



**REPORT
GAFSP-CSO Mission to Lao PDR
May 3-6, 2015**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first GAFSP CSO mission to Lao People's Democratic Republic was conducted May 3-6, 2015, a month before the scheduled design mission for the country's GAFSP project. The Mission was conducted by Ms. Ma. Estrella Penunia and Ms. Maria Elena V. Rebagay, Secretary General and Policy Advocacy Manager of AFA, respectively, and Mr. Phouthasinh Phimmachanh, General Manager of Click. The latter, acting as local host and translator, coordinated with the concerned government officials and supervising entities for the final program of the consultation workshop.

The Mission Team met representatives from Lao Farmer Network (4 men, 3 women), NGO Helvetas (2 men, 1 woman), IFAD (2 men, 1 woman), WFP (1 woman), government officers from the Department of Planning (DOP) and Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAP) (3 men). The one-day CSO consultation was attended by 35 participants (24 men, 11 women). During these meetings, there was sharing of information about the GAFSP processes at the international level and AFA's role in it, the profile, status and programs of the organization, and their views and opinions on the proposed project.

The objectives of the mission were fulfilled. Interaction with key farmers groups and NGOs working on agriculture and food security was established. The CSO consultation became a venue to inform participants about GAFSP processes, the CSO's work in GAFSP, GAFSP Laos proposal, and the programs of key NGOs/intergovernmental NGOs in the country. The CSO consultation itself became a first initiative on partnership, as it was co-organized by AFA, Lao Farmer Network, MAF-DOP, IFAD and WFP, with financial support from GAFSP CU and AsiaDHRRA.

Participants during the CSO consultation expressed appreciation over the content and process of the GAFSP Laos proposal, and gave further recommendations as to its substance as well as to the process of the upcoming design mission. Participants asked that the GAFSP project in Laos addresses the issues of: land/landlessness especially in the uplands, inclusion of women and youth, post-harvest technologies, use of non-timber forest products, production amidst climate change, financial and technical issues in marketing. Amidst the current push of commercializing and modernizing agriculture, there was a strong recommendation to focus on smallholder family farmers, and openness from IFAD, the supervising entity, to address the demands of the "missing middle". Encouraged by the growing openness of the government to work with farmers organizations, the Lao Farmer Network asked for more involvement in the GAFSP processes and a seat in its steering/management committees. The participants also recommended the use of resources and expertise, which are available already from the CSOs/development partners.

The government and supervising entities have expressed willingness and commitment to include the NGOs and the farmers' organizations in the design process as well as in the implementation processes of GAFSP. In the words of WFP Deputy Country Director: "We started well. The needs and concerns have been expressed. We will be going together from now on and we hope we can develop a sound program for the Lao people". In the words of Mr. Benoit Thierry of IFAD: "This is the start together of a big work, and hope we will be together in this. Now we will work to get organized in GAFSP, which is actually initiated by many donors and development partners together". In the words of Mr. Sisovath of MAF-DOP: "We will try to involve the FOs in the beginning and in the implementation as beneficiaries."

As for the Lao Farmer Network, they need to prepare for the upcoming design mission in June by getting a translated copy of the project document and by preparing their members in GAFSP targeted regions for the upcoming field-level consultations.



MAIN REPORT

A. Background:

This is a report of the first GAFSP CSO mission to the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Laos), conducted last May 2-7, 2015. The Mission was conducted by Ms. Ma. Estrella Penunia and Ms. Maria Elena V. Rebagay, Secretary General and Policy Advocacy Manager of AFA, respectively. Ms. Rebagay is also the Project Manager of MTCP2/Asia Pacific Farmers Forum, which is a five-year program to build capacities of FOs in 16 countries being managed by AFA in consortium with La Via Campesina, and being supported by IFAD, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and European Union (upcoming support). Laos is a covered country of MTCP2. The local host and translator was Mr. Phouthasinh Phimmachanh, General Manager of Click. Mr. Phimmachanh also provided support during preparations by arranging the meetings with IFAD, WFP, the NGOs and FOs. Click provides secretariat support to the Lao Farmers Network or LFN, which is the FO implementing agency in the country. *(please see Annex 1 for design of the Mission)*

B. Objectives

As this is the first mission in Laos and as the design phase for the GAFSP project has not started at the time of the mission, the main objectives were:

- Get basic profiles of key FOs and NGOs working for food security in the country
- Get information about the GAFSP processes from the government and supervising entities (IFAD, WFP)
- Inform key FOs and NGOs about (1) GAFSP processes, (2) CSO's work in GAFSP, (3) GAFSP project proposal of the Lao government, (4) other large agri development programs of government and development partners
- Get feedback from key FOs and NGOs about the GAFSP process in the country
- Get the commitment of the government and the Supervising Entities to include FOs in the design, implementation and evaluation of the GAFSP project through institutionalized mechanisms

C. Key Activities

The Mission Team conducted the following:

- May 3: preparation of documents for the consultation with the farmers organization and the CSOs
- May 4: briefing, finalization of program and orientation with local host
- May 5 AM: preparatory meeting with the Lao Farmer Network, with seven farmer leaders in attendance: Mr. Somboun Saibouakeo, Mr. Neung Sombounkhan, Mr. Khammoune, Mr. Bounliep, Ms. Bounma, Ms. Tieng and Ms. Khammone (3 women, 4 men). The Mission Team gave a presentation on the overview of GAFSP at the international level.
- May 5 PM: meeting with representatives from Helvetas: Ms Celestine Krösschell, Country Director, Mr. Rakesh Munankami, Deputy Country Director, and Mr Andrew Bartlett, Team Leader and Policy Adviser
- May 5 PM: preparatory meeting, aimed to finalize the program for the CSO consultation, with representatives from the Lao government and Supervising Entities IFAD and WFP - Mr. Sisouvath from MAF-DOP, Mr. Thierry Benoit (IFAD Country Program Manager), Mr. Soulivanh Pattivong (IFAD Country Program Officer), Ms. Jutta Khranh (IFAD Consultant for the design process), Ms. Sarah Gordon-Gibson (WFP Country Director).
- May 6, whole day: Consultation with CSOs, co organized by AFA, IFAD, WFP and DAEC, supported by GAFSP CU and AsiaDHRRA, and was attended by 35 persons (24 men, 11 women) (Please see Annex 2 for attendance sheet and Annex 3 for the Program)



D. Key Information Gathered

1. Basic Profile of Key FOs and NGOs

a. **SNV**: SNV is an international, non-for-profit organization founded in Netherlands 50 years ago; and is currently present in many developing countries including in Laos. SNV Laos' goal is to improve livelihoods through income, food and climate solutions for smallholder women and men by increasing their incomes and employment, improving food and nutrition security, and strengthening the environmental sustainability of agriculture production and meeting the challenges of a changing climate. It is currently involved in the value chain development of rice, cassava and bamboo, through six projects in 5 locations, with IFAD as one of its funders.

b. **Helvetas /LURAS**: Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation is an international development organisation anchored in Switzerland whose vision "is a just world in which all men and women determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner".

One of its main project now is Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS), which is co-implemented by SNV and the government's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry through the Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC) and the Division for the Advancement of Women, with funding support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) . LURAS believes that with (a) a policy framework that is favorable to the livelihoods of small farmers, (b) farmer organizations that can demand better services and facilitate fairer market engagement for their members and (c) a range of state and non state actors to deliver a wide range of services demanded by small farmers, then small farmers will be able to receive services that will eventually improve their productivity, food security, and incomes.

LURAS has its roots in a 13-year old project called LEAP (Laos Extension for Agriculture Project), that was implemented through a partnership between DAEC and the NGO Helvetas, and supported by SDC. LEAP was aimed at improving the capacity of the government to deliver better services to farmers across the country. LURAS now has more participatory approaches and extension work with farmers' groups. It also serves as the secretariat of the government's sub working group on Agribusiness, which is a direct tie up to policy dialogue.

Helvetas observes that the current approach of the Lao government is not only commercial agriculture but also large scale agriculture , industrialization and modernization. Helvetas thus urges GAFSP to focus and emphasize on small farmers, especially now that there is more opening from the government to work with farmers and their organizations and there is greater recognition from government that these farmers organizations should have voluntary membership and independent management processes.

c. **Lao Farmer Network (LFN)**: The Lao Farmer Network was established in January 2014, as a result of the coming together of many farmers groups being assisted under the LEAP project. Its main mission is to contribute to the poverty reduction in the country through improved livelihoods of Lao farmers. Its membership is composed of 16 district or village level commodity based groups (rice, coffee, tobacco, vegetables, maize, sugarcane, Cardamon, bamboo), with a membership of 2884 farmers. LFN implements at the country level the Medium Term Cooperation Program Phase 2 (MTCP2), dubbed Asia Pacific Farmers Forum, a capacity building program for farmers organizations in 16 countries, which is being supported by IFAD SDC, and EU (upcoming) and which is being managed by AFA in consortium with La Via Campesina at the regional level.



d. **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**: SDC is the official development agency of Switzerland. In the Mekong sub-region, which includes the CMLV countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam) Switzerland aims to reduce poverty, support equitable and sustainable development and foster democratic governance. The SDC has supported the development projects in Laos since 1990. In 2006, it opened an office in the Lao capital to coordinate its operations in CMLV countries. SDC programming in Laos is focused on three areas: local governance and citizen participation, agriculture and food security, employment and vocational education and training; with cross cutting themes of gender equality and social inclusion, good governance, climate change, conflict sensitive program management and culture.

The theme on agriculture and food security has three goals with several outcome indicators each:

--improved resilience and food security (improved nutritional status and food security), --- better production and sales condition (Farmer opportunities, sustainable management, market engagement) and
--Access and control of agricultural lands and forests (secured land access and use of land for food security).

SDC has supported the LEAP project and is now supporting LURAS.

e. **Sustainable Agriculture and Environment Development Association (SAEDA)**: SAEDA is a national NGO in Lao PDR founded in 1991. It is working to support vulnerable communities by promoting sustainable agriculture practices, and improving their capacity and awareness to safeguard the environment. Its projects focus on three main areas of intervention: Sustainable agriculture, Chemical Pesticide Risk Reduction and Biodiversity Conservation. They have organized district level farmers groups which are now members of the Lao Farmer Network (LFN). It has a plan of further federating the provincial networks of its farmers groups, in effect, strengthening the LFN.

f. **AsiaDHRRA /Agricord**: The Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA) is a regional network of rural development NGOs in 11 countries in Asia, formed in 1974. Its mission is to be an effective promoter and catalyst of partnership relations, facilitator of human resource development processes in the rural areas and mobilizer of expertise and opportunities for the strengthening of solidarity and kinship among Asian rural communities. It is an NGO affiliate of ASEAN and is in special consultative status with UN's ECOSOC. It is also a member of AgriCord, which is a network of "agri-agencies", defining themselves as NGOs with structural links to farmers and rural people's organizations in their home countries. AgriCord provides direct financial and advisory services primarily to FOs. Through the Farmers' Fighting Poverty (FFP) Program, AgriCord strengthens FO capacities in 4 work areas: organizational strength and inclusiveness, institutional development, policy elaboration and advocacy and farmer-led economic development. The program currently provides a small grant for FOs to engage in public programs, believing that with the effective participation of organizations representing smallholder family farmers in their design and implementation, these public programs will ensure that interests of smallholders are addressed, and that strategies and support mechanisms will include them as well. AgriCord will also implement the EU support called ASEAN FO Strengthening Program (AFOSP) using its FFP program approach. The AFOSP will also support the MTCP2 in ASEAN countries.

g. **International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)**: IFAD is a specialized agency of UN that was established in 1977 as an international finance institution for agriculture development. Currently, IFAD's activities are guided by its Strategic Framework on enabling poor rural people to improve their food security and nutrition, raise their incomes and strengthen their resilience. Its goal is to empower poor rural women and men in developing countries to achieve higher incomes and improved food security. It currently has three active loans:



-Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Productivity Enhancement – Total project cost at \$36.6M, IFAD financing at \$15M. With ADB as co-financier. 11,250HH as project beneficiaries. Project components include (1) capacity building (2) agri and commercialization sub projects and (3) project management.

-Souum Son Seun Jai Community based Food Security and Economic Opportunities Programme- Total project cost at \$ 19.3 million. IFAD financing at \$14M. With Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit and World Food Programme as co-financiers. 17000 HH as project beneficiaries. Project components include (1) integrated farming systems and (2) links to markets.

- Southern Laos Food and Nutrition Security and Market Linkages Programme- Total project cost: US\$ 17.3 M. IFAD financing at \$9.7M. With ADB as co-financier. 12,000 HH as project beneficiaries. Project components include (1) food security and pro-poor market access and (2) institutional support.

IFAD is the supervising entity for the GAFSP project in Laos, together with World Food Program. It is also familiar with the current work of GAFSP CU about the “missing middle”, and is open to further seek clarifications about the concept and models of the “missing middle”, and then include in the final design of the GAFSP project in Laos specific measures to reach out to the “missing middle” and address their needs.

The IFAD Country Program Manager in Laos is also the IFAD Task Manager of MTCP2. One of the project components of MTCP2 is “involvement of FOs in large agriculture programs”. GAFSP project is considered a large agriculture program.

h. World Food Programme (WFP): The WFP is an agency of the United Nations established in 1961. It pursues “a vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life”. Since three to four years ago, WFP-Laos has been working not only on relief but also on food security and nutrition. It has been operating a Mother and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) Programme since 2012 (piloted in 2011) which aims to prevent stunting in children under 2 years of age by targeting the first 1,000 days of life. It is also undertaking a School Meal Program, transporting USDA food contribution (of cereal and vegetable oil) to over 1500 village schools, for community cooks to prepare a daily mid-morning snack for pre-primary and primary students. It also runs a project on asset mapping, where community members identify the assets they need in order to be productive.

i. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO): FAO is an agency of the United Nations mandated to achieve food security for all. Its current strategic objectives include (1) help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; (2) make agriculture, fishery and forestry more productive and sustainable; (3) reduce rural poverty; (4) enable inclusive and efficient agro food systems; and (5) increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises. The FAO office in Laos was established in 1980. FAO Laos is implementing farmers’ field schools and Integrated Pest Management approaches as well as supporting farmers to become exporters of horticulture commodities. On the policy front, it supported the development of the National Nutrition Policy and its companion National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action for 2010-2015, the Agricultural Development Strategy 2025, and the policy on rice.

j. Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC): DAEC is one of the departments under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao PDR. It is mandated to support districts and provinces to provide extension services. It was the key government agency to implement LEAP, which gave birth to the Lao Farmer Network (LFN). DAEC targets the establishment of self-managed FOs who have (1) the legitimacy to represent the farmers in policy dialogues with government as well as in engaging the private sector and (2) the capacity to provide services to their members. In so doing, farmers will have higher productivity and incomes. Their strategies include farmer



learning, organizational strengthening, market linkages, information dissemination and sustainable cooperative promotion. DAEC sees itself as continuing to help LFN, for example in continuously organizing exhibit /trade fairs for their members' organic products during World Food Day celebrations.

2. During the consultation, Mr. Benoit Thierry of IFAD shared the latest draft of the GAFSP proposal dated December 2014 (the mission team had the May 2013 proposal). He also informed the participants that a design mission for GAFSP would be conducted in June, with the aim of producing the master plan for the GAFSP project in Laos, and clearly identifying target provinces and the budget per project component. The design process will kick off with a briefing session on June 8. Field visits will be conducted during the design mission. The final project document, after two draft documents, hopes to be submitted to the IFAD board by December 2015.
3. The government, IFAD and WFP have expressed appreciation of the initiative of AFA to conduct the mission and organize the CSO consultation. The participants appreciated the CSO consultation process. Many of them, except several international NGOs, were unfamiliar with the GAFSP processes at the international level and more so, with the project that was submitted and eventually approved by the GAFSP Steering Committee last 2013. In general, they appreciated the objectives and components of the project, and gave several recommendations as to its content and process. NGOs were eager to share and situate their current programs/projects within the ambit of the GAFSP project, as a way of exploring possible areas of cooperation through the GAFSP project. The Lao Farmer Network, in the preparatory meeting with them, expressed desire that they be significantly involved in the design process and that their inputs to the final design be sought and considered.
4. The government, IFAD and WFP have expressed willingness and commitment to include the NGOs and the farmers organizations in the design process as well as in the implementation processes of GAFS

In the words of the WFP Deputy Country Director: "We started well. The needs and concerns have been expressed. We will be going together from now on and we hope we can develop a sound program for the Lao people".

In the words of the IFAD CPM: "This is the start together of a big work, and hope we will be together in this. Now we will work to get organized in GAFSP, which is actually initiated by many donors and development partners together.

In the words of the DDG of Department of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry: "We will try to involve the FOs in the beginning and in the implementation as beneficiaries."

E. Recommendations, Action Points

1. From the meetings and the consultation, the Mission Team gathered the following recommendations:
 - a. on the content and process of the GAFSP proposal:
 - Include the following: strategies to address landless people and land issues especially in upland farms, production challenges related to climate change; the participation of rural women and youth in the project and non-timber forest product as source of food from forest
 - Focus on smallholder family farmers, who are they and where they are to ensure that the program is really working with the poor, and not the opposite.



- Prioritize financial and technical support particularly in marketing
 - Clarify the role of international NGOs
 - FOs can play roles in service provision especially technical knowledge to other farmers
 - Maximize the existing mechanisms, e.g. Sectoral Working group on Agriculture and Rural Development (SWARD) and SWGAB (Sub-sectoral working group on agri-business (SWGAB))
 - Given the significant reduction in approved budget vis the proposed budget, there should be clear prioritization criteria
 - FOs should be represented in the project management structure/mechanism
 - Ensure complementation of GASFP with other programs (LURAS, MTCP2, etc)
 - Sustain and upgrade the sharing of experiences on sustainable and resilient agriculture
 - Use/tap existing resources and expertise of development partners especially in capacity building
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- b. On the conduct of the design process for the GAFSP project:
- Expand the design team to include relevant stakeholders, particularly FO and NGO representative; and that drafts of the design document be circulated to them for their inputs
 - The design team should maximize existing case studies as reference points (e.g. SWARD and SWGAB case studies)
 - There should be multi-stakeholder consultation processes at the field level
2. Particularly for the Lao Farmer Network, immediate action points, especially considering the upcoming design process include
- Translate (or get a translated copy of) the project document for the farmer leaders
 - Share the results of the consultation and new knowledge about the GAFSP project proposal to their members especially in the GAFSP targeted regions.

ANNEXES

- 1 Design of the Mission
- 2 Attendance Sheet, May 6 CSO Consultation on GAFSP Laos project
- 3 Program of May 6 consultation
- 4 PowerPoint presentation on GAFSP
- 5 Pictures

*Submitted:
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Asian Farmers' Association*