

# Young Organic Farmers (YOF)

Community Resilience: A Learning Journey at the Cutting Edge of  
Organic Agriculture Programme in Bhutan



25 November - 4 December 2017  
College of Natural Resources, Lobesa and  
Faladay and Beteni Community, Tsirang, Bhutan

#### Co-organizers:

College of Natural Resources (CNR) Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)  
Bhutan Organic Seeds Alliance in Tsirang, Bhutan  
Towards Organic Asia (TOA), Thailand

All together it was a group of 5 international participants (Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) and 10 participants from Bhutan to build capacity of young farmers by experiential learning process with in-depth sharing & discussion, and field works, to holistically learn organic agriculture programme from College of Natural Resources (CNR) and organic seeds project from local communities in Bhutan, to maximize the organic agriculture ability and minimize the organic agriculture obstacle, and to exchange about agricultural issues and strengthen the network of young organic farmers among Mekong Countries and Bhutan.

Part I, Young Organic Farmer Forum: A Learning Journey at the Cutting Edge of Organic Agriculture Programme in Bhutan was held at the CNR; the programme had presentations & discussion session in the morning and farm visit in the afternoon, including daily reflection on personal lessons learned.

### **Young Organic Farmers: A Learning Journey in Bhutan**

#### **Opening Speech**

The president of CNR, Dr. Phub Dorji, who has 24-year experiences of teaching and working in the campus gave opening speech to all participants that we need to learn from and share with each other in order to work together in the further. He addressed that organic agriculture is less than 10% and it's now getting more popular, more importantly, in 2050 the world population will be around 8-9 billion people, and we should be incorporate for food production in sustainable way to feed the world.

In fact, we need to address the current situation and prove on sustainability, production, and techniques of organic agriculture, to pursue organic agriculture towards the world sufficiency we need not have to cut down million acres of the forest.

Bhutan has set the goal to be 100% organic country in 2020, the challenge is pushing a big goal in a short term, however, the planning and implementation are in progress for developing resources, in particular human resources, supporting structure, pricing system, and marketing. More importantly, the big goal is not to promote organic as a main income generation, but to enhance the deep sense for organic as "way of life."



## How to maximize organic agriculture and organic food system

### The experiences from Bhutan by Dr. Sonam Tashi

Bhutan has changed from 90% (in 1960) to 56% agrarian country. By the matter of this fact, it is very important to change the wrong notion that to be a farmer is equal to "poor" or "insecure".



Maximizing organic agriculture and food system in Bhutan will need **1) Strong policy support and active advocacy programmes** by announcing a declaration for 100% organic country, promoting organic community such as communities in Gasa District, and Yusipang in Thimphu.

Also, **2) The capacity development and technologies** are required, to train agriculture extension agents and farmers, to enrich effective technologies in nutrient management and plant protection (Nurturing the Soil is the heart for organic agriculture), and to make farm attractive by balancing the system and farm resilience.

**3) Market and Market Infrastructure** by linking sellers and buyer (connecting producers and consumers to reduce the travel cost and the competitive mechanism) and strengthening Cooperative and Farmers Groups.

**4) Post harvest and processing**, value adding including processing and packaging, to locally select the good product for a niche market and minimizing energy consumption.

## Young Organic Farmers: Current Situation and Expectations

YOF representatives from Mekong Regions and Bhutan

**Myanmar**, Zin Myo Lwin (Zin) presented about Young Farmers Network for Safety and Sovereignty. In Myanmar, the eco-farming models are aiming to improve and apply eco-farming practices, to promote Self Reliance and Self Supporting Corporative Farming Economy Systems, and to establish Young Farmers Network for Food Sovereignty.

Kalyanamitta Foundation organizes 2 main training activities; the Eco-farming training, participants will learn nutrients and soil, land and seed law, agricultural business

management, advocacy awareness and facilitation skills; and Fellowship programme, participants will learn about village map, resource map, seasonal calendar, and graph & matrix. After trainings, young farmers will practice and participate in organic movement in their community.

Zin expectations were gaining more knowledge and skills from others friends from Mekong Region and Bhutan in order to share with young farmers in Myanmar



**Cambodia**, Soran Chhin (Soran) has background as a farmer daughter and banker. After graduated she herself together with 2 close friends decided to be farmer by attending 3-month training organized by CEDAC (TOA partner in Cambodia).

There is a pressure for graduated young adults for getting a good job in the big city instead of becoming a farmer. The perception of people toward the farmer in Cambodia is negative. However, Soran and her friend have started growing their own food despite the difficulty and people opinion.

The problems in the farm are low yield, not enough water, pests & diseases control, and how to build up community to community. Her expectations for this trip were deepening knowledge and skills on organic farming and food security.

**Thailand**, Mathana Aphaimool (Pui) is a young farmer and seeds grower from Maetha Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Pui shared about Young Farmers Network in the north, northeast, central & west and south of Thailand. They have been involved in many focal points, joint network with Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN, Thai Partner of TOA), such as GMOs, Contract farming, chemical substance, sustainable agriculture policy, food security, climate change, and FTA. The main purpose are maintaining the honour of Thai Farmers, strengthening the agricultural development concepts, extending organic farmer members, and enhancing seed banks. They are also collaborating with multi-stakeholders from Thai Volunteer Service (TVS), Maejo University, and Earth Net Foundation.

Organic farmers in Maetha could be classified into 3 generations- 50-60 years old, 25-40 years old, and 15-24 years old. The key to maintain Maetha Community sustainably is

passing on knowledge and experience to next generations through learning and practicing. Generally, organic activities in Maetha are seed and vegetable productions, food processing, marketing, organic café, learning space and youth camp. However, there are some challenges, internally- young people also need to know about city life and have pressure within family and community, and need more skill on food processing- and externally- climate change issues and economic crisis. Learning from Maetha experiences our group came to learn about supporting young organic farmers, as well as new generation of organic farmers to widening organic network and movement.



**Vietnam**, Dang To Kien (Kien) is a young farmer leader and she shared about young organic farmers in Vietnam (including Laos). Kien introduced about ESP programme supported by Germany, which will be able to applicable in Bhutan contexts. The EST programme is supporting livelihood project for young people.

According to the learning condition, young farmers learn realistically from the difficulties, in different cases they choose their own activities on livelihoods. And with the support and coordination of SPERI and CENDI (Community Entrepreneur Development Institute), many young people from various ethnic and minority group in Vietnam and Laos had a chance to attended famer field school programme, eco-farming training in HEPA, Vietnam to gain knowledge and practice on eco-garden, traditional cultivation, pig and chicken raising, handicraft, and etc.

To participate in YOF, Kien was expecting to gain more experience from Bhutan wisdoms & cultures, and share about her issues in Vietnam, especially the GMOs.

**Bhutan**, Sangay Dorji from Rekhay Vegetable Group and Tenzin from Brongteri Vegetable group had shared about 2-year experiences in their farm on growing rice and vegetables, and the challenges for this group are shortage of labour, water management, and wild animals. Therefore, they would like to learn the best practices and visit farms regarding traditional and organic farming.

Dilip Subba, initiator and coordinator of Organic Seeds Project in Tsirang, also shared about Organic Seeds Production at local level for thriving community economy and resilience, later on the group will visit communities in Tsirang and then Dilip will be able to explain more about famer group mobilization and seeds production.

Namgay Dema and Kinzang Norbu are young organic famers from Zurphel Tshesey Gongphel Nyamley Tshogdhey. They said, not many young people live in the village anymore and they find it's difficult to find the market for selling their organic products. Therefore, joining the YOF, they would like to learn more about organic agriculture because they believe that this is a better way of living, and find another possibility to work with Dilip on seeds production.

Tshering Dem is a member of community cooperative in Lobesa, she had shared passionately on organic farming and personal obstacles. It's a paradox that many graduated students couldn't find a good job and couldn't work on farming. She saw that organic farming is leading to safety food. If the situation of marketing and logistic management is getting better it will bring more prospective customers.



### The Cutting Edge of Organic Agriculture Programme in Bhutan

#### Organic agriculture principles and Ecological System

Dr. Sonam Tashi presented the 4 main principles of organic agriculture that consist of principles of health, ecology, fairness and care.

- Health for all beings which is interconnected, by avoiding toxic and synthetic chemical use
- Ecological system improvement, by conserving the resources, reducing, re-using, and recycling of the resources
- Fairness, by ensuring equity, respect, justice, and decency
- Care, by reviewing the production technologies and being responsible towards the health of other live forms and the environment

Also, the essences of organic farming are holistic approach and sustainability driven, to maintain soil health, biodiversity, eco system, limited external inputs and no synthetic chemical inputs, so, the benefit of organic agriculture are covering all social, economic and ecological aspect.

#### Bhutanese Culture and local knowledge on farming and healing:

Ms. Phuntsho Choden, a lecturer in Culture and Linguistics, has shared about Bhutanese cultures and folk knowledge regarding traditional farming, seed saving, herbs and medicinal plants. She had lots of insightful thoughts and explanations on harmonious way of living and sharing with nature, and doing no harm to life.

Culturally, agricultural practice, when farming works are due, a suitable day is sought from the village astrologer for ploughing and sowing of seeds. Nevertheless, farmers generally stick to the *throejor*, *throechen* and *throechung*, which are combinations of two of the five elements according to astrology. Raising cattle has been a part of a farmer's

life in Bhutan for a number of reasons. They are the source of dairy products and also meat, they provide power for tilling the land and they provide organic fertilizer in the form of manure. For all these reasons, cattle will always be a part of farm resilience in Bhutan.

Ritually, Bon and Buddhist tradition, various invocations and festivals are performed so that the villages get timely rainfall and good harvests, to ensure that the health of both people and animals remains sound, and to avert any other natural calamities.

Healing ourselves and healing the earth, by local knowledge there are many indigenous methods to treat diseases by using locally available herbs, belong to oral tradition with practice and direct experience; thus people know how to cope with fever, headache, stomach ache, giddiness, body cleansing, jaundice, and external bleeding.



### **Strengthening Social fabric that support organic agriculture and local food**

Dang To Kien helped group to revisit the meaning of “Social Fabric” in order to support local food as well as **natural farming, organic farming, ecological farming**.

With an open discussion and sharing from the group, we learned that we all are part of this complex society at different levels such as individual, family and community, regional, and international level. By knowing this we take responsibility and start from changing ourselves, and in parallel collaboration with others for weaving social fabric-strengthening people to people, community to community, and networking

Kien also presented a short VDO about GMOs issue in Vietnam, for more information please see the [\*\*VDO link\*\*](#)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PoM4sCGvow&feature=youtu.be>)

**Harvesting, Processing and Marketing Organic Food to Revitalize Local Economy**  
Dr. Sonam Tashi explained about post harvesting, normally farmer will harvest in early morning, the concern issue regarding harvesting would be minimize the respiration rate and zero energy storage such as natural cooling container.

Tenzin Wangchuck was presenting about the Marketing of Organic Products: Ongoing Practice in Bhutan.

The current challenges of organic products are high competition from Indian markets, pricing, lack of value addition, and standard & requirement for organic certification. In term of markets, Bhutan imported and relied on the goods from India (Bhutan trade statistic on import and export RNR commodities in 2016 reference), it shown that there are prospect markets in the country. Therefore, marketing for organic products in Bhutan will be focusing on quality control, post harvest improvement, consumer's awareness, corporative and farmer group mobilization, and R&D on Marketing at national, regional and international level



Tenzin Wangchuck also leaded the group for farm visit to medical and Aromatic Plants Garden, Companion Plants Garden, and CNR farm.



Part II, the group traveled to visit Faladay and Beteni communities in Tsirang to deepen knowledge and understanding on natural farming and organic agriculture and organic seeds project in Bhutan.

### Community Resilience and Organic Seeds Project

#### An introduction to Organic Seeds Social Enterprise: New paradigm towards sustainable agriculture By Dilip Kumar Subba

Faladay community is a good example of community resilience, villagers are practicing natural and traditional farming, growing buckwheat, millet, maize, cardamom, orange, various kind of vegetable, and so on. Previously, the community will need only salt and some peanut oil from outside.

More and more, people moved out and left community, in the past, there were more than 80 households but now the number is decreasing to 17 households.



An introduction to Organic Seeds Alliance, Dilip shared that he has 10-year experience working for Alpine Seed Company (Seed production and Selling in Bhutan are operated by 2 organizations: National Seed and Alpine Seed). Faladay is his community. Dilip believes that the Organic Seeds Project will strengthen and vitalize his community by generating more incomes and employment opportunity for villagers, and bringing young people back to their home.

#### Seed Production Future Plan:

- Farming in Dilip family land, calculate and plan for land used & seed production
- Building ware house / storage house
- Setting up office and buy some office equipments
- Revise cost & effective business plan
- Landscape / Farm design, to maximize the output and minimize the input

#### Monitoring Plan:

- Seed production, germination testing should be up to 75%
- Preparing and arranging for seeds cleaning process
- Setting up agreement with seed grower members for quality management

#### Risk Protection Plan:

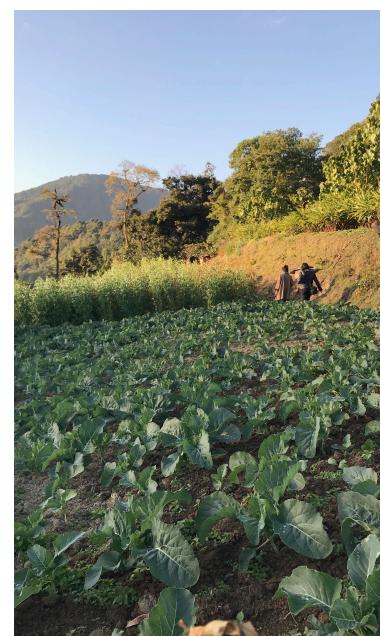
- In case, farmer lost their production, Dilip will support for their labor cost
- Wild animal protection (Monkey, pig, deer)

#### Challenge:

- Transportation, road construction is in progress, it will bring both prosperity and change to the community.
- Water, its' not enough sometimes. Need to find the solution to harness the water or water management.



Beteni Community. Our group also visited to another community that Dilip has been working with for more than 5 years. We visited and learned about vegetable plantation, seed production, vermi-compost, use of local resources, and beekeeping. Another obvious example and model of practicing self-sufficiency, respecting diversity and management skills, Beteni is one of the inspiring communities for young people to be able to return home.



Before depart from Beten Community, we have certificate of attendance handling to all participations.

### Reflections and Suggestions

Participants had shared the highlights from this trip:

- Using local material & resources- rice pounding machine, sprinkle, etc
- New knowledge on farming, appropriate technology, and beekeeping
- Understanding farm management, water management
- Technique and practice on soil improvement (cover the soil)
- New variety of vegetables and plants (tomato, chili)
- Marketing for organic products
- Seed production techniques, Organic Seeds Project
- Local Food and Local Seeds Preservation
- Wild Animals Protections and Prevention
- Young Farmer Motivations and building relationship
- Strengthening community, revitalize local economy
- Traditional way of living in the village

Suggestions:

- 10-day programme is very suitable for group learning in term of contents and farm visit, there are many other communities that could be visited and learn from (it could be for the coming group)
- In the meeting room, we could have more activities- working group, drawing pictures and ideas, instead of presentations
- We should have a proper time for reflection, including future plan (1 day)
- TOA should organize youth exchange (2 months), among TOA partner organizations

### Co-organizers

- College of Natural Resources (CNR), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)
- Bhutan Organic Seeds Alliance, Tsirang Community, Bhutan
- Towards Organic Asia (TOA), Bangkok, Thailand

### List of Participants

| No | Name                        | Country  | Organization                                    |
|----|-----------------------------|----------|---|
| 1  | Dr. Sonam Tashi             | Bhutan   | College for Natural Resources                   |
| 2  | Mr. Tenzin Wangchuk         | Bhutan   | College for Natural Resources                   |
| 3  | Mr. Dilip Kumar Subba       | Bhutan   | Tsirang Organic Seeds Alliance                  |
| 4  | Ms. Namgay Dema             | Bhutan   | Zurphel Tshesey Gongphel<br>Nyamley Tshogdey up |
| 5  | Mr. Kinzang Norbu           | Bhutan   | Zurphel Tshesey Gongphel<br>Nyamley Tshogdey    |
| 6  | Mr. Sangay Dorji            | Bhutan   | Rekhay Vegetable Group                          |
| 7  | Mr. Tenzin                  | Bhutan   | Brongteri Vegetable Group                       |
| 8  | Ms. Tshering Dem            | Bhutan   | Druk Organic Grower Cooperative                 |
| 9  | Ms. Denka Dorji             | Bhutan   | Druk Organic Farm                               |
| 10 | Mr. Jigme Tshering          | Bhutan   | Druk Organic Farm                               |
| 11 | Ms. Chhin So Ran            | Cambodia | CEDAC   |
| 12 | Mr. Zin Myo Lwin            | Myanmar  | Kalyanamitta Foundation                         |
| 13 | Ms. Dang To Kien            | Vietnam  | HEPA Farmer Field School                        |
| 14 | Ms. Mathana Aphaimool       | Thailand | Maetha Community                                |
| 15 | Ms. Narumon Paiboonsittikun | Thailand | TOA (YOF 2017 Coordinator)                      |