

Project objective

The overall objective of the ASSET project is to transform food and agricultural systems in Southeast Asia into more sustainable, safer and inclusive systems by harnessing the potential of agroecology. This will be achieved through strengthening and synergizing initiatives contributing to Agroecological and Safe food System Transitions (ASSET) from local to regional levels.



© Germain Priour, Cambodia

Background

The agricultural sector of Southeast Asian countries is at a crossroads between conventional agricultural models that rely heavily on chemical inputs and capital and innovative agroecological systems. Continuous intensification of the former is leading to a simplification of agricultural landscapes, land degradation and biodiversity depletion, and increased health risks for farmers and consumers. Moreover, beyond food and nutrition security, food safety is a rising concern, especially in relation to high pesticide residues, and to the contamination of soils and aquifers.

A main challenge for the research and development community is generate and share contextualized knowledge to support the transition from a relatively standard and simple Green-Revolution based model of intensification, to a mosaic of production models (agroforestry, crop-livestock integration, crop-diversity, conservation agriculture, etc.) with increasingly diverse and strengthened connections to safe food system, including domestic and export value-chains.

The theory of change to achieve the objectives

The ASSET project aims to develop and promote a shared vision of Agroecology and Safe Food System Transitions in South East Asia through a comprehensive approach that includes research, networking, policy advocacy, capacity development, awareness raising and communication. It will engage with governments, civil society and the private sector (including small producers) to generate and transform knowledge into sustainable innovation processes and transformative policies, sensitive to youth and gender equality.



© VAAS, Vietnam

It will build upon 1) research for development processes, 2) the Agroecology Learning Alliance in Southeast Asia (ALiSEA¹) and 3) the ASEAN Lao facilitated Initiative for a regional Coaching of Agroecological transitions in South East Asia (LICA), to support technical, organizational and institutional innovations at territorial level in flagship programs and consolidate pathways towards bringing innovative approaches to scale. It will better link agricultural and market transformations and mainstream innovative approaches and their enabling conditions into policy frameworks at national and regional levels.

¹ <https://ali-sea.org/>

The project draws on an integrated approach to tackle a variety of levers of the agro-ecological and safe food system transitions within three overlapping spheres of influence, namely the public sphere (consumers and citizen demands for safe agro-ecological products), the policy sphere (enabling environment at national and regional levels), and the technical and economic sphere (scaling-up agroecological and safe food system innovation from the local to the regional levels) as evident from fig. 1 below.

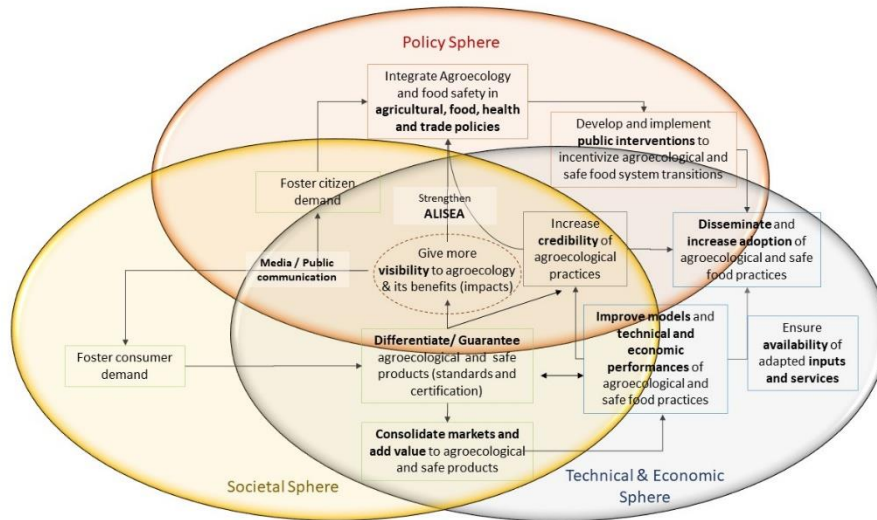


Fig 1. The spheres of influence and levers to be activated in the ASSET project

By the end of the project, innovation processes at territorial level are strengthened in flagship sites in the four countries; and robust evidences on their performances and impacts inform scaling up strategies and political processes at larger scales. The Agroecology Learning Alliance in South-East Asia (ALiSEA) becomes a fully autonomous member-managed network and knowledge hub supporting agroecology and safe food system transitions. The ALiSEA Knowledge Hub is a major resource to synergize stakeholders' engagement and initiatives to achieve ASSET objectives up to the regional level. Policy dialogue at national and regional levels (notably ASEAN level) is fostered and strengthened to better integrate sectorial issues (i.e. agriculture, poverty alleviation and rural development, food safety, trade and regional integration) and support agroecology and safe food system transitions.

Main activities

Activities under Component 1 (see fig. 2) will consist in extending, structuring and consolidating the governance of the ALiSEA network. ImpresS (IMPact of REsearch in the South) *ex ante* methods will be adapted in combination with other Theory of Change approaches to formulate with large multi-stakeholder groups a shared vision and plausible nested impact pathways of the agroecology and safe food system transitions, at flagship, national and regional levels. These nested Theory of Changes will be elaborated and monitored during the course of the project. The shared vision of ASSET pathways that they will contribute to build will support the extension and structuring of the ALiSEA network into an open coalition of farmer organizations, policy makers, value chain operators, and research and development actors. A knowledge Hub will be developed through upgrading the current ALiSEA's online platform, integrating into the platform the data and knowledge generated by the project and building strong connections with other existing platforms on related topics such as FAO's Agroecology Knowledge Hub. An overall multimedia communication, visibility strategy and capacity development



will be conducted towards a variety of targeted audience, including broad based public awareness events, journalists field day, and MOOC on agroecology.

In each selected flagship site chosen through a participatory approach, under Component 2 (see fig. 2) in the 4 target countries, the shared vision of the transitions built through the above described methodology will be used for planning and monitoring action research activities at territorial level. Actions research will support innovations which can include on-farm or on-station experiments, post-harvesting processing, waste management, land use planning, access to services and markets, quality management, branding and certification, marketing. Private public partnerships at the farm, value chain and flagship territory levels will be enhanced. Particular attention will be paid to identify and address the specific constraints of women and young for the adoption of agroecological and safe food practices. Action-research activities will serve to understand better innovation processes and assess a variety of mechanisms underlying the co-design and dissemination of agroecological, inclusive and safe value chain practices in multiscale approaches. The initial Theory of Change (ToC) will be developed upon a range of participatory tools and help define collectively responsibilities and contributions of each partner and engaged stakeholders to the global strategy and related activities. In complement to the knowledge generation processes, capacities of local stakeholders will be strengthened and scaling up processes supported. A joint collective partner effort will lead to a common broad-based methodological framework to assess the performances, impacts and enabling conditions of innovations and pathways to the agroecology and safe food system transitions. That common framework will be revised throughout the project implementation through learning loops, i.e. through cyclical collective reflections on the project results, achievements and pitfalls. Flagship achievements and lessons learnt will support collective learning, and cross-fertilization of knowledge, within, across and beyond the target territories. Knowledge generation from flagship to regional levels will feed into and be fostered by multi-stakeholder policy dialogue implemented at multiple scales, (i.e. at local level through the flagship sites, at national and at ASEAN levels).

Organization

In line with the above, the project activities will be structured into two operational components organized into three sub-components or workpackages each as summarized in the Figure 2 below.

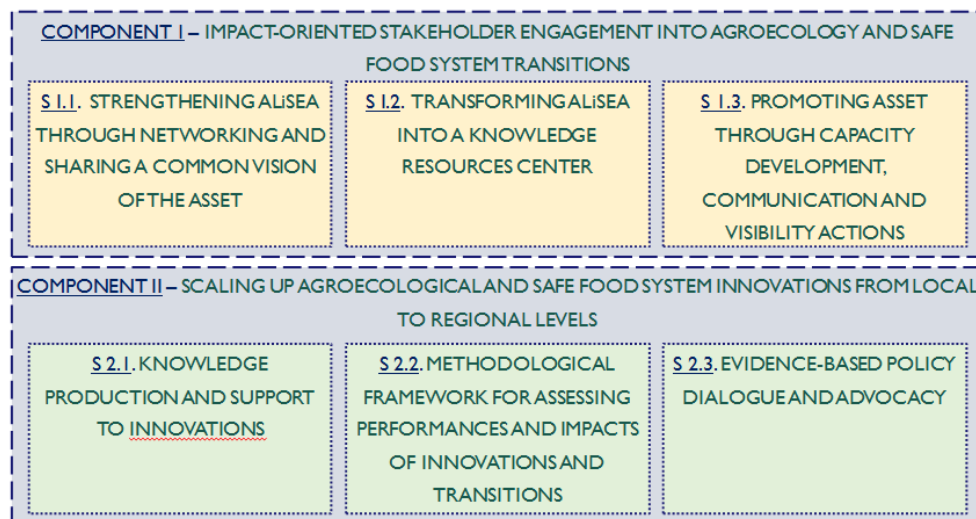


Fig 2. ASSET project structure

The project will be piloted by a coordination unit consisting of the overall project coordinator and two scientific coordinators. An Executive Committee, including the six sub-Component leaders and the



coordination unit, will review progress across the project and ensure effective interaction and collaboration between sub-Component and complementary activities. The project Steering Committee will involve members of the Executive Committee, representatives from AFD and the EU, a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos PDR, from the ALiSEA networks in the 4 countries, and a representative from each consortium partner; it will monitor and help planning the project implementation annually. This governance structure will be completed by an independent Advisory Committee drawn from key transformative actors (internationally recognized experts, representatives of funding agency...) to support the project in reviewing strategic outputs, outcomes and orientation, and in fine tuning and disseminating key messages.

Implementing organization

The project is coordinated by the GRET in a strong articulation with the CIRAD, which is in charge of the scientific coordination.

Partners

National Partners

Laos PDR

- ✓ Department of Policy and Legal Affairs (DoPLA)
- ✓ Department of Agricultural Land Management (DALAM)
- ✓ National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI)
- ✓ National University of Laos (NUoL)

Cambodia

- ✓ General Directorate of Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (GDA/MAFF)
- ✓ Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC)

Myanmar

- ✓ Department of Agricultural Research of the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Irrigation (DAR/MoALI)
- ✓ Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Irrigation (DoA/MoALI)
- ✓ YEZIN University

Vietnam

- ✓ Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD)
- ✓ National Institute of Animal Sciences (NIAS)
- ✓ Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS)

European Partners

- ✓ National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD - France)
- ✓ Mediaseeds (France)
- ✓ Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI - Sweden)
- ✓ Swisscontact (Switzerland)
- ✓ Louvain Cooperation and Eclasio, both members of Uni4Coop consortium (Belgium)
- ✓ University of Bern - Centre for Development and Environment (CDE - Switzerland)
- ✓ PIN-Educational and Scientific Services for the University of Florence (PIN – Italy)
- ✓ University of Hohenheim (Germany)

International Partners

- ✓ Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI)
- ✓ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- ✓ International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)
- ✓ International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
- ✓ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)



Other stakeholders

- ✓ The Agroecology Learning Alliance in South East Asia regional network (ALiSEA)
- ✓ Two platforms in partnership for research and training (dPs) *Agroecology for Southeast Asia (ASEA)*, *Sustainable food systems for cities in Asia (MALICA)*.
- ✓ The Lao facilitated Initiative for a regional Coaching of Agroecological transition in South East Asia (LICA)
- ✓ Researchers, professors and students
- ✓ Policy makers local to regional levels (different departments of Ministries of Agriculture, inter-sectorial level with Ministries of Environment, Higher Education, Finance, etc. and ASEAN)
- ✓ Farming communities including women and youth, service and input suppliers, private sectors, extension agents as well as consumers and citizens
- ✓ Journalists at local and national levels

Region

Laos PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam

Funding and co-funding

UE	€ 7,000,000
AFD	€ 5,000,000
Total budget	€ 12,000,000

Duration

6 years; October 2019 - September 2025



Implementing organizations:

National partners:

Lao PDR



Cambodia



Myanmar



Vietnam

