East Asia, AFD) & discussing the future of regional initiative in Agroecology.

1. *Capitalization & Communication*

- To consolidate and disseminate achievements and outstanding initiatives conducted in the framework of ACTAE over the past 3 years.
- To demonstrate to a broader audience practical results / outputs from ACTAE and others stakeholders (innovation and knowledge fair).

2. *Cross Learning & Sharing*

- To facilitate the sharing of experiences amongst regional stakeholders (panel discussions, parallel and poster sessions).
- To use the conference to have a dialogue amongst stakeholders on common issues and challenges at regional level. For instance, what policies are needed? What are the priority issues to be addressed at national and regional level? To create a matrix with what are the critical issues & what are the key actors to be involved to work on these issues.

3. *Advocacy & Fund raising*

- To showcase to policy makers, donor agencies and active regional AE stakeholders what has been done within the framework of ACTAE (learning briefs, knowledge products...).

4. *Agroecology Network structuration*

- To bring together all ALiSEA, CANSEA members and regional universities to consolidate network foundations and engage a participatory process for shaping their road maps.

Outputs

The **forum output** will be a 'proceeding' highlighting the outputs of the plenary and parallel sessions. The document will present an overview of the status and challenges to address each dimension of an Agroecological transition. The forum outputs will be presented to corresponding ministries and funding agencies.

In addition, it is anticipated that the Forum will be the opportunity for sharing a broad range of products including (amongst others):

- A short-animated movie about the emergence of the ALiSEA regional network and its key moments together with an attractive book compiling most relevant knowledge products from ALiSEA members (success stories / innovative and successful agroecological models)

- Other relevant knowledge products, technical leaflets on the preservation and use of plant diversity, testimonies of smallholder farmers (clips)...
- A booklet presenting all ALiSEA members' profile

When and where

The forum will be organized in **Siem Reap, Cambodia** on the **6th to 8th of November 2018** ahead of the Fruits & Vegetable Fair organized every year by Ministry of Commerce (8th – 11th November).

Targeted audience

The first part of the Forum (6th, 7th and 8th (morning only) November) will address stakeholders actively involved in promoting AE across the Mekong region: Farmers' Associations, Development Practitioners, Academia and Research, Private Sector, Government Organizations.

The second part (8th November afternoon and beyond) will be opened to the general public to raise awareness about agroecology.

In addition, the forum will be also opened to funding agencies and technical partners (AFD, SDC, World Bank, ADB, Giz, FAO, IFAD, UNCCD, Swiss Contact, CE SAIN/RUA...).

Forum proposed organization

1st & 2nd Days: 6th - 7th November: Agroecology Futures Regional Forum

The Forum will open with plenary addresses by invited keynote speakers in relation to the following main themes:

- **Theme 1:** Current dynamics in production and food systems and AE innovations
- **Theme 2:** Enabling environment for promoting Agroecological transition (communication, education, advocacy, certification, food systems...)
- **Theme 3:** Supporting and converging regional networking and strategies for promoting agroecology.

Two days combining:

- Key note presentations to set the stage of the main themes (plenary session)
- Parallel thematic sessions and roundtables
- Cultural presentation and Poster session

Parallel sessions will be held per the above three themes, to be organized by session conveners. The format of the parallel sessions will be determined by the conveners, in close collaboration with the organizing committee, to ensure the themes are sufficiently presented and discussed to compile the main outcomes and key aspects.

Abstracts and papers for keynote speakers will be invited to support the 3 main themes.

Posters presented by different stakeholders involved in agroecological transition and addressing the 3 main themes.

Theme 1: Current dynamics in production and food systems and AE innovations

Keynote presentations

- Smallholder farming in ASEAN / Mekong Region: what are we talking about?
- Regional networking for promoting Agroecology in South East Asia (case of ACTAE: ALiSEA, CANSEA)
- New strategies of sustainable food production in ASEAN (public policies & strategies for promoting Agroecology)
- Agroecology, commodities and agroecosystems transformation

Parallel sessions

- *PS1 - Agroecology, commodities and agroecosystems transformation*
- *PS2 - Landscape/territorial approach (field to market)*
- *PS3 - Status of agrochemical use in ASEAN and challenges for an AE transition*
- *PS4 - Crop Biodiversity: A Foundational Component of Sustainably Intensified Farming Systems*
- *PS6 - Climate Change & Indigenous Knowledge & AE*
- *PS7 - Practical examples for improving soil fertility*
- *PS8 - Session for the implementation of a Conservation Agriculture Consortium in Cambodia*

Theme 2: Enabling environment for promoting AE transition (communication, education, advocacy, certification, food systems...)

Keynote presentations

- Wrapping-up of parallel sessions of day 2
- The value of the soil capital or Biodiversity and Ecosystem services for Asia and the Pacific
- Historical drivers of land use changes, impacts on livelihoods, in the uplands of Cambodia
- Blockchain: Investing in global resilience and regeneration with sustainable agroforestry
- Donors' strategies to address Agroecological transition and how regional networks can facilitate their implementation -

Parallel sessions

- *PS9 - Examples of participatory process to accompany an agroecological transition*
- *PS10 - Building the new generation of AE farmers (Education, training and Agroecology)*
- *PS11 - Soil management, climate change adaptation and mitigation*
- *PS12 - Agroecology food safety, certification and role of consumers*

Theme 3: Supporting and converging regional networking and strategies for promoting agroecology

Plenary session:

- *PS13 - Closed session for drafting an informal university network addressing AE*
- *PS14 - Closed session for ALiSEA members to address the future of the network: What priorities to focus on, with which governance modalities?*
- *PS15 - Key topics of R4D for an Agroecological Transition (follow up meeting of the workshop held in Battambang in April 2018)*

3rd day (afternoon): 8th of November

- **Innovation and knowledge fair** which could include
 - Technical / hands on workshop: vermicompost making, biofunctool (soil clods and slake test), seed saving and keeping ...
 - Integrated pest management, agroforestry and crop-livestock integration.
 - Exhibition of a diversity of plants and soil profile.
 - Exhibition for the regional universities to present their programs and activities related to AE (education, research, innovations/technology parks).
 - Seed fair / swapping. It will be asked to the participants to bring seeds from the place where they work and to have a place for a seed swap that is basically a seed exchange process between farmers, development operators.
 - Video & photo corners
 - The photo corner will be dedicated to the ongoing photo contest launched by ALiSEA which will culminate at the Forum with the awarding of the 3 best photos,
 - The video corner will be dedicated to the several clips and other movies available on ALiSEA and CASC YouTube channels as well as the e-learning platform.
- **Public cultural performance** (collaboration with PHARE circus) in the evening about Agroecology and Natural Resources Management.

Anticipated networks and stakeholders to be invited to share their activities / experiences:

- Asian Farmers Association for sustainable rural development
- CGIAR: CIAT (Vietnam) / IRRI (Cambodia) / ICRAF (Vietnam)
- CE SAIN (Royal University of Agriculture), University of Battambang (UBB) and the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC)
- FAO (Upscaling AE initiative)
- GDA, IPM program
- GIZ ASEAN Sustainable Agrifood Systems (ASEAN SAS) (<https://www.asean-agrifood.org/>)
- Mekong Extension Learning Alliance (MELA)
- Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN-AP) (<http://panap.net/>)
- Swisscontact
- The Field Alliance (<http://www.thefieldalliance.org/>)
- UNCCD (Cambodia Climate Change Alliance)
- UNESCAP/CSAM