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
CONSIDERING AN ASIAN ACADEMIC (plus) NETWORK ON AGROECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS: University Sector Reflections

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OVERVIEW

1. **BACKGROUND:** Contributing to Consultation Outcome #3: “Building a multi-stakeholder alliance **facilitating the emergence of a regional network of academics and researchers** supporting food system transformation and family farming

2. **CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY** Regional Partnership Activities (2015-2020) on “**Higher Education for Sustainable Agriculture (HESA) and Food Systems in Southeast Asia**”

3. **FIVE PILLARS** for Mainstreaming Agroecology (AE) and Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) in Academia - Building on Common University Foundations

4. **ISSUES and DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** on facilitating a multistakeholder Asian regional network on AE and SFS
FAO Historical Contexts for Strengthening Asia-Pacific Agro-Ecological Education, Research & Extension

RECOMMENDATIONS from FAO Consultation, Bangkok 2015

Governments, decision-makers, technical and financial partners... in particular FAO, should:

• 7) **Integrate agroecology in the curricula** of both formal and nonformal primary and higher education institutions, in vocational training centers for producers, including farmer field schools, school farms, farmers’ trainings and school gardens...

The academic and research community should:

• 12) **Build a REGIONAL NETWORK of agroecology researchers**, involving CSOs and small-scale food producers and allow for learning from each other across countries,

**FAO SCALING-UP AGROECOLOGY INITIATIVE 2018 Concept:**

• To scale up agroecology, rural education and extension systems need to be strengthened... (including) knowledge **co-creation** which combines scientific knowledge with the knowledge of food producers...”

**References**


“Expert Group on Higher Education for Sustainable Agriculture (HESA) and Food Security in Southeast Asia”
(FIRST Summative Sub-Regional Symposium -18 Aug 2015 Chulalongkorn University)

HESA Pilot countries/Comparative Analysis
Policy Briefs produced for - Laos, Philippines and Thailand
http://www.siani.se/expert-groups/higher-education-sustainable-agriculture-hesa-southeast-asia/resources
Initial Outputs for LAOS, PHILIPPINES & THAILAND
3 Pilot Studies—Policy Brief Publications (2016)

HESA-SIANI Policy Briefs/Published Online
For Laos -- Philippines -- Thailand
http://www.siani.se/expert-groups/higher-education-sustainable-agriculture-hesa-southeast-asia/resources
ASEAN Technical Workshop REPORT
6-7 Dec 2017, Jakarta

ASEAN Technical Meeting and Multi-Stakeholder Policy Dialogue on Higher Agriculture Education, Research and Extension (ASEAN-HAERE) for Food Security and Sustainability in Southeast Asia. 6-7 Dec 2017, ASEAN Secretariat Jakarta

SUMMATIVE REGIONAL WORKSHOP: Scaling-up Agroecology in ASEAN Higher Education to Meet SDGs and Ensure Climate Resilience
Hosted by Maejo University, Chiang Mai, Thailand 26-27 June 2019

Main Co-sponsors: ALiSEA: Chula; OHEC; SEARCA and UNESCO
SUMMARY REPORT Available at https://ali-sea.org/online-library/
SUMMARY of Main Chula-HESA Networking Activities and Outputs with Academic Plus Partners (2015-2020)

Participants and Hosts to various national or regional events (2015-2020)

• At least 500 individuals (academics and administrators; farmer representatives, agricultural research centers; government officials, NGOs, UN agencies, and regional organizations
• National Workshops or Regional conferences co-hosted by institutional partners in 7 Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia; Laos, Indonesia; Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand; VietNam)

Main Donors and Contributing Cosponsors (over 5 years):

• Agroecology Learning alliance in South East Asia (ALiSEA)
• Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI)
• Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, Jakarta
• Chulalongkorn University (various academic units and project grants)
• Maejo University (MJU), Thailand (with) ASEAN Agriculture Universities Network (AAUN)
• Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) Thailand
• Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA). Swedish International Agriculture Network Initiative (SIANI) – Sida with Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
• United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Bangkok
• University of the Philippines, Los Banos

Main Outputs: Various Conference Proceedings, Reports, Policy Briefs and Academic Publications

Results: A loose (but not funded) academic network of individual experts and institutional partners on Higher Education for Sustainable Agriculture (HESA) and Food Systems across Southeast Asia
WORKING ASSUMPTION(s):
Mainstreaming Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems in Academia Building on Traditional University Pillars

Working Assumption: Effective mainstreaming of Agroecology and SFS in Academia requires significant (long-term) institutional reform and strategic planning

Academic Reforms ideally should build on Traditional Foundations (Common Pillars of Universities world-wide) to enhance Agroecology Knowledge uptake and Impacts through:

• 1. Curricula (and Teaching);
• 2. Scientific Research;
• 3. National and Campus policies;
• 4. University-based Extension; and
• 5. Institutional Assessment Research with Sustainability Reporting for SDGs

Source
PILLAR 1 – Curricula, Learning Resources and Teaching for Agroecology/SFS - Core Themes/Challenges

• **Typical AE/SFS curriculum** can include learning about Agroforestry, Organic Agriculture, Conservation Agriculture; Integrated Pest Management or Integrated Crop Management; System of Rice Intensification and allied approaches.

• **Critical thinking** and **problem-solving skills** are needed while learning AE content specialized theory and technical knowledge in agriculture or food systems studies.

• **AE/SFS values, content** and **perspectives** should be mainstreamed/integrated across other disciplines, research fields, and courses such as rural sociology, anthropology, engineering, business, education, politics, law, indigenous studies, gender studies, medicine, health policy, sustainability science/environmental studies, agronomy, mathematics, genetics, biology and more.

• **AE/SFS competencies** and **skills** should help students find or create decent **green agriculture or food system jobs** to genuinely serve rural and indigenous communities while protecting ecosystems.
PILLAR 2 - Scientific Research on AE Evidence, Partnerships and Learning

- **Multidisciplinary research** needs to better **inform critical debates** on how to “feed the world” and address AE critics conducting/synthesizing studies presenting reliable evidence on how AE can facilitate sustainable food systems (SFSs)

- **Social and sustainability sciences** need strengthening in agriculture research to achieve SDGs and scale-up AE

- **Scientific methodologies** should especially **include participatory AE research** with rural communities, indigenous peoples, peasant organizations, family farmers, women’s groups, youth or students, and others.

- **Scientific methodologies** should **prioritize understanding traditional knowledge systems, social-ecological relationships, and diverse learning processes** to inform **evidence-based policies** that encourage HEI reforms enabling AE transitions for SFS
PILLAR 3 - National and Campus Policies -
(Enabling AE for SFS Transitions)

- **Enabling policies and budgets** (national and campus-specific) for AE mainstreaming in HEIs are essential to counter or mitigate adverse effects of the currently unsustainable agri-food system.

- **New AE/SFS education investments** are vital to address multiple challenges on and off campus.

- Many issues need **policy support** to incentivize study and innovation to better design, promote and strengthen **AE/SFS alternatives** (particularly at field and rural community levels).

- Clearly defined and **incentivized (funded) policies** can help empower AE and scaling up best practices in new curricula, faculty teaching, research, campus sustainability in food services or procurement, extension services and more.
PILLAR 4 - University-based Rural Extension, Farmer Services and AE Evidence

• The classic Tripartite University Mission is Teaching, Research and SERVICE.

• (But) historically HEIs have grown to be urban-centric (unless mandated national agriculture colleges or universities) and have not well served rural communities

• A weakened public extension sector and privatization encourages agrochemical dependency and inadequate public investments in independent science or farmer extension services for AE/SFS alternatives

• The SERVICE Mission of universities needs strengthening to better support sustainable agriculture, rural youth or farmers for AE and SFS

• A new Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation, TAPE developed by FAO can help build evidence and collect data to encourage new knowledge co-creation with farmers on sustainable agriculture and multi-dimensional values of AE
Pillar 5: Institutional Assessment Research
(with Sustainability Impact Reporting to achieve SDGs)

• **Data needs to be systematically collected** on AE curriculum, learning resources, policies, enrollments and extension services including impacts on student career choice, communities, labour markets and society.

• Comparative AE data can be used as **evidence to inform academic administrators, policy makers, and curriculum developers**.

• **Educational, science and technology priorities for AE** by governments and international agencies need to be a priority in public investments and budgets.

• Some work has also begun among HEIs to study and **assess their progress on implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** including University Impacts.

• (But) **We need to better gather and analyze relevant AE data from HEIs to inform evidence-based policy dialogues** encouraging innovations and reforms in national public education, science and technology policies and budgets to achieve SDGs.
Practical Contexts and Challenges for Mainstreaming AE for SFS in Academia while Planning a Regional Network

Practical Contexts/Issues

- **Universities (and other HEIs) are independent bodies** with chartered mandates with historical traditions, and unique decision-making processes and bureaucratic structures implicating all FIVE PILLARS: Curricula/Teaching, Research, Policies, Services, and Reporting.

- **Clarification of Objectives/Goals Needed** for a Network, especially and specifically on **university roles** in AE/SFS leadership, reform and impact Assessments for their own institutions.

- **Importance of integrating Agroecology and Food System transformation goals in University Core Missions, Mandates, Policies, Planning processes and Budgets**

Governance and Membership

- **How can a University Agroecology/Food Systems Network function uniquely and independently for academic purposes**, AND include other research institutions, learning NGOs, farmer alliances, regional or international agency partnerships?
Preliminary Recommendations For Southeast Asia
(Adapted Summary from Chula-FAO Policy Brief 2021)

1. DEVELOP a Regional agroecology (AE) learning and research strategy for sustainable transformation of the Southeast Asian agri-food system linked to SDG outcomes
2. SURVEY/DOCUMENT agroecology and SFS activities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
3. SYNTHESIZE/UTILIZE RESULTS of empirical evidence about multiple values of agroecology and mobilize FAO’s new Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE).
4. MONITOR/EVALUATE agroecology policies, programs, curricula, research agendas and farmer-scientist partnerships and activities among the 6000 plus HEIs of the ASEAN region
5. CONVENE multi-stakeholder Evidence-based Policy Dialogues on the multi-disciplinary scientific bases for agroecology
6. FACILITATE AE transition and upscaling plans for the HEI sector in Southeast Asia based on 5 pillars: Curricula; Research; Extension; Policies; and Sustainability Assessments/Reporting
7. PILOT a Common AE Curriculum with ASEAN for selected HEIs including an introductory Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) for Southeast Asia
8. DESIGN/LAUNCH an updateable online, open-source data-base of AE Education and research
9. PUBLISH a high quality, evidence-based, peer-reviewed technical-analytical Report on the State of Agroecology Research, Learning and Extension in Southeast Asian HEIs
10. ESTABLISH/GROW a new Southeast Asian University Network on Agro-ecological Transitions. (with Farmer, NGO, International Agency, Research organization and other Partners)

Some Discussion Points on Next Steps: Establishing/Growing a University (Plus) Network on AE and SFS?

1. **OBJECTIVES.** What would be priority objectives of an Academic Network on Agroecology and Food Systems (e.g. information sharing, curriculum development, capacity building, policy dialogue, collaborative research, advocacy, etc.)?

2. **SECTORAL RELEVANCE.** Could a distinct University or HEIs Network be an independent academic body or sub-group, or working committee of a broader multi-sectoral alliance?

3. **CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES.** What are main challenges and clear opportunities for building an academic network to include/engage non-academic partners (e.g. farmer groups, agriculture research organizations, international agencies, etc.)?

4. **FUNCTION.** How would a new Network function (online platform, technical workshops, working groups, thematically focused discussion meetings, etc.)?

5. **GOVERNANCE.** How would a Network be organized, moderated and coordinated (host-lead organization and/or more diversified responsibilities for sub-committees, etc.)?

6. **FINANCE.** What donors/funding resources or partnership models/membership structures could support Resource Mobilization and long-term, sustainable financing of a network?

7. **OTHER ?????**