

## Summary Report

### Multi-stakeholder Forum

#### *NATURAL OR ORGANIC: WHAT ARE THE CHANCES FOR OUR FARMERS? CURRENT DEBATE IN VIETNAM AND LESSONS FROM THE REGION*

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016, Hanoi, Vietnam



## Table of Contents

	page
Programme Schedule	3
Background	5
Part I: Opening speech by Professor Le Van Khoa	5
Part II: Panel Discussion	
- First Session	6
- Second Session	8
- Third Session	11
Part III: Farm Visit	13
TOA participant list	16

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### Programme Schedule

<i>Time</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Facilitated by</i>
08:00 – 08:10	Participants Registration	Bach Yen, Ha Duong
<b>Part I:</b>	<b>Forum Opening</b>	
08:10 – 08:15	Video screening	
08:15 – 08:20	Opening Speech by SPERI representative	Prof. Le Van Khoa
<b>Part II:</b>	<b>Forum Panels: Exchanges of views</b>	
<b>Panel 1:</b>	<b>NATURAL OR ORGANIC: DIVERSIFYING VIEWS, CLARIFYING CONCEPTS, EXPERIENCE, PRACTICES</b>	Le Huyen Trang
08:20 – 09:10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Hans van Willenswaard (TOA, School for Wellbeing, IFOAM)</li> <li>2. Mr. Duong Quang Chau (SPERI - Strategy for promoting ecological farming/natural products from MECO-ECOTRA farmers' network: currency, lessons learnt and the future)</li> <li>3. Mrs. May Hau (Farmer Union Member, Natural Organic Agriculture in Vietnam)</li> <li>4. Mr. Vang Sin Min (Hmong minority, young eco-farmers, family based producers)</li> <li>5. Mr. Do Hoang (Executive of Vietherb, natural based forest herbal products)</li> </ol>	
09:10 – 09:35	Q & A	
09:35 – 09:40	Tea/Coffee Break	Pham Bich Thuy
<b>Panel 2:</b>	<b>Dialogue amongst Vietnamese actors: natural products or organic products: currency of agricultural production in Vietnam: rural, urban, and upland areas. What are the opportunities, challenges? (Views from association, small producers, farm cooperatives, entrepreneurs and shops)</b>	Le Huyen Trang
09:40 – 10:20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mrs. Tu Tuyet Nhung (PSG Vietnam and currency of organic production in Vietnam)</li> <li>2. Mr. Chau Van Hue (natural honey production company in Quang Binh province)</li> </ol>	

<i>Time</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Facilitated by</i>
	3. Mrs. Trieu Thi Khang (Red Dzao herbal healer, natural based forest herbal products from Ha Tay province) 4. Mr. A Chon (H're ethnic minority - natural forests products from Po E commune, Kon Tum province) 5. Mr. Leng Van Suong (Tay minority young eco-farmer, family based producer of an ecological farm in Simacai district) 6. Mr. Hoang Van Hung (Thanh Xuan Organic Vegetables Cooperative)	
10:20 – 10:35	Q & A	
10:35 – 10:40	Tea/Coffee Break	Pham Bich Thuy
<b>Panel 3:</b>	<b>Sharing experiences: lesson learnt from international organizations under TOA network: organic or natural farming &amp; production – what are the potential, markets, certification and future opportunity?</b>	Le Huyen Trang
10:40 – 11:40	1. Mr. Gum Sha Awng (Metta Foundation, Myanmar) 2. Mr. Sam Vitou (CEDAC, Cambodia) 3. Mr. Nakorn Limpacuptathavon (CityFarm, Thailand) 4. Dr. Sonam Tashi (College of Natural Resources, Bhutan) 5. Mr. Vieng Phet (Lu minorities' young eco-farmers, family based producers of agro-ecological farms in Luang Prabang province) 6. Pham Minh Duc (Ecolink): Organic tea certification	
11:40 – 11:50	Q & A	
11:50 – 12:00	Concluding and summary of the key points and lessons learnt from the forum. The future?	Duong Quang Chau/Huan
<b>Part III:</b>	<b>Farm visit</b>	
13.30 – 17.00	Experience learning from farmer union's members	

## Background

TOA multi-stakeholder dialogue is a public forum that organized to be a part of action research for policy advocacy. The public forum aims not only sending stakeholder's voices to the policy level, particularly, organic agriculture for sustainable development, but to build wider impacts and awareness in public sphere.

In 2016, the public forum was held in Hanoi, Vietnam by SPERI (Social Policy Ecology Research Institute). The public forum's topic related to difference between natural and organic concepts of farming and products that can benefit to small-scale farmers in Vietnam.

### Part I: Opening speech by Professor Le Van Khoa



Photo: Professor Le Van Khoa, SPERI representative

The forum started by speech from Professor Le Van Khoa, SPERI representative to focus on the harmful circumstances from chemical agriculture including pesticide, fertilizer, herbicide and etc. The professor stated, "*The way of organic agriculture can bring us clean and safe products*". And also lesson learned from sharing experiences by other countries in comparison to chemical and organic impacts will be useful for Vietnam.

The exchange platform was set into 3 sessions;

- 1) Natural or Organic diversifying views aims to clarify concept of both natural and organic farming.
- 2) Natural or organic agricultural products in rural, urban, and upland areas of Vietnam; opportunities and challenges
- 3) Experience and lesson learnt from other countries in the potential, markets, certification and future opportunity



## Part II: Panel Discussion

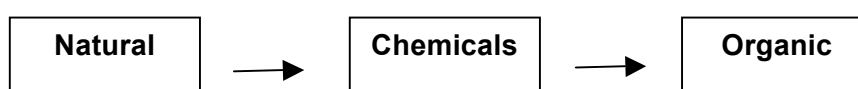
### First session: Diversifying views, clarifying concepts, experiences and practices



Photo from left to right: Dan Kien and Duong Quang Chau (SPERI), Do Hoang (VietHerb), May Han (Forest products and farm owner), Vang Sin Min (Young eco-farmer) and Hans van Willenswaard (TOA, School for Wellbeing)

The first panel started by Hans to introduce organic concepts. Next, other speakers; Duong Quang Chau, May Han, Vang Sin Min and Do Hoang shared ideas and experiences together in working with natural and organic products as following points;

- **IFOAM concept** and background which divided to 3 stages which established since 1972. At this moment, IFOAM becomes notable organic sector that work together with international organizations.
- The organic idea based on natural agriculture and local wisdom how to do farming without chemical usage



Therefore, it would be better to cross the step of chemicals. In addition, changing from natural to organic by linking with organic movement is related to ecosystem. Organic agriculture combines natural farming, innovation and science to benefit both ecological system and people living in fair relationship and include certifying process.

- Another point between natural and organic agriculture is **language**. 'Organic' is English word but in French and German use the word – 'Bio' which imply to living being. On the other hand, the word 'nature' imply to something that derived from plants or animals directly without processing.
- The way to promote ecology and agriculture – agroecology needs to have consumer movement as a driving force. **Social awareness** and country vision are in concerning and have to be changed. It seems that urban consumers are less awareness in natural resource conservation. Moreover, changing of consumption and consumer behaviors are important to organic markets



Photo: Ms. Nhung, PGS Vietnam shared her idea to natural and organic products

- **Confusing among Vietnamese people** about terms of natural farming and organic farming. Many poor farmers and small-scale farmers are still in natural farming because of less opportunity in turning to organic and even chemical farming which need more knowledge and technical supports.
- **SPERI mission** is to bring opportunities to farmers, especially, indigenous farmers by knowledge implementation to protect them from chemical usage.
- **Supporting farmer union** in environmental protection will gain benefits both for farmers and ecology. Organic agriculture which is good for farmers and safe for consumers.
- **The linkage ways** from producers and consumers, especially, vegetable products are needed. Now, people in Hanoi attempted to set consumer groups and support small-scale farmers.
- Teachers and elders in the community can help in **sharing wisdom** and bring proficiency knowledge to young people in farming. Lesson learnt about impacts of chemical farming and organic farming from others is interesting.
- Viet Herb tries to find out an opportunity of Vietnamese farmers to talk about **food contamination and food safety** for wider understanding because it becomes the hot issue at this moment and it can be a good opportunity to promote farmer products.

- In Hanoi, clean vegetable shops are vary but difficult to find out vegetable shops where **safe and clean** products are available.
- In low land and delta area of Vietnam, the **green revolution** brings farmland into pesticide and chemical usage. Agricultural products are extensive production which should be distinguished and control their quality to make it safe and clean.
- The key challenge of agricultural products is to **connect agro-business and governmental organization together** for the organic vision.
- **Forest products** can grow only in natural forest system hence ecological conservation is significant in natural farming. Forest vegetable in Vietnam is controlled by legislations which become barrier to local forest products in sometimes. And also, consumers concern about food safety on forest products and how to guarantee.

**Second session: Vietnamese dialogue on natural products and organic products  
current situation of agriculture production in rural and urban areas of Vietnam**



From left to right: Le Huyen Trang Moderator, Leng Van Suong, Chau Van Hue, Hoang Van Hung, A Chon, Trieu Thi Khang and Tu Tuyet Nhung

The second panel dedicated to the situation in Vietnam on natural and organic products from the producer to consumers. The speakers from PGS Vietnam, Organic Agriculture Cooperative, honey product company, herbal medicine producer, natural forest producer and a young eco-farmer exchanged their experiences and opinions of Vietnamese farmers, consumers and marketing towards challenges and opportunities of natural and organic products. The focal points in discussion are;



- People need to be **educated** about natural and organic products
- There was a small project for organic farming but not successful, the team suggested more stakeholders to get involve is required. This project tried to connect between farmers and markets which farmers could run markets for their products but it fails and was terminated in 2012 because **farmers have no capacity** enough to do
- **The green revolution affected to organic agriculture in policy advocacy.** NGOs working also support organic production in Vietnam. However, people have not much pay attention about organic agriculture.
- The main challenge to organic products in Vietnam is **trust of consumers** because they don't believe that farmers can avoid chemical inputs in farm production. Therefore, the guarantee system is needed to make confident to consumers.



Photo: PGS, the guarantee system label

- If people found food they bought is not clean, they will not buy anymore. The point is consumers cannot be sure hence, consumers often concern the real organic products and their production processes. If there is something to guarantee the products, customers will buy even in higher price. And when they trust the producers, they will become **frequent customers**.
- **Food safety control** in Vietnam is fail. Hence, working in certification to guarantee organic products is important and farmers also admire to join this process. The lesson learnt from the past project need to share among farmers.
- There are 20 farmers groups who are members in **guarantee system**. Private enterprises support the product guarantee system and organic movements have been set to educate consumers but still have very low amount.
- **Forest products** are regarded as safe products because it comes from nature
- The organic and natural products are produced following supply and demand. **Comparison of price** on organic vegetable and general vegetable is in consideration

- Farm products by cooperatives might usually clean and safe but mostly people bought farm products from general markets where they could not know **the origin of products** that make low rate of consumers' trust.
- Creating **more channels for consumers' access** to clean and safe food also is the focal point.
- SPERI working focuses on ecological agriculture which has been developed for farmers, especially indigenous farmers. **The monitoring team** is set to make commitment with private enterprises. Also, company representatives are assigned to monitor the farmer groups that they have business agreement.



Photo: VDO screening explained vegetable products in Hanoi markets

- In the area of medicinal products and herbal medicine have **different production of herbal medicine**
- The villager group established the herbal medicine village and lots of customer comes to village to buy herbal products because it serves as **a center of herbal medicine**.
- Villagers normally collect herbs from the forest because **they do not grow many herb varieties themselves enough**. Sometimes, they have to go far away to find out herbs that don't exist in their area, it's difficult because of sources.
- Farmers explore **sustainable way to collect herbs from the forest** which makes plants still growing but they did not grab a whole tree, just some parts of plants.

- The key element is **forest eco-system recovering** for increasing herbal plant growing and forest herbal products.
- Most of farmer families depended on **chemical usage** and pesticide in farming before young eco-farmers have been trained to do on agro-ecological farms.
- Approximately 90% of vegetable and fruits that produced by family members has been sent to market for sale rather than domestic consumption. **Farmers do not realize the harmful impacts from pesticide and chemical inputs** because private merchandisers sell pesticide and chemical inputs without inform farmers about impacts to environment that affect to farmers and their products as well.

**Third session: Sharing experiences: lesson learnt from international organizations of TOA network – what are the potentials, markets, certification and future opportunities of natural and organic farming and production?**



Photo from left to right: Dang Kien (SPERI, Vietnam), Nakorn Limpacuptathavon (Vieggie Prince City Farm, Thailand), Sam Vitou (CEDAC, Cambodia), Vieng Phet (Young farmer, Lao PDR), Pham Minh Đức (EcoLink, Vietnam), Sonam Tashi (CNR, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan) and Gum Sha Awng (Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar)

The last panel is an exchange platform that focused on sharing experiences of organic situation in farm level, production process, markets and consumers from outside Vietnam which TOA partners from Mekong countries and Bhutan joined this panel.

- From **Bhutan** side, area of land is very small. The first challenge is limited land for agriculture and another challenge is young people do not want to work on farm. Training for farmer is need, not only single training but a whole training of organic

agriculture. The policy of 100% organic agriculture in Bhutan is purpose for market and export. And mostly, farmers in Bhutan are small holders hence; the situation is different from other area where invading of capital farmers is obvious.

- In **Cambodia**, CEDAC runs about 20 years in producing organic agriculture to market. The important note is how can be sure whether products are organic or not? Therefore, we need to bring farmer to meet consumer to guarantee the organic product. During conversion at the early period, we cannot call as organic product but we call natural product until 2003, after CEDAC get certified of organic products from both USA and EU. CEDAC attempts to encourage farmer in Cambodia to produce organic products because making farmer to get more profits and confirm that consumer are really to support farmer organic product. It should have awareness from farmers, consumers and policy makers.
- **Vietnam** representative, Ecolink shared his view from his working experience in producing organic products from Vietnam to Europe. People in upland area live in eco-system atmosphere and the mission of Ecolink is to find out the right place to produce organic products which bringing farmers in survival. Organic products can sell not only in niche market but also international market and organic tea is a key product from Vietnam.
- The current situation in **Myanmar**, it's a bit more opposite to Bhutan in comparison. Because of government policy and effect to others, Myanmar also talks about sustainable, organic and ecological farming that focus on seeds and food. Metta Foundation work with farmers in grass-root level and encourage them to produce their own seed. We also work on policy platform that could impact largely to farmers, thus conducting a kind of country assessment both farmer and policy level is need in order to link with action research.
- The owner of CityFarm shared his experiences on organic farming in **Thailand** by starting at himself. He works on organic agriculture about 7 years to promote organic lifestyle in Bangkok since he started his master thesis on 'Alternative market for farmer'. And Thailand's trend is in change, especially in Bangkok. Many green fairs emerged in Bangkok and urban dwellers find out their own garden at home. He starts to promote organic gardening at home about 3 years ago and get close relationship with consumers. Now, consumers are active and aware about food safety for example, they set the movement against GMOs laws.
- In **Lao PDR**, Laotian young farmer stated that at this time young people do not want to be farmer and work on farmland. They want to work in industrial factory instead. Then, he attempted to build his own farm, livestock and now starting of organic restaurant. At the restaurant, customer can come and ask many things such as how to cook, what ingredients are and we can promote organic food to consumer through this channel. According to experience from Thai people that use chemicals in farming, causes of many diseases and cancer, so we should aware chemical farming.



- NGO in **Lao PDR**, PADETC also mentioned to the country which is an agricultural country, but chemical farming can bring large impacts to land and people health. PADETC provides eco-forestry Park as a learning center but government become barrier to promote organic farming because of launching many industrial projects around the country. Until now, the accession to organic products is limited.



Photo: Khamphoui Syathalat shared experiences from PADETC working

### **Part III: Farm visit**

#### **At farmer union in suburb Hanoi**



Photo: Integrated farming in Hanoi

In the afternoon, participants joined the visit of farmland in suburb Hanoi where not far from Hanoi International Airport. The farmlands are occupied by farmer union members where have distinguished management into 2 models.

## 1) Co-operative model

In one plot consists of 8 members (32 families in the area) that work together in about 3.5 hectare of cooperative land and sell their products through a cooperative shop. However, they get lower yield than conventional farming approximately 40% (organic) and 60% (conventional) because it is in soil improvement period. People have been trained for pest and weed control.



The government supports farmers in writing proposal for loan approval (interest rate approx. 4.5% per year). The co-op has to pay tax for business setting but no land tax. Quality control is made by quality control team to guarantee buyers and customers who have selling contract with co-op. In the case that the team finds out any mistake from their product, all members have to stop their product selling 6 months for restarting vegetable planting process. Therefore, all members need mutual responsible for unexpected circumstance.

Photo: The cooperative members explained

background  
and management of cooperative farm and translated  
in English by Dang Kien, SPERI

## 2) Inter Group model

The plot is a part of 6 hectare area where 21 inter group work in this area. Each group will has one leader that members in group selected he/she to be a group representative. No one belongs the own land, they rent the land from state in a long term contract. The inter group model consists of 4 working group; Technical training, M&E, Marketing and Coordinating. The monitoring conducts both intra and inter group levels.

Once a month, the meeting between group leaders and monitoring team which shop and company representatives are members will be occurred to share and discuss in 4 working area. At this moment, there are 10 companies and 20 shops in Hanoi are frequent customers to order their products. Fertilizers are made from both animal composes and vegetable trash but sometimes, order from outside.



- The participants enjoyed farm visiting in suburb Hanoi



- Circumstances and farmer working on farmland



## TOA participants

Name	Organization
1. Dr. Sonam Tashi	CNR, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan
2. Mr. Gum Sha Awng	Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar
3. Mr. Khamphoui Saythalat	Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), Lao PDR
4. Mr. Sam Vitou	Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Cambodia
5. Mr. Duong Quang Chau	Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Vietnam
6. Ms. Dang To Kien	Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Vietnam
7. Mr. Nakorn Limpacuptathavon	Veggie Prince City Farm, Thailand
8. Mr. Hans van Willenswaard	TOA – School for Wellbeing, Thailand
9. Ms. Wallapa van Willenswaard	School for Wellbeing/ Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise, Thailand
10. Ms. Ampika Ananta	TOA – School for Wellbeing, Thailand
11. Dr. Siya Uthai	TOA – School for Wellbeing, Thailand