

ASSET - Agroecological and Safe food System Transitions in South East Asia

Objectives of the project

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



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Background



**Agroecology and
Safe Food System
Transitions**

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 to 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 promote a **shared vision of Agroecology and Safe Food System Transitions in South-East Asia** through a comprehensive approach, including action-research, networking, policy advocacy, capacity development, awareness raising and communication. It engages with governments, civil society, private sector and small producers to generate and transform knowledge into sustainable innovation processes and transformative policies, sensitive to youth and gender equality.



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It builds on 1) action-research for development processes, 2) the Agroecology Learning Alliance in Southeast Asia (ALiSEA¹), and 3) the Lao-facilitated Initiative on Agroecology for ASEAN (LICA), to support technical, organizational and institutional innovations at territorial level through the flagship

¹ <https://ali-sea.org/>

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programs and consolidate pathways towards bringing innovative approaches to scale up. It better links agriculture to market and mainstreams innovative approaches, as well as enabling conditions into policy frameworks at national and regional levels.

The ASSET project draws on an integrated approach to tackle a variety of levers of the agro-ecological transition and safe food system within three overlapping spheres of influence: (i) Public sphere (consumers and citizen demands for safe agro-ecological products), (ii) Policy sphere (enabling environment at national and regional levels), and (iii) Technical and economic sphere (scaling-up agroecological and safe food system innovation from the local to the regional levels).

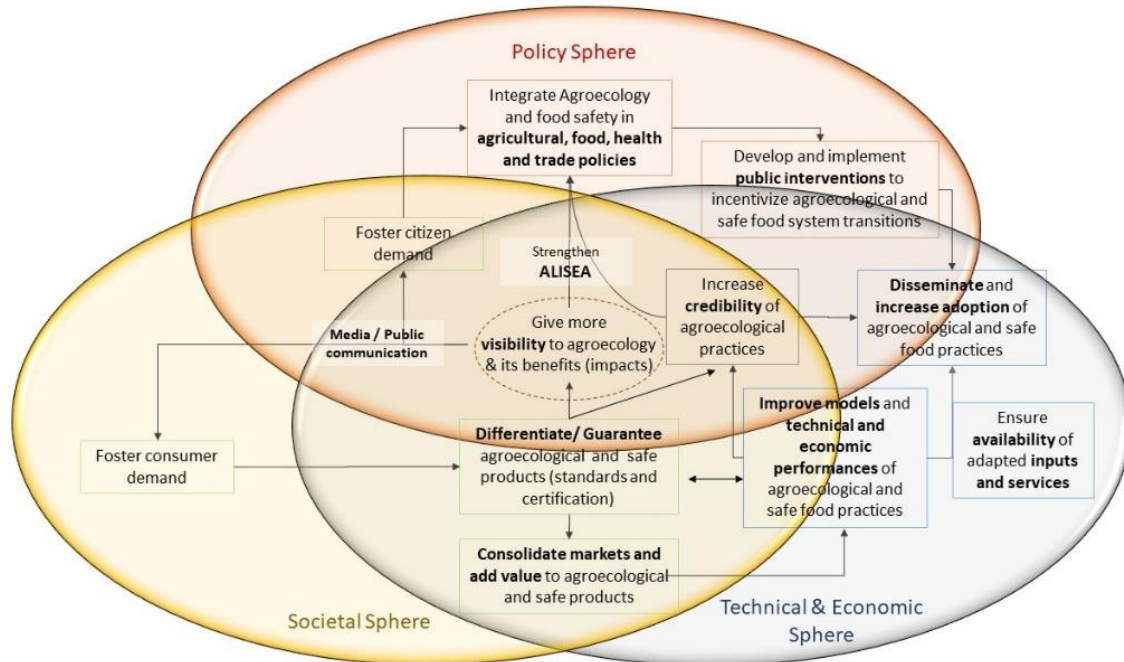


Figure 1. The spheres of influence and levers to be activated in the ASSET project

By the end of the project, innovation processes will be strengthened at flagship site level in three countries (Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam) and robust evidences on their performances and impacts will support strategy and political processes at larger scales. The Agroecology Learning Alliance in South-East Asia (ALiSEA) will become a fully autonomous member-managed network. The ALiSEA Knowledge Hub will become a major resource to synergize stakeholders’ engagement and initiatives at the regional level. The policy dialogue at national and regional levels (notably ASEAN level) will be fostered, strengthened, better integrate sectorial issues (i.e. agriculture, poverty alleviation, rural development, food safety, trade and regional integration, etc.) and support the agroecology and safe food system transition.

Main activities

The project activities are structured into two operational components and three sub-components as summarized in the Figure 2 below.

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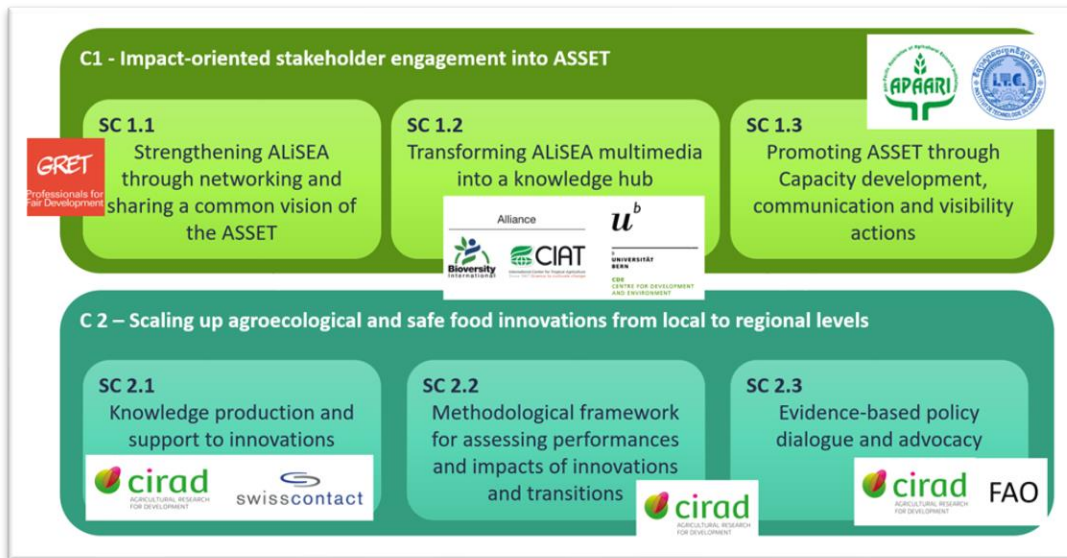


Figure 2. ASSET project structure

Activities under **Component 1** (see fig. 2) consists in extending, structuring and consolidating the governance of the ALiSEA network. ImpresS (IMPact of RESearch in the South) *ex ante* methods are being 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 are being elaborated and monitored during the course of the project. The shared vision of pathways supports 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 is being developed through the upgrading of the current ALiSEA's online platform with a view to integrate the data and knowledge generated by the ASSET project and other existing platforms, for example the FAO's Agroecology Knowledge Hub. An overall multimedia communication, visibility strategy and capacity development plan is being conducted with large targeted audiences, including broad based public awareness events, journalists field day, and Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on agroecology.

In each selected flagship site chosen through a participatory approach, under **Component 2** (see fig. 2) in the three countries (Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam), the shared vision of the Agroecology transitions built on the Theory of change methodology are used for planning and monitoring actions-research activities at territorial level. Action-research to support innovations 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, and marketing. Private public partnerships and value chains at flagship level are being enhanced. Particular attention is paid to address the specific issues related to women and young on the adoption of agroecological and safe food practices. Action-research activities serve to understand better innovation processes and to assess mechanisms of co-designing and dissemination of agroecological practices and inclusive and safe value chains with multiscale approaches. The Theory of Change has been developed based on participatory tools to define collectively responsibilities and contributions of each partner and stakeholders in the global strategy and related activities. In complement to the knowledge generation processes, capacities of local stakeholders are being strengthened and scaled up. A joint collective effort of partners led to a common broad-based methodological framework for assessing the performance, impacts, enabling conditions of innovations, and pathways to the agroecology transitions and safe food system. This common framework is being revised during the project

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implementation through learning loops, i.e. through cyclical collective reflections on the project results, achievements and pitfalls. Flagship achievements and lessons learnt are expected to support the collective learnings and the cross-fertilization of knowledge in target territories and beyond. Knowledge generation from flagship is expected to feed into the policy dialogue at multiple scales from local level (through the flagship sites) to national and ASEAN level.

Results to date (31 December 2022)

Since the start of its implementation in October 2019, the project has made good progress in both its components. Some Strategic Orientations Plans (SOP) have already overpassed their objectives, for instance, the total number of people whose climate resilience (SOP 2) is increased.

The project impact on the stakeholder engagement in agroecology and the safe food system (Component 1) achieved significant outcomes. The number of ALiSEA network members increased since 2019 and reached nearly 200 members in 2022, ensuring large representativeness of local NOGs, research institutes, universities and private sector in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Myanmar. Around 1,500 people visit the ALiSEA website per month. Capacity building of ALiSEA board members has benefitted from various training sessions between 2021 and 2022. A small grant facility gave an opportunity to seven (in 2022) and ten (in 2023) projects to be implemented by ALiSEA members, reinforcing their capacities at the same time.

Regarding the project activities on scaling up agroecological and safe food innovations from local to regional level (Component 2), action-research activities, thematic training programs and other priority activities under the flagship Theory of Change (ToC) strategic and vision documented in 2021 were launched in three flagship sites in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Key activities were implemented in 2022 and 2023, such as ToC and flagship workshops to produce Action Plans, field activity monitoring system elaboration using e-MON (co-designing of an e-monitoring system for ASSET), and broad-based household surveys in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

At the policy dialogue and advocacy level, analyses of policy documents and case studies were conducted in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam and presented at different political platforms, such as dissemination and consultation workshops in 2022 in Lao PDR and Vietnam. In Cambodia, the revision of the 5-year commune development plan was undertaken with local policy partners and ASSET supported the Cambodia Conservation Agriculture Sustainable Intensification Consortium (CASIC) platform. At the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) level, discussion with the ASEAN Secretariat continued on the role and responsibility of the Lao facilitated Initiative on Agroecology for ASEAN (LICA) in the ASEAN sector working group on crops and on the preparation of ASEAN policy guidelines to support the Agroecology transition.

Organization

The overall and day-to-day works of the project is managed by a Coordination Unit, consisting of a project coordinator and two scientific coordinators. An Executive Committee, including the six sub-Component leaders and the Coordination Unit, is responsible for reviewing the project progress and ensuring an effective interaction and collaboration between sub-Component activities and complementary activities. The Project Steering Committee involves members of the Executive Committee, representatives from funding agencies (Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and European Union (EU)), representatives from line Ministries and ALiSEA board members in the countries of intervention, and representatives from project partners, monitors the project implementation and validates its annual work plan and budget. An Advisory Committee consisting of key actors (i.e. recognized experts, representatives of funding agencies, etc.) is mobilized on the ad-hoc basis to

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support the reviewing of project strategic outputs, outcomes and orientations and the dissemination of the project key messages.

Implementing organization

The project is coordinated by the GRET (Consortium leader) with a scientific coordination from CIRAD.



Project Partners

National Partners

Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ General Directorate of Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (GDA/MAFF) ✓ Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC) ✓ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD) ✓ National Institute of Animal Sciences (NIAS) ✓ Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS)

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

Other stakeholders

- ✓ Agroecology Learning Alliance in South East Asia regional network (ALiSEA)
- ✓ Agroecology for Southeast Asia (ASEA)
- ✓ Sustainable food systems for cities in Asia (MALICA).
- ✓ Lao-facilitated Initiative on Agroecology for ASEAN (LICA)
- ✓ Researchers, professors and students
- ✓ Line Ministries (Agriculture, Environment, Higher Education, Finance, etc.)
- ✓ Local communities, including women and youth, private sector

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Location

Laos PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam

Funding and co-funding

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



Duration

6 years; October 2019 - September 2025

Website

<https://www.asset-project.org/>

Updated on 09/11/2023