

Policy dialogue in ASSET (Sub Component 2.3):
a “bottom-up” policy dialogue process
(from local to national, then regional levels)

- Starting from a “bottom-up” documentation
on Success and Learning Stories in the field

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Success and Learning Stories in policy support to agroecology and safe food systems in South-eastern Asia

Preliminary remark: in ASSET project, “policy support” is understood in a broader sense, as any institutional mechanism some public authorities set up to support agroecological transition and safe food systems (see examples below).

“Success and Learning stories...” : identifying the best success **or** learning stories on policy support that have been already and effectively applied and that show tangible on-site effects.

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- ✓ Identifying best stories.
- ✓ Documenting them -> fill in first summarizing forms.

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Boosting Organic produce value-chain

Local certification of organic products: The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) Example of Lao PDR

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- Objectives of the mechanism/policy instrument** (<https://pgs.lfoam.bio/>):
 - Setting a mutual control process of organic production at local level, which is less burdensome and cost-intensive than a national inspection (usual third-party system).
 - Involving producer groups and local government offices in the control process
 - Developing capacity-building on organic production techniques and organic standards, and on participatory processes
 - Securing value chains for organic produce, and building trust of consumers
- Mechanism description**
 - Local PGS certification refers to the national organic standards, but adapted the certification process for a 'self' local implementation (see below). A first set of templates for PGS establishment has been developed, based on the templates and guidelines provided by IFOAM as a toolkit. The three PGS pilots have received these documents in order to adapt them for their own group. However, all PGS in Laos are expected to follow the national standards for organic agriculture or higher standards in order to qualify for certification.
 - Technical district staffs** (Agriculture and Forestry Office, Health Office, Industry and Commercial Office Natural of Resources and Environment) and **Farmer Organization Committees** are trained on organic standard and certificate systems, and to facilitate the farmers' involvement into the certification process.
 - Local Organization Committees:** farmers representatives are facilitated by **technical district staffs** to assess production systems (District Organic Certification); Farmers are in charge of documenting the production techniques, but not those from their own group (**mutual control**).
 - At village level, farmers are organised in **PGS groups** (between 4 to 15 households).
 - Department of Agriculture (DoA)**, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry certifies PGS groups with Laos Organic label. As for now, a PGS certified product in Laos uses the same logo as a product certified by the LCB.

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- Organic markets are set for PGS-certified farmers, at district and provincial level. These organic markets are set by the local governments, with **Technical district staffs'** help, and are managed by **Local Organization Committees**. PGS produce are also sold to local shops and restaurants.
- In **Southern** province, the price of the vegetables is decided in an open discussion between farmers of PGS groups and the consumers. In **Xiang Khouang**, local organisation Committees fix the prices.
- Communication and awareness process towards consumers by VT, Radio, Posters/brochure, Face book, community sound, sign and others.

Where can we notice effects? (Geographic focus/targeted area)

- Vegetables: Provinces of Xiengkhuang, Vientiane, Louangnamtha, **Southern**, Vientiane capital
- Dried bamboo: **Southern** province

Who is/are in charge of implementing?

- Trainers of Trainers (ToT):** Ngo **Southern**, **DoA**, Department of Agriculture (**DoA**), then already trained and experienced district staffs.
- Provincial and District technical staffs** (Agriculture and Forestry, Health, Industry and Commerce, and Natural Resource and Environment), once trained and coached.
- Local Organization Committees**, that brings together representatives of farmers organisations, local technical staffs (see above), and **ToT** staffs (NGO or **DoA**). Agricultural technical staff lead the district certification process then District offices approve it.
- Local Organization Committees** report to the national **Department of Agriculture (DoA)** that oversight and guidance the whole certification process.

National (DoA)	Provincial (PGS committees)	PGS operator (farmers)
Standard development and logo	PGS policy manual Quality management manual	PGS standard applied (at least meet to Laos National Organic Standard)
Development of criteria for PGS approval	PGS certification system (standard operating procedures)	PGS operating manual
Guidance for PGS registration and approval process		PGS work instruction
		Recording system

National structure for Participatory Guarantee Systems in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Source: FAO 2018)

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Funding source for the institutional set up:

Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), IFAD, Bread for the World (**DoA**), **Southern**, **DoA**, **DoA**, JICA,....

National and/or local policies which have enable the development and implementation of the initiative:

- Laos is one of the few countries in the Mekong Region which adopted national organic standards (No. 1665/MAF.DOA, December 30, 2005), established a third-party certification organism, the Lao Certification Body (LCB), as well as a Clean Agriculture Development Centre (CADC) to train organic agriculture stakeholders and disseminate sustainable practices. PGS are in this sense an additional tool to be tested in order to strengthen and expand an already existing organic sector at the national level.
- As regards PGS, Laoian government has a pro-active position since 2016, with a formal recognition of PGS as a tool for organic certification. It goes along with the production of national guidelines and a governmental control over the certification process. Pilot areas (see above) were selected by **Department of Agriculture (DoA)**, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, to implement a first phase of experimenting participatory guarantee system (PGS). **DoA** is actively involved in the establishment and the management of PGS groups
- Furthermore, Organic Agriculture is an official priority development in Xiengkhuang, Louangnamtha, and Vientiane provinces.
- Organic farmer's committee** is a national steering committee of **Lao Farmer Network (LFN)** supported by Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperative (DAEC-MAF).

Targeted beneficiaries and stakeholders:

- Farmers, consumers, and technical staffs that can train and lead farmers production.
- National bodies in charge of agricultural standard

Proven effects on agroecological transition and safe food systems (actually noticed in situ):

Communities where this initiative is taking place complained that pesticides were contaminating the rivers and soil, causing the loss of diversity including of animals, crops, and plants. Pesticide use was affecting their livelihood including mushroom collection in the forest, fish, and natural vegetables. This initiative seems to them solution for pesticide elimination.

The promoted techniques to achieve PGS standard are simple, require low investment and materials that are available at the local level. They proved to be effective in increasing productivity and quality which promotes health and protects the environment. Farmers sell their products at a higher price compared to previously. They built up strong farmer organizations to ensure knowledge sharing, coordinated production plan, and effective market operation.

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PGS in Lao PDR proves to be a certification option to help farmers to get cheaper and easier certification geared towards domestic markets. It is an option alongside with Internal Control System (ICS), which is the methodology applied by Third Party Certification (Lao Certification Body - LCB).

In **Southern** province, more than 70 million Kip are saved in the farmers' saving fund and 19 million Kip for an operational fund. More than 200 farmer experts have been developed by the initiative and provide training to around 13,130 farmers across the country.

Some farmers in **Southern** even become 'farmer teacher' to educate young people to become the next generation of organic farmers.

What has not worked? (Constraints and difficulties):

- PGS process is cheaper than a third-party one but need local technical staffs to be trained (financial support required) in order to facilitate the participatory process and the technical control.
- Establishing a national approval and certificate for PGS is an issue, as PGS certification process is adapted to each local context. It is often argued that PGS recognition by the government at the national level is a major stake for PGS development and spread across the country. However, it is worth questioning the meaning of "recognition", as it may help defining the scope of the government's action regarding such a grassroots and participatory system. In the case of Laos, this recognition of PGS at the national level goes along with a keen interest from the government to actively lead the experimental process of PGS across the country. This specific requirement can be explained by Laos' particularity that the **DoA** certifies PGS groups with Laos Organic label whereas in other country the PGS label can be more independent: PGS standards can be adapted from existing standards or fully elaborated by the group. Consequently, the leeway for adaptation to the Lao producers' constraints and needs is potentially limited.
- Referring to IFOAM definition of PGS, the PGS Committee should reflect the multi-stakeholder ambition of PGS with a core role given to the producers. In Laos' case, PGS certification entities government staff to be part of the Committee, while government staff may be more relevant in a strictly advisory role.

What are the required conditions before implementation? (Pre-requisites and enabling factors and environment)

- Farmers that are aware of environmental issues
- Consumers are aware of safe food issues
- Supporting the implementation of Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) groups requires facilitators to adopt innovative bottom-up approaches, since the core principles of PGS (IFOAM) bring back producers at the centre of the decision-making.
- Some trainers' staff (**ToT**) that can spread the facilitation capacities to other staffs (new methods and tools to be used by development practitioners in order to truly allow producers to be at the centre of decision-making)
- National Allowance to implement local certification process

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How long has the mechanism been in place? Is it still functioning? If no, duration period and funding source; if yes, has the institutional set up (and funding source) evolved compared to when it started? (Sustainability process):

Mechanism in place since 2009, and has been replicated and being replicated in Laos right now.

How to concretely achieve the same kind effects at the whole country level? (Scaling-up possibilities, conditions for implementation in other contexts):

- Mobilizing (and funding) skilled **ToT** staffs, with expertise **Q** on organic farming and local certification products (PGS); **IT** participatory approaches.
- Achieving National and local government commitments
- Convincing local staffs to improve their methods.
- In addition, establishing farmers' organizations would be useful.

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Boosting value-chains

A provincial fund to support agroecological transition:
The Conservation Agriculture Development Fund
Sayaboury province, Lao PDR

Contacts:Xayavong Chanthasome kentao.....

➤ Objectives of the mechanism/policy instrument:

The objective of the *Conservation Agriculture Development Fund* (CADF is to set a **financial tool at the provincial level**, inspired from Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) programmes. The CADF is a provincial fund that is initially feed by local taxes that would derive from the maize industry to sustain Sustainable Agriculture development (at the beginning it was focused on Conservation Agriculture development). More recently, additional funds for government budget. The fund is used to support the costs of an inter-sectorial support to agroecology transition, especially towards farmers, traders, and technical trainers: demonstration farm, credits, infrastructures like dryer houses, improving tools and machinery, other production costs, supporting traders’ associations, organizing collecting plans of products for exportation...

➤ Mechanism description (What are the main steps of the mechanism implementation trajectory?)

The Fund was created in 2008, with the institutional setup validated by the Governor of Sayaboury Province on 29/11/2007 (decree 2042/GN.SY) and the functioning modalities validated on 21/08/2008 decree 1468/GN.SY).

The CADF has been primarily funded by a 10 LAK per kilogram “tax” on the maize sold and exported out of the province, and can also receive inputs from diverse sources (e.g. private sector, international organizations or development projects (Article 12).

This tax has firstly been collected by the traders’ associations then district Commerce and Industry office (DoIC) has been in charge to collect money. 240,000 usd could be collected during the first two-year period, covering 10 districts.

The CADF is managed by a Secretariat of A Management Committee presided by the vice-governor

The fund can sustain activities and actions that support agroecological transition (Conservation agriculture until 2015):

- farmers’ credit to develop AE practices
- inputs and labour cost for demonstration activities
- local trader-collectors training on setting standard for export;
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➤ Are there been adjustments during the implementation process?

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The CADF was initially focused on Conservation Agriculture (CA)

In 2012, the Secretariat started pushing for having less money spent on demonstration sites and more on activities aimed at organizing maize producer groups and facilitating their interactions with traders on issues of production quantity and quality, credit and access to machinery.

In 2012-13, important issues emerged within the traders’ associations. As a reaction, in 2014, the CADF Management Committee transferred full responsibility for collection of the “maize tax” to the district Departments of Commerce and Industry, including responsibility for the accounting and financial management of the Fund.

Lastly, in 2020 Sayaboury provincial authorities issued an agreement notice that will increase sustainable financial sources, and objectives, of the Fund.....

➤ Where can we notice effects? (Geographic focus/targeted area)
Xiengkhuang and Champassak Provinces

➤ Who is/are in charge of implementing? (Implementing agency/ies)

- **Provincial authorities** decree the setting up of the Fund and its functioning.
- a **CADF management committee** brings together Districts technical staffs and stakeholders’ organizations (traders, then farmers in 2016) to yearly monitor the Fund implementation
- The **CADF secretariat** manage the fund implementation by the districts technical staff
- **District staffs** implement the Fund activities (tax collecting and working programs to support agroecological transition)

➤ Funding source for the institutional set up (international donors / government subsidies / current budget at national or local level):

French cooperation, government subsidiaries, provincial budget

➤ National and/or local policies which have enable the development and implementation of the initiative:

National policies allow to set traders organisations and farmers groups “only very few producer groups are actually structured and recognized by the district authorities. In the absence of established producer groups, farmers also tend to lack coordination in front of traders.” Provincial policies to set the taxes.

➤ Targeted beneficiaries and stakeholders:

Traders, Farmers, agricultural staffs that can train and lead farmers production, and staffs of

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➤ Proven effects on agroecological transition and safe food systems (actually noticed in situ):

The overall revenues of the CADF have been relatively stable – between 120,000 and 140,000 USD per year, although fairly variable from one district to another.

Each year, through their participation in the CADF, members of the traders’ associations have been able to access to tax-free seeds, machinery In 2011 for instance, the CADF Secretariat has coordinated with Thai providers to import without tax a total of 1.26 tons of hybrid maize seeds. Traders could then provide the seeds to farmers through low interest credit schemes.

➤ What has not worked? (Constraints and difficulties)

Drops in revenues for the CADF are directly linked to exportation shifts. In these situations, with few storage plants, a major part of the production can be exported illegally or sold to intermediates within Laos, with very limited monitoring and hence taxation of the transactions.

More generally, the amount of “tax” collected appears extremely low when compared to what could be expected considering

➤ What are the required conditions before implementation? (Pre-requisites and enabling factors and environment)

Setting taxes at the provincial level is allowed.

A profitable value chain exists (to be taxed)

Farmers and traders are aware of agroecological transition issues

➤ How long has the mechanism been in place? Is it still functioning? If no, duration period and funding source;:

Since 2008, and still on going. The fund is supported by government subsidiaries and additional funds from.

➤ How to concretely achieve the same kind effects at the whole country level? (Scaling-up possibilities, conditions for implementation in other contexts):

Districts DoIC should be in charge of collecting the tax.

Monitoring and evaluation system

Capacity building of district agencies

Enhancing the participation and negotiation capacity of farmers

Identifying ways to better support and engage traders,

Success and Learning Stories in policy support to agroecology and safe food systems in South-eastern Asia

- ✓ Identifying best stories.
- ✓ Documenting them -> fill in first summarizing forms.
- ✓ Share, discuss, and analyse them between *us* (bottom-up process from local to regional levels)
- ✓ Reflecting on potentialities for adaptation and implementation into the flagship context
- ✓ Reflecting on integrating some into advocacy approach

THANK YOU

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