Engaging with Academia and Research Institutions (ARIs) to support Family Farmers and Food System Transformation During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic in Asia

With technical assistance from the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
MAINSTREAMING AGROECOLOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) FOR REDESIGNING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN ASIA

Dr. Abha Mishra
RoundGlass Wellbeing Pvt. Ltd.
Content

- Background
- Introduction to programme
- Geographical areas and partnerships
- Key processes for innovations
- Results
- Recommendations
BACKGROUND

• 500 million family farmers produce 80% of the world food
• Majority of them are smallholders (<5 ha)
• 75% food are sold on to markets
• Food-health-trade-climate change interdependent. (fragile linkages)
• Covid-19 and other crises have threatened progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030
• Redesigning sustainable food systems with active engagement with farms and farming communities is gaining momentum
• HEIs are seen as crucial actors
INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAMME

33 districts in 11 provinces in LMB region

Sustaining and Enhancing the Momentum for Innovation around the System of Rice Intensification in Lower Mekong River Basin (SRI-LMB)

System of Rice Intensification: A ‘menu’ for innovation and transformation

1. Transplanting younger and fewer seedlings/hill or direct seeding with low seed rate
2. Maintaining wider spacing
3. Avoiding continuous soil saturation
4. Applying compost as much as possible

Capturing farmer’s imagination by enabling them to get higher yield with reduced external inputs, fueling their capacity for innovation
GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Royal University of Agriculture
National University of Laos
Hanoi University of Agriculture
Rajabhat University

http://www.sri-lmb.ait.asia/
KEY PROCESSES FOR INNOVATION

• Multi-stakeholder networks & platforms (academics, researchers, Farmers Organizations) enabling co-creation of knowledge & participatory research for supporting family farming & food system transformation

• Enhancing rural communities’ initiatives and development, and transfer of technologies

• Policies and strategies (from regional to local levels) to support family farmers & sustainability of rural livelihoods/communities

• Innovation in HEIs curriculum to better address agroecology and family farming
1. Multi-stakeholder networks and platforms

CAMBODIA
Implementing consortia include NGO, GO, academics

LAOS
Implementing consortia include NGO, GO, academics

THAILAND
Implementing consortia include NGO GO, academics

VIETNAM
Implementing consortia include NGO, GO academics

Provinces

Districts

Regional consortia

National consortia

Local consortia

UQ
Australia

Oxfam

FAO

SRI-Rice
USA
2. Enhancing rural communities’ initiatives and development, and transfer of technologies

Practices evaluated and adapted
✓ SRI-D
✓ SRI-T
✓ CP
✓ Diversification (potato etc.)

22-25 farmers at each FFS site led by farmer’s trainer (FT)

Reached to other farmers in proximate communities (50,000)
3. Policies and strategies (from regional to local levels) to support family farmers & sustainability of rural livelihoods/communities

ASEAN Food Security Policy (2015-2020) recommended SRI and CA integrated agroecological practices to benefit smallholders under climate-smart initiative, however, there has not yet been much visible action taken on the ground.

Two key elements:

- Location-specific
- Connecting environment

Macroeconomic situation in all four countries
4. Innovation in HEIs curriculum to better address agroecology and family farming

**ENGAGE AND EVOLVE**

Interdisciplinary knowledge (cross-departmental collaboration) - Conventional departments receive more resources however there is interest evolving to initiate dedicated programmes in this direction

*Following areas could be explored:*

1. Joint research project for mapping out and identifying the gaps in the area of agroecology and sustainable food systems (Integrating TAPE in academic curriculum)
2. Establishing regional network of HEIs
3. Involve faculties in global and regional technical and policy consultation
4. Internship and fellowship programmes for masters and PhD students (engage students in FFS)
5. Gather consensus on innovations that have significant impact
6. Develop curriculum that helps to understand the growing demand for healthy and nutritious food
7. Link CSO/communities institutions with universities
8. Galvanize external funding support *(International donor community should align their support to facilitate such transition)*
Facilitated development of informal farmers group involving 15,000 farmers

- 15,000 farmers, 56% FPAR farmers were women
- ✓ 52% higher yields
- ✓ 70% higher net profit
- ✓ 64% higher labor productivity
- ✓ 59% higher water productivity (kg/m$^3$ of water)
- ✓ 75% higher fertilizer use efficiency
- ✓ 74% less seed
- ✓ 40% less fertilizer
- ✓ 34% less energy
- ✓ Less leaching loss of fertilizer
- ✓ More activity of soil biota
- ✓ 17% less GHG emission
- ✓ 77 ministries staff
- ✓ 16 researchers
- ✓ 30 project staff
- ✓ 10 students
- ✓ 9 faculties
- ✓ 5 training curricula
- ✓ 1 professional master degree course curriculum
- ✓ 4 national and 1 regional policy papers

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ Create connecting environment
✓ Engage and evolve
✓ Location and local-specific
✓ Collective action and co-creation
✓ Share, learn, reflect, adjust
✓ Work-in-progress