



An Agroecological Laos by 2040

Position Paper

October 2023

AGROECOLOGY

Agroecology is a science, a practice and a social movement that applies ecological and justice principles to the design and management of sustainable and fair food systems.

TOC WORKSHOP IN LAO PDR

- 👉 Date: 18-19 October 2022
- 👉 59 participants, including 26 women
- 👉 25 CSOs, 3 NGOs, 4 research centers, 4 Governmental bodies represented at the ToC workshop.
- 👉 One national transition pathways to Agroecology future toward 2040 co-constructed and endorsed.

II. AGROECOLOGY DYNAMICS IN LAO PDR

In Laos, family farming has occupied a central role in the sustainable development of the agricultural sector, while agroecology has been at the heart of cultivation systems. However, traditional Lao production systems are now being challenged by the emergence of national and regional dynamics for agriculture intensification.

In 2023, the structure of the Lao economy is heavily resource-based, which implies heavy damages to environment and increases inequality gap between urban and rural populations. Foreign Direct Investment have been strongly promoted to achieve poverty reduction and in this context two competing forces are now driving agricultural policies in Laos.

On the one hand an urgency to reduce poverty and a believe that this is best achieved through commercial and industrial agriculture led toward the development of large scale concessions for commercial plantations of rubber, cassava, sugar, eucalyptu. This rapid expansion of commercial plantations and contract farming is resulting in a rapid loss of diversity and a steep increase in the use of chemical inputs.

On the other hand, a global awareness of industrialized agriculture's risks on health and environment leads to the promotion of "clean" and "smart" production methods in Laos, especially for independent or subsistence farmers.

In response to these challenges, Lao PDR has been adopting a range of policies promoting clean agriculture, including organic, GAP, non-chemical and natural agriculture. A growing



I. DRAWING PATHWAY FOR AGROECOLOGY IN LAO PDR

This paper presents the findings from the National foresight and Theory of Change workshop held in Vientiane in 2022. The workshop was organized as part of the ASSET project to further engage activities into a transformative approach and foster a sense of belonging to a common vision for agroecology and safe food systems, as well as to strengthen ALiSEA as a coalition and community of practices. The findings of this workshop were then presented and consolidated during the ALiSEA General Assembly workshop.

number of actors, including Lao CSOs, are now getting mobilized to open another way for the development of agriculture, based on agroecology principles.

Currently, key elements of the agroecology transition in Laos already receive some attention from public and private sectors in Laos:

- 🌿 Adoption of agroecology practices at farm & field levels;
- 🌿 Environmental preservation related to biodiversity and resource preservation;
- 🌿 Nutritional aspects and healthy diets;
- 🌿 Food Quality and Safety Standards.

However, other aspects of the transition are left behind, with limited visibility and engagement. These include social & economic dimensions of agroecology, such as promotion of family-farming, fair trade and direct linkage between producers and consumers. Synergies and collaboration between stakeholders remain limited, as well as policy implementation for the transition. Importantly, a holistic approach to agriculture linking production, processing, distribution, awareness of consumers, cooperation between actors is still to emerge at larger scale, as agroecology is addressed through sectorial approaches and technical aspects.

While a growing number and diversity of actors are getting engaged in the movement, agroecology scale up in Laos still encounters important challenges. Commercial plantations and contract farming continues to develop, while human resources are diverted from the agricultural sector as the young generation is leaving for other sectors. The implementation of policies promoting agroecology principles at sub-national level remains challenging. In this context, how to spread agroecology at a large scale in Laos? The ASSET project aimed at working on the co-construction of national pathways to address this question, while building a shared vision to unite efforts. This was done through a collective workshop gathering key agroecology actors in Laos, with active participation of the members of the ALiSEA network.

III. CURRENT OBSTACLES, OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE TRENDS

Building on a methodological approach rooted in the ImpresS ex ante framework (*Blundo Canto and De Romemont, 2020; [#### ALISEA NETWORK IN LAO PDR](https://impress-impact-</i></p>
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The Agroecology Learning Alliance in South East Asia (ALiSEA) aims to enable local and regional agroecology stakeholders to leverage one another's expertise to produce evidence-based studies and share them broadly to support a regional transition towards agroecology. In Laos, it gathers 65 members from different backgrounds and approaches to Agroecology. It is quite unique by its diversity of stakeholders (CSOs and NGOs, Farmer organizations, Research & Academia, Private Sector, Government), its broad geographical focus (Greater Mekong Sub-Region).

recherche.cirad.fr) and adapted to the goals and configurations set for this ToC development under ASSET project, a first step of the co-construction process has been the identification of the key trends, obstacles and opportunities for the transition to Agroecology in Lao PDR.

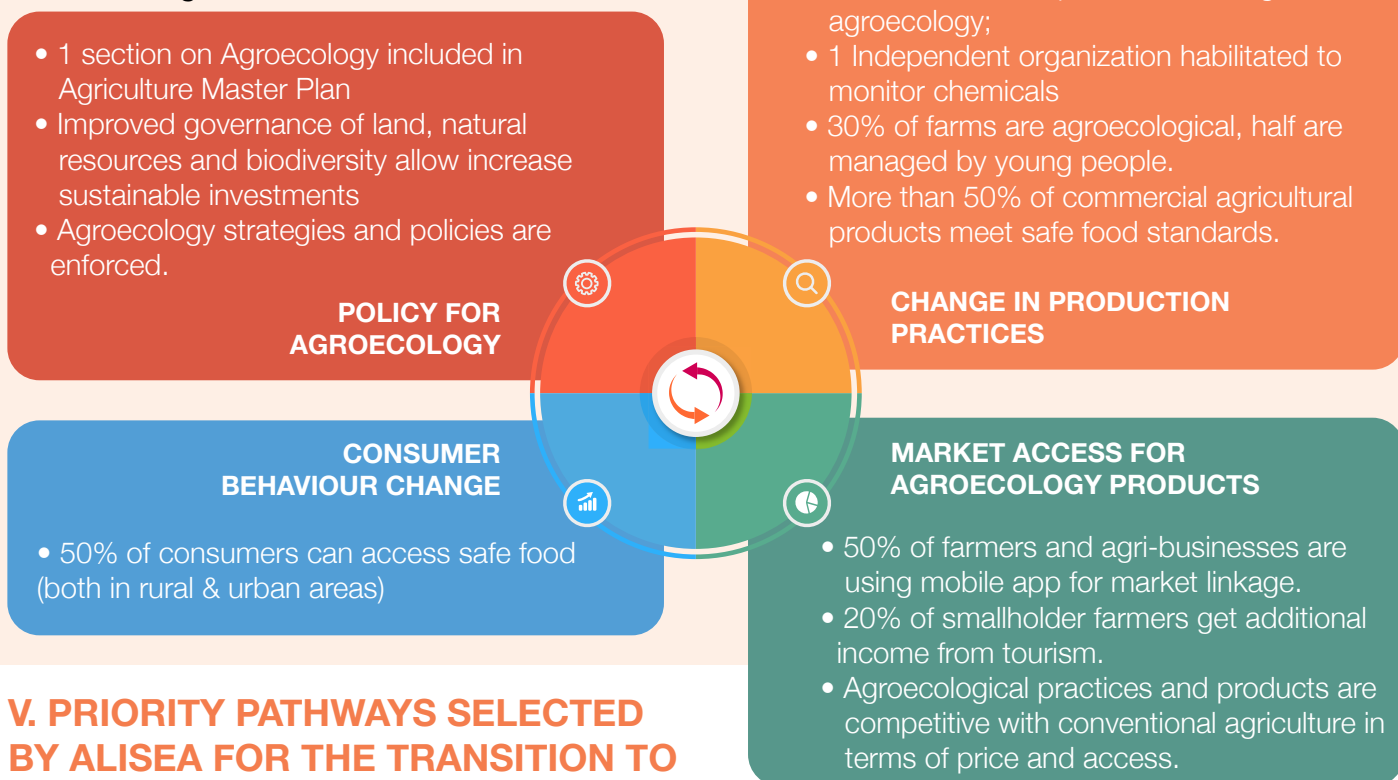
By analyzing the current system, agroecology stakeholders can strategically plan to overcome and address obstacles, while playing on opportunities and trends favorable to the transition.

The following key obstacles, trends and opportunities for the transition to agroecology in Lao PDR were identified by the Workshop's participants:

OBSTACLE	Policy gap on agroecology; High cost of agroecological products due to high transportation, inputs and production costs; Limited technical capacity of smallholders on AE, Safe Food, certified, post harvest, processing and marketing; Poor chemical use management and laws enforcement
OPPORTUNITY	Abundant and rich natural resources; Increased knowledge on international AE dynamic and interest of young and women people in AE; Improved access to information for farmers and consumers; Clear decree on cooperative and Producer Groups.
TREND	Increased interest and local initiatives for Agroecology tourism and local consumers; Increased interest of consumers in organic products due to food safety and health concerns; Policy design for support to intensive agriculture (limitation).

IV. A FUTURE VISION FOR AGROECOLOGY IN LAO PDR BY 2040

As a second step, the participants to the workshop collectively designed a future vision for the Lao agriculture sector by 2040. By selecting key targets, they could agree on shared objectives and draw a collective target for transition actions.



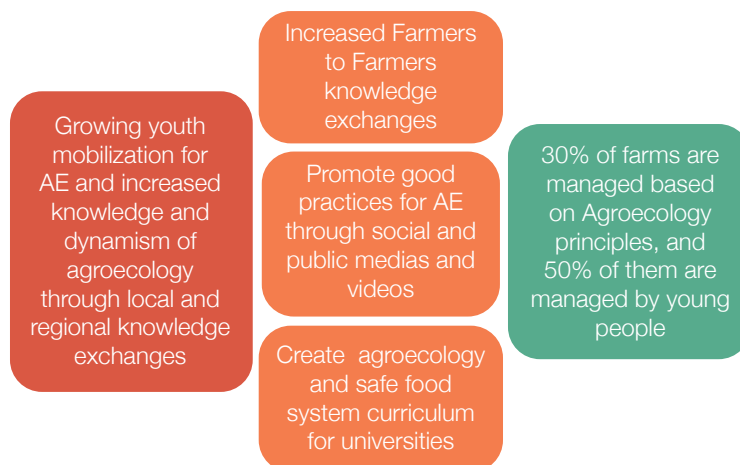
V. PRIORITY PATHWAYS SELECTED BY ALISEA FOR THE TRANSITION TO AGROECOLOGY IN LAO PDR

The Lao Agroecology stakeholders linked the opportunities and trends to the mapped objectives, thus creating coherent pathways for the transition, with practical actions to be implemented to achieve the desired change. A total of 9 pathways to drive the transition in Lao PDR were constructed.

During the General Assembly of the ALiSEA network in Lao PDR, ALiSEA members in Laos prioritized 3 pathways, which were deemed to be the highest priority and were anticipated to have the highest transformative power over the short term. The 3 pathways voted and prioritized during the General Assembly were the following:

(1) The first pathway aims at raising the mobilization of the youth for the transition.

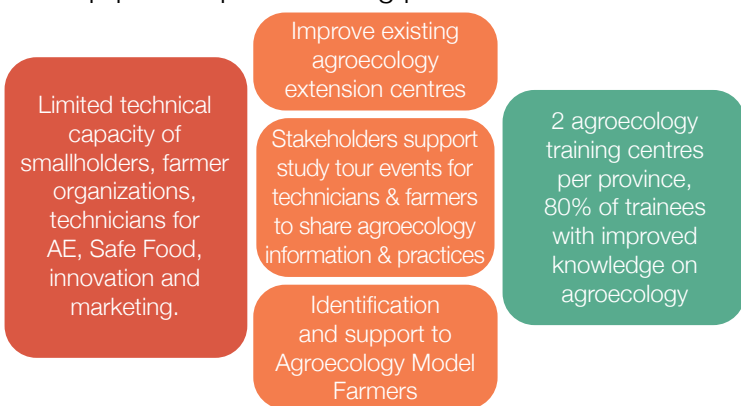
This transition will benefit from actual trends, which show a growing interest for agroecology amongst young people and regional dynamics for learning and exchange. The transition will however require further knowledge exchanges, promotion of good practices through social media, and the development of agroecology curriculum.



(2) The second pathway selected focuses on increased technical knowledge and capacities of smallholder farmers, Farmer Organizations and technicians on agroecology production and marketing.

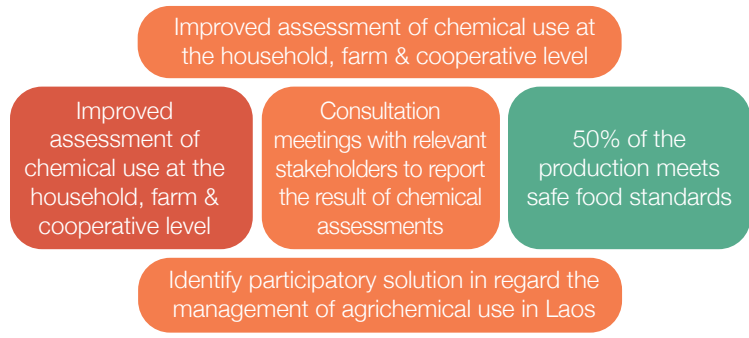
In order to achieve this improvement of knowledge and capacities, it is necessary to improve the teaching and extension capacities in agroecology of existing learning centers. A diversity of agroecology stakeholders (Farmers Organizations, NGOs, CSOs and private sectors) should support study tours for

collective learning. Finally, Farmers to Farmers exchanges and valorization of model farmers would help peer to peer learning processes.



(3) The third pathway selected focuses on the reduction of chemical pesticides uses in the agriculture system, with 50% of the production that should meet safe food standards by 2040.

One key objective is the set-up of an independent organization responsible for chemical tests controls in Laos, as currently chemical tests based on international standards are operated abroad. In order to achieve this objective, the privileged solution is to set-up a control system through which local authorities as well as development partners can measure the chemical levels in the food produced, organize regular consultation meetings on pesticides reduction and identify participatory solutions for improved management.



VI. NEXT STEPS FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF STAKEHOLDERS FOR AGROECOLOGY TRANSITION IN LAO PDR

The shared vision built through a co-construction process will allow the Lao Agroecology stakeholders to design collective actions for the transition and will drive their strategy for policy dialogue.

In the framework of the ASSET project and ALiSEA network, the 9 designed pathways to the transition will:

- 🔥 Guide the design of the ALiSEA national action plan;
- 🔥 Inspire members' own strategy;
- 🔥 Support and guide members in the development of project proposals;
- 🔥 Guide the priority topics for the next Small Grant Call for proposal under ALiSEA network.



Source: ASSET, 2022. Report of the National foresight and theory of change workshop in Laos, 18-19 October 2022, in Vientiane. Agroecology and Safe Food System Transitions (ASSET) project.

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GROW SUSTAINABLY, EAT HEALTHY,
ADOPT AGROECOLOGY

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