Agroecology & Markets

What have we learned?
How can we move forward?

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WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?
What is agroecology?

- Need to **improve the sustainability of agriculture** by focusing on:
  - various dimensions: agronomic, environmental, social, economic, ethical,
  - various scales: plot/field, farm, landscape, whole food system.
Objectives of agroecology

- produce diversified and high-quality food,
- reproduce (or even improve) ecosystem fertility,
- limit the use of non-renewable resources,
- avoid contaminating the environment and the people,
- contribute to the fight against global warming
# The changing scope of agroecology

<table>
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<th>Plot</th>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Food System</th>
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<td><strong>New farming practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>Exchanges with the surrounding environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Design and management of sustainable food systems</strong></td>
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| • Efficient use of natural resources  
• Improved nutrient recycling  
• Enhanced diversity in time and space  
• Health of soils, crops & livestock  
• Promotion of key ecological processes and services. | • Plant and animal communities  
• Food web interactions  
• Conservation biology in agricultural landscapes and agroecosystems | • Link between how food is produced and how it goes into the food system.  
• Resilience, participation, localness, fairness, and justice of the global food system. |

Environment ↔ Agriculture ↔ Food
A **food system** is a system that involves activities, social and institutional structures, and processes related to the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of food.

- Who and how many people are involved in the cycle from the farm to the fork?
- What are the **relations** between those who grow the food and those who receive and eat it?
Innovation

- **Not only** about technology.
- It may be the reorganization of institutions, organizations, value chains, businesses to enable actors to innovate on their own terms (Felt et al., 2007)
- What **kind of innovation** are we talking about?
  - trying intercropping, planting legumes to improve the soil,
  - diversifying / trying new crops,
  - growing products year round / supplying a consistent quality,
  - shifting to commercial agriculture,
  - setting-up / joining a cooperative / social enterprise,
  - signing a contract with a buyer,
  - creating short supply chains (box schemes, CSA)…
Bringing agroecology to markets

- **Farmers** willing to change the way they do farming and/or the way they interact with the rest of the food chain
  - environmental degradation (erosion, pollution),
  - rural development / employment (youth, women, minorities)
  - health and nutrition,
  - livelihoods.

- **Consumers** willing to buy products that have desired quality attributes (e.g., safe, fresh, nutritious, tasty, environmentally-friendly, organic, traditional).

- **Other stakeholders** (government, associations, enterprises, etc.)
ISSUE #1: CREATING TRUST
The problem with quality

- It is **easy** for me to find a **yellow** mango:
- It is **a little harder** for me to find a mango to eat:
  - like this...
  - or like that:
- It is **very difficult** for me to find an organic / fair trade / child-free labor / bird-friendly / farmer-grown... mango
Information asymmetries & market failures

Producer
with specific (AE) practices

• How to make sure the consumer knows that my product has the quality attributes that he and I value?

Information asymmetry

Consumer
willing to pay for the benefits of such practices

• How to make sure the quality attributes I value are present in the product?
Creating trust

- Personal Relationships
- Prices
- Reputation
- Brands/Private Labels
- Retailer
- PGS
- Third Party Certification + Label
ISSUE #2: ENCOURAGING INCLUSIVE LEARNING PRACTICES
Connecting people, getting organized

**Participatory guarantee systems:** to share knowledge, raise awareness and create trust;

**Farmers’ markets / Short supply chains:** to enable consumers and farmers to better know / understand each other;

**Eco-tourism initiatives:** to connect tourists to rural livelihoods / products;

**AE movement & Farmer-to-farmer exchanges:** to share knowledge, experiences, practices, seeds, etc.

**Platforms & networks** to generate collective knowledge and to encourage forums for deliberation, public debate, and the dissemination of knowledge.
Fostering awareness

Percentage of consumers who...

- Heard about organic agriculture: 57%
- Understood the meaning of organic agriculture: 43%
- Knew the organic logo: 25%
- Knew the meaning of the organic logo: 7%
- Knew about Lao organic standards: 4%
Fostering awareness

How can one tell a product is really organic?

- Farmer: 70%
- Organic label: 53%
- Appearance: 29%
- Higher price: 19%
- Organic market: 15%
ISSUE #3: SHARING VALUE(S)
Agro-ecology in a food system approach

- Food sovereignty
- Autonomy
- Empowerment
- Local employment
- Community development
- Diversification of activities
- Improvement of soil
- Water conservation
- Higher biodiversity
- Lower dependence & vulnerability
- Improved food quality and nutrition
- Improved awareness
- Improved food quality
- Better recognition of farmer role
- Equity
- Fair sharing of value
- Sharing of information / interaction
What is the true cost of AE products?

**Conventional (plantation) banana**

- **Input costs**
  - fertilizers,
  - pesticides,
  - plastic sheets,
  - ...

- **Pollution of soil**
  - chemical residues
  - fertility loss
  - plastic

- **Pollution of rivers & groundwater**
  - Less fish
  - Other crops

- **Health costs**
  - workers,
  - population,
  - consumers

**Costing negative externalities**

- Cost of restoring the land (fertility, banana trunks, plastic),
- Cost of treating sick workers & nearby population and consumers,
- Cost of human life (death of workers),
- Cost of cleaning the water for other uses,
- Cost of unsustainable livelihoods,
- Cost of forgone opportunities (Fusarium)...

**AE banana (Klouay nam)**

- Low input use
- Low GHG emissions
- Traditional farming
- Local varieties
- Excellent taste
- Nutritious & affordable
Sharing values may require special market intermediaries / relations

- **Not only for profit enterprises**
- **Social enterprises:**
  - explicitly aim to benefit the community;
  - launched by a group of citizens;
  - decision-making power is not based on capital ownership;
  - participatory nature, which involves the persons affected by the activity;
  - limited profit distribution

- **Committed intermediaries**
- **Specific mechanisms** to help large companies commit (CSR, C)
MOVING FORWARD
Potential limits to the expansion of AE practices

- **Farmers’ ability:**
  - to keep taking risks or to share them with others,
  - to negotiate fair prices to reward their efforts towards adopting new practices,
  - to develop / strengthen newly established market linkages,
  - to follow new requirements (quality, reporting, regularity, etc.),
  - to overcome poor enabling environments,
  - to retain their autonomy (diversify).

- **Limited awareness of all stakeholders**

- **Limited potential of niche markets**
Creating an enabling environment

- Policies
  - Tax exemptions
  - Infrastructure
  - Subsidies
  - Access to credit
  - Collective action
  - Risk sharing contracts
  - Secured land & farmers rights
  - Criteria for fair contracts
  - Clear system of standards
  - Campaigns to promote AE
  - Recognition of social enterprise
  - Green procurement
  - Eco-tourism

Criteria for fair contracts:
- To encourage risk taking
- To reduce costs
- To create trustful / mindful markets
- New outlets for AE products

To encourage risk taking:
- To encourage risk taking

To reduce costs:
- To reduce costs

To create trust:
- To create trust

Other strategies:
- Collective action
- Risk sharing contracts
- Secured land & farmers rights
- Criteria for fair contracts
- Campaigns to promote AE
- Recognition of social enterprise
- Green procurement
- Eco-tourism
THANK YOU VERY MUCH