

Concept Note for the 2016 Regional Curriculum Workshop on Agroecology for Farmer Training

Background

Over the past two decades, much effort was put toward the development and expansion of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) throughout the world. The IPM program helped farmers to better understand ecosystems, manage crops and pests accordingly, and increase yields and income. The most effective IPM training programs, however, were time consuming and required extensive monetary and human resources for implementation. Thus, many farmer training programs were left with inadequate resources. In response, communities and governments opted for shortened trainings aimed at helping farmers to increase crop production, alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides, market expansion, etc.

While in some ways, this seems a solution, it also leaves farmers without exposure to crucial information on food security, safety, and nutrition, the importance of biodiversity, and the environmental and health impacts of agrochemicals. Until now, most programs continue to focus on training farmers to intensify commercial crops and increase access to premium markets while neglecting to address these issues. Commercial and contract farming by large corporations has continued to expand dramatically and led to the widespread use of agrochemicals with profound negative impacts that have not been seen previously. Climate change, extreme weather conditions, and the migration of farmers to cities for more gainful employment has created a huge gap in labor within the agriculture sector, and in most cases left the elderly and women to bear the responsibilities of farming and household chores. In the face of these challenges, in recent years practices in Agroecology¹ have been increasingly implemented by small-scale farmers as the result of increased attention from international governments and NGO's. Recent global and international movements to promote ecological and biodiversity based agriculture practices have advocated for increased support of ecological agriculture and farmer education. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) partners with global initiatives like the United

¹ Agroecology is the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems. It focuses on the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment. Agroecological practices work in harmony with these interactions, applying innovative solutions that harness and conserve biodiversity. Agroecology is practised in all corners of the world, with the traditional and local knowledge of family farmers at its core. Through an integrative approach, agroecology is a realm where science, practice and social movements converge to seek a transition to sustainable food systems, built upon the foundations of equity, participation and justice. ”#

Nations and G8 and through their programs, acknowledge the benefits of ecological practices and the need to shift towards them in order to increase food security and improve nutrition through integrative approaches to sustainable food production systems. In addition, UNESCO recently organized the first ASEAN conference on Biocultural Diversity to create awareness on the need to promote biocultural diversity through regional development involving local industries in planning, increasing accessibility to environmental education, and emphasizing the link between nature and culture, as well as between utilization and conservation. Even with this increase in support, the promotion of ecological practices is still often limited to small, remote farming areas where farmers have a strong interest, but typically receive inadequate support from local governments making programmatic sustainability a challenge.

Since 2007, the Field Alliance and partner organizations have promoted the Rural Education for Agricultural Livelihoods (REAL) program with the aim to help create awareness of the importance of agrobiodiversity and encourage communities to conserve resources and reduce the use of chemical pesticides through the adoption of ecological agricultural practices like Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The REAL program relies on school and community participation to conduct surveys and document the status of agrobiodiversity and the impacts of pesticides on public health and the environment in target communities. This information serves as a baseline to be used for subsequent community action planning. Data is also disseminated to raise awareness and solicit support at the local, national, and regional levels.

Since its inception, the REAL program has proven effective in supporting farmers in carrying out ecological practices. However, given increased public demand for safe and organic foods, and the ever-present need to ensure food security, there is now a need to review and revise the REAL curriculum and guidelines to address Agroecology across the board. The pilot of this revised curriculum during the final year of the Keml supported program will be essential in paving the way for further development and expansion over the next decade.

1. Objectives:

- To share experiences on Agroecology training of farmers in the region
- To visit and exchange with farmer groups near Hanoi
- To draft a revised Agroecology curriculum framework for FFS

2. Output:
 - Various papers and presentations on Agroecology
 - Curriculum framework for FFS Agroecology
3. Venue: Khach San Muong Thanh Hanoi Centre Hotel, Hanoi, Vietnam
4. Date: December, 13-15, 2016
5. Organizers: The Field Alliance and Initiatives for Community Empowerment and Rural Development (ICERD)
6. Participants: FAO, various government organizations, non-governmental organizations, representatives of various international organization (approx. 30 Persons) from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam
7. Cost: outlined below
 - Meeting cost will be cover by organizers.
 - Travel and accommodation will be provided for The Field Alliance's partners.
 - Other participants are welcome to attend at their own expense.