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Study visit report on Institutional visit on policy research and agroecology farming in Vietnam

Policy Think Tank (PTT): Institutional visit report on policy research and agroecology farming in Vietnam

**Souphalack Inphonephong, Latsamy Phounvisouk, Sengphachanh Sonethavixay,
Phanhsy Maniphet, Thavixay Soulinh, Bounlert Vanhnalat, Keuangkham Sisengnam
and Somsamay Vongthilath**



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Summary

The report documents the institutional meetings and discussions taking place between 26-30 November 2023 when a delegation from Lao PDR visited Vietnam. Overall aim of the visit was to enhance institutional cooperation between policy researchers and policy makers for more effective policy formulation. The Lao team learnt about options to strengthen policy implementation, like through formulating specific strategies, supporting farmers to adopt suitable technologies/innovations, and bringing research evidence into the policy formulation process. As the term “agroecology” is new to some stakeholders links to existing practices have to be shown, accompanied by advocating its benefits from a broader view perspective.

I. Introduction

The report documented knowledge and lessons learnt from the exchange visit on policy research engagement and agroecology practices in Vietnam, from 26-30 November 2023. The visit organized in cooperation between the national Policy Think Tank (PTT) Initiative of the National Agriculture and Forestry Institute (NAFRI) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies (NPS), represented by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). There were 11 participants with three women, who were from NAFRI, the National University of Lao PDR (NUOL), the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DOPC) of MAF and IWMI.

The overall objective of the visit is to gather information, knowledge and experience and learn lessons on how the Government of Vietnam has attempted to improve evidence-based strategy and policy development process, especially policies in relation to agroecology concept. The process of the visit arrangement was to involve officials and researchers from different institutions of MAF in learning and research process of PTT, to strengthen their cooperation in further policy formulation process and facilitate their joint evidence-based research. Specific objectives of the visit were:

- To learn how policy research was engaged into policy formulation;
- To understand main contexts and responsive contents in the agroecology policy; and
- To experience agroecology farming practices.

During the visit, the team received support from the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD), to coordinate the visit to different places, in addition to sharing the knowledge on engaging evidence-based policy research into policy formulation process and concept of agroecology practices in Vietnam. The visits included the Department of Crops Production, Department of Livestock Production and Department of Fisheries of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), where the team learned about how agroecology policies and approaches integrated in their sectoral development. To explore agroecological practice, the visiting team also visited a rice-fish-shrimp farming in Bac Lieu, Mekong Delta region, which is considered as a successful agroecology farming practice by Ong Tho Corporation.

To have better comprehension agroecology concepts and successful factors in the context of the agroecology practices in Vietnam, the team took additional desk review. Details of the reviews, learning programs and key discussions were outlined in the following sections of the report.

II. Background

Vietnam is a knowledgeable case for the visit. On policy engagement, Vietnam and Lao PDR have similar strategic development directions to promote sustainable agriculture. These include the goal of the 13th Party Congress of Vietnam to build “Agroecology, Modern countryside and Smart farmers” model in the orientation for socio-economic development for 2021-2025 (Anh, 2022) and MARD’s 2021-2030 Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development and 2050 Vision focusing on ecological and environmental-friendly agriculture to create agricultural values and consumer demands to under its transition efforts from agricultural production to agricultural economic thinking (NARDT, n/a).

The concept of green, clean and sustainable strategic direction is well aligned with the development context of Lao PDR under its National Green Growth Strategy (NGGS) to 2030 and other policy framework, for example, the current Green and Sustainable Agriculture Framework (GSAF). To articulate NGGS and GSAF as a part, a particular Sub-Sector Working Group has been established to promote agroecology in Lao PDR, under leadership of the Department of Agricultural Land Management (DALaM).

Vietnam is also well known for successful agroecology farming practices in different parts of the country, including Bac Lieu, a coastal province in Mekong Delta region (Figure 1). These practices, especially rice-shrimp farming, created economic benefits for farmers/producers from quality rice and shrimp production.

A new rice-shrimp farming was introduced in Bac Lieu in 2001 to promote sustainable farming through rotation and intercropping model (DOF, 2016). However, the rice-shrimp farming was practiced in other areas of the Mekong Delta in the 1980s (Petersen and Hieu, 2022). The area for rice-shrimp farming in Bac lieu increased from 5,851 hectares in 2011 to 29,867 hectares in late 2015 (DOF, 2016). This trend continued in later years, at 40,000 hectares (Ngoc et al., 2023).

Bac Lieu has also has another suitable ecology zone for intercropping between rice or fruit trees and vegetables, apart from the mixed rice and rice integrating with shrimps or other aquatic animals (Minh et al., 2015). A rotation of rice-shrimp production comprised of two cycles, from January to June for raising shrimps and from July to December for rice cultivation (Ngoc, et al., 2023).

The rice-shrimp systems have been broadly recognized due to its sustainable practice (Petersen and Hieu, 2022; VietFish Magazine, 2019). Main benefits of the rice-shrimp model included disease reduction in both rice and shrimps, clean production compliance to customer needs and profit increase (Ngoc et al., 2023). Another case of the environmental benefit due to reductions of chemical uses was a rice-duck farming in another area of Mekong Delta, which farmers can reduce both chemical pesticides and fertilizers because ducks often ate weeds and insects in rice fields and their droppings help fertilize rice plants



Figure 1: Bac Lieu's map, source: Minh et al., 2015

(Ino, 2016). The author (2016) elaborated that farmers also expanded to an intensified rice-duck-shrimp model to secure their livelihoods which were often affected by salt intrusion.

As a result, Bac Lieu People's Committee introduced a plan to develop organic rice-shrimp farms for safety assurance to its 2025 Vision in 2019, with the aim to increase productivity and quality of rice and shrimps in compliance with different safety schemes, i.e. VietGAP and Organic (VietFish Magazine, 2019). In terms of the average productivity, the rice-shrimp farming produced 300-500 kilograms of shrimps per hectare and 4-5 metric tons of paddy per hectare.

From the principal perspective, agroecology is described around three pillars of economic, social and environment sustainability. For example, FAO (2023) defined agroecology as “an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principals to the design and management of food and agricultural system”, while another definition is that “Agroecology is a holistic approach to the analysis and management of farming and food systems that prioritizes diversity and synergies at all levels to produce outcomes that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable.” (Bartlett, 2023).

For agroecology implementation in Vietnam, six policies were created to encourage specific agroecology practice (Anh, 2022). These include:

- Agroforestry policies: a land-use system to facilitate cultivation of perennial crops on the same land as trees.
- Policies for integrated crop management and integrated pesticide management: it is about adoption of the Integrated Pest management (IPM) concept on an ecological approach to enhance understanding of farmers on field ecosystems, the use of appropriate farming practices, making effective decisions in the management of production system, cultivation of healthy crops and reducing pesticide use.
- Policies for standardizing agricultural production: issuing and application of standards, i.e. Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices (VietGap) in agricultural production to ensure food safety for consumers.
- Policies for integrated farming management: it is traditionally practiced by Vietnamese farmers to cope with their challenges in accessing external farming inputs and food markets. Some successful examples of the integrated farming models are rice-duck, rice-fish and the 4F model (Farm, Foods, Feeds and Fertilizers), which helps protects ecological environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Policies for organic production: it is to develop and implement Vietnam Organic Agriculture (OA) which was established in May 2012.
- Policy for conservation and landscape agriculture: it is about soil protection in mountainous areas by using ground cover with vegetables and plant waste to response to maize monoculture causing soil erosion.

III. Learning programs and summary of outputs

During the visit, the team visited different Government offices and a farming site. See attachment of the agenda for the study visit. Details of the programs and key learning outputs are as follows:

3.1. Meeting at the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD)

On 27 November 2023, the visiting team met with Dr Truong Trang, Deputy Director of IPSARD and Dr Dang Kim Son, Senior Advisor for a project of IPSARD, in Hanoi.

IPSARD was established under the Prime Minister's Decision no.930/QD-TTg, dated 9 September 2005, as a public scientific and technological agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). It is served as MARD's Think Tank in the field of agricultural policy and strategy. Main functions of IPSARD include scientific research, technology transfer, international cooperation, policy advice, baseline surveys, information provision, training and other services in relation to agricultural and rural development. To perform these functions, IPSARD has outlined key mandates to perform these functions and its institutional strategic development around vision, missions and operational plans. On research spheres: its mandates are about a) agricultural and rural development's strategy and policy research as assigned by MARD and provisions of law and b) other research mandates on markets, industries, economies, society, institution and environment and climate change in the areas of agriculture and rural development. On policy advice and consultation, IPSARD also has different areas of service including consulting, evaluating and commenting strategies, policies, action plans, programmes and projects. On information, IPSARD works on compiling agricultural and rural development policies, strategies and relevant research outputs and scientific information publications. As a part of these roles and mandates, IPSARD also takes part in policy formulation process.

In Vietnam, a policy formulation also follows four key principle steps including problem identification, formulation, issuance and evaluation. IPSARD involves two of the four steps of policy formulation process, referring to the presentation made by Dr Son (Photo 1). These include formulation and evaluation, while the other two steps on problem identification and policy issuance are responsibilities of the Government. He emphasized that it is important for policy researchers to monitor/conduct studies to gain evidence and feedback on the implications of the policy implementation from different perspectives, including farmers, private sector and stakeholders, and report to the Government for their information and necessary actions to ensure policy effectiveness. He added that it is often common that governments are not aware of underlying implications as serious, so it is the role of policy researchers to identify emerging issues and proposing solutions.

In terms of the agroecology policy, Dr Son explained that it is one of the approved directions by the Party. However, a comprehensive concept of agroecology was outlined in the Direction, and the country has no specific agroecology strategy. It is not known for now whether the Government may plan to develop the strategy or an operational guidance to support agroecology implementation. He added that the important point to consider for agroecology promotion is that governments should ensure market creation for agroecology farming, not only formulating and enforcing the strategy, for example, there should be buyers for carbon credits if this agroecology scheme is to be promoted as a part of the strategy.

Regardless of the policy in place, Vietnamese farmers have been practicing different agroecology farms such as rice-fish-duck and rice-shrimps and other intercropping crops. He added that agroecology, es-

pecially at the macro level, can be implemented informs of carbon credits, waste recycles, climate adaptation and so on. The status of agroecology promotion and practice in Vietnam is not far different from the situation in Lao PDR where the Government has strong interests in agroecology advantages through sustainable the agricultural development direction. These are good lessons learnt for the visiting team.

It is interesting to note that IPSARD used to have a number of challenges to perform their policy research role with a focus on cross-cutting issues for MARD due to a lack of staff and qualified staff as well as required capacity and budget, but these were addressed by raising research funds from agribusiness enterprises and development partners. On the staffing issue, IPSARD emphasized on both capacity building schemes (short and long-term training) and empowering staff with high education into management positions. These institutional challenges of IPSARD are similar to the current situation of PTT and might be a good lesson for NAFRI to strengthen its capacity and operations as Policy Think Tank for MAF.



Photo 1: Following up discussions after presentation by Dr Son, IPSARD, photo credit: Thavixay Soulinh

3.2. Meeting at the Department of Fisheries

The team met on 27 November also with Mr. Pham Quang Toan, the Director of Planning and Finance Department of the Department of Fisheries, and other officials responsible for breeding and aquatic feed and cooperation (Photo 2).

Vietnam has three types of fishery farming systems, including sea water-based farming, freshwater farming and a mixed water farming. Fisheries industry contributed 25%-27% of the agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Under Fisheries Strategy to 2030 and 2045 Vision, fishery farming sets a target to increase farming production to reduce hunting natural aquatic animals and increasing private investments in sea-based fisheries, while maintaining environment and aquatic biodiversity. The target is to have an annual increase of farming by 3-4% per year and 7 million tons of aquatic farming products by 2030. As a part, these are also to underpin the Party's direction to promote agroecology, new rural development and modernized city development. To ensure the achievement and reflect the impact of urbanization development on farming lands of mixed water fisheries, the development of the Department will focus on sea-water farming. Besides, the Department will launch some development projects to reduce hunting natural aquatic animals and protecting the rights of fishermen.

The case of the Department shows that although agroecology can be well applied in the fishery industry, there need necessary regulations/law enforcement to manage exploitation of natural resources, to effectively implement the agroecology policy. It is also important to note that Vietnam try to develop their fishery industry based on their potential, i.e. fishery farming in the sea, rather than the fresh water.

3.3. Meeting at the Department of Livestock Production.

The team met with Mr Duong Thang, the Director General of the Department, and colleagues (Photo 3).



Photo 2: Meeting at Department of Fisheries, photo credit: Phonethip Banouvang

The Department of Livestock Production has shifted to self-sufficient operation by focusing more commercialization direction from 20 years. Livestock production contributed 26.7% of the agricultural GDP. The Department simultaneously promotes animal production and animal feed production. There are seven zones for entire livestock production and more than 700,000 sites of manual processing. Main export markets of Vietnamese livestock are Japan and USA. Main animal productions include pig farming with average production of 28 million to 30 million, which is ranked in the 5th of the world, the 2nd in Asia, and the 1st among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), followed by poultries with production of more than 50 million heads and other herbivorous animals such as cattle, goats and sheep. meet production in the whole country is sufficient for 100 million consumers.

For animal feed production, it can annually produce 21 million tons, which is ranked in the 10th of world. However, a main challenge is about limited land for cultivating animal feeding crops such as maize, cassava and beans.

Livestock production is governed by different legislations, including the law on livestock which was formulated in 2018 and approved in 2020. The livestock sector sets its annual growth of 5% to increase their export markets. To promote production, the Government provides loans with low interest rates and does not collect land tax. The Department also focuses on breeding animals required by European countries.



Photo 3: Visiting team presents souvenir to the host at the Department of Livestock Production.

In terms of agroecology or sustainable production practice, the livestock production direction is oriented to green, environmental-friendly and sustainable production. The Department also pays attention to monitoring carbon emissions. The Department also cooperates with the Department of Crops to promote cycle production. Processing animal manure to produce fertilizers and energy to reduce environmental pollution and increase values are other examples.

The team finds a number of successful factors from meeting with the Department of Livestock Production. These include making available loans with low interest rates, turning animal waste to general income, energy and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is observed that a collective business model of farmer cooperative is promoted to supply compliant quantities without expanding more production sites.

3.4. Meeting at the Department of Crop Production

On 27 November 2023, the team met eventually also with Mr. Vu Nhu Cuong, the Director General of the Department of Crop Production, and his colleagues (Photo 4).

Vietnam used to be a food insecurity country, but it is the 2nd or 3rd food export country in the world in the present. Vietnam has export value of US\$ 22 billion from the crop production sector, including US\$ 5 billion from fruits and US\$ 4 billion from rice. The country has an approximate rice production area of 3.5 million hectares with sufficient yields for domestic consumption and the export.

The success of the crop production sector is because of a number of key factors, according to the General Director and his colleagues. These include the new policy focusing economic orientation, the efforts and dedication of Vietnamese farmers who try to not leave their agricultural land empty, and MARD's supported direction emphasizing on scientific research and technology application to boost productions.

The sector makes strong research efforts to multiply quality seeds of staple, high-value and industrial crops such as coffees, durian, and dragon fruits. For example, the sector can produce high quality rice seeds, in terms of having a short cultivation period from 95-120 days, high productivity and quality. Other research focus is about developing contextual-based production techniques due to soil quality and suitable crops. The Department also pays attention to having proper disseminations and adoption of the research results and technology application. The annual meeting with provincial agricultural offices is an example platform to disseminate relevant policies, new technology and research results. A key challenge for the crop production sector is related to enforcement of land allocation, which is not often effective. Average agricultural land per household is about 0.2 or 0.3 hectare.

On the agroecology approach, different farming practices were raised as examples such as rice-shrimp, rice-duck, and using rice stores for producing compost and other uses, i.e. vases. Another interesting example is that terraced-rice fields in mountainous areas are used for ecotourism. The Director General added that Vietnamese farmers were familiar with intercropping and rotation practices as a part of agroecology, however, they may need more support on environmental-friendly production techniques.



Photo 4: Presenting Lao handicraft made souvenir to the Department of Crops

The visiting finds that providing technical support to farmers to focus on environment care practice to increase their existing farm productivity is a good lesson learnt to promote effective agroecology practices in Lao PDR. This will create an opportunity for researchers to conduct research based on the demands and facilitate sustainable adoption of the introduced techniques.

Please also note that the concept or the term of agroecology does not seem to be an interesting top of the discussion with the host. Perhaps, it is because this cross-cutting approach is perceived as a part of farming practice to ensure effectiveness of land use and manage production waste.

3.5. Site visit in Bac Lieu Province

On 28 November 2023, the team visited a rice-shrimp and fish farming in Bac Lieu, in Mekong Delta region, which is about 110 kilometers from Can Tho city. The team was hosted by Ms. Duong Thanh Thao, the Chief Executive Officer of Ong Tho Rice Corporation and her area manager (Photo 5).

The rice-shrimp and fish/muddy crap farming is operated under cooperation between the company and local farmer cooperatives, under a contract farming. Under this arrangement, the company is responsible for supplying rice seeds, production technique under VietGAP standardization, and the market. The company promotes rice production for export, mainly to the USA. Contracted farmers are responsible for their aquatic production and the market. This enhances their additional income from selling rice to the company. The company supports rice production in more than 15,000 hectares, including this area.

The rice-shrimp-fish farming is practiced by both rotation and integrated model. Under the rotation, rice is cultivated in the rainy season while shrimp farming is operated in the dry season, in which sea water can be released in the rice fields. According to Ms. Thao, rice cultivation helps adjust water temperatures for raising shrimps, fish and muddy craps and leaves of rice plants are feeding source to for the aquatic animals in addition to natural food sources from the rice fields for shrimp production.



Photo 5: Discussion with Ms. Thao, on the left. Photo credit: Thavixay Soulivanh.

On the other end, aquatic animals' waste helps fertilize rice plants in addition to organic fertilizers. This integration practice produces high yield of rice at 5 metric tons per hectare, while farmers can have 300 kilograms of crap production per hectare and 200 kilograms of shrimps per hectare.

It is evident that agroecology farming practice can be well applied with a larger agribusiness model, not only for food security of rural households. This also suggests that agroecologists need introduce techniques and prove how agroecology can increase effectiveness, in terms of productivity and costs of the foundation crops which is rice for this case, in order to have the introduced techniques/best practices actively adopted.

3.6. De-briefing meeting

On 30 November 2023, the visiting team had a wrap-up meeting to present lessons learned from different visits, verify them and agree on further actions. The session was facilitated by technical team from IWMI and NAFRI's PTT.

Presenters who were instructed to be a focal person for consolidating information and lessons learned from different meetings, also took the presentation role in this session. These include: 1) Mr Somsamay Vongthilath for the meeting at IPSARD, 2) Mr Thavixay Soulinh for the Department of Fisheries, 3) Dr Bounlert Vanhnalat for the Department of Livestock, 4) Dr Keuangkham Sisengnam for the Department of Crops Production, and 5) Dr Phanhsy Maniphet for the site visit.

Key lessons learnt and actions agreed from following discussions and comments from all the participants, are summarized in the next section of this report.

IV. Lessons learnt and recommendations

Overall, the visit team learned different good lessons from Vietnam in terms of factors sustaining and advancing agroecology farming practices. There are some specific lessons on policy engagement and policy implementation, as follows:

Policy engagement:

- Lao PDR is in a good track when compared with Vietnam, in terms of having similar policies/strategic directions in place to promote agroecology. For examples:
 - Vietnam uses the 13th Party Congress as the institution to promote “Agroecology, Modern countryside and Smart farmers” model for 2021-2025 and MARD’s 2021-2030 Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development and 2050 Vision to promote ecological and environmental-friendly agriculture.
 - Lao PDR has NGGS to 2030 and GASF, which were formulated to articulate the 8th five-year National Economic Development Plan from 2016-2020 for green economy to end hunger, ensure food security and sustainable agriculture with the aim to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2) as a part and support smallholder farmers.
- However, strengthening the policy/strategy enforcements is a key success. In 2023, MAF established the specific Sub-Sector Working Group (SSWG) on Agroecology providing platform to share experience and policy discussions, including preparation for policy/strategy formulation.
 - It is proposed that the PTT research community under leadership of NAFRI and DOPC shall be involved in all consultation and formulation process on agroecology strategy/action plan.

- To ensure policy effectiveness, MAF/relevant departments shall pay attention to having adequate evidence-based research for policy formulation and evaluation of the policy implementation and impacts for both aspects of technology and policy effectiveness.
 - It is proposed that the PTT research community shall be assigned to take lead or involve in the stage of formulation and the evaluation of policy impacts.
 - To perform better roles in the policy influence and formulation process and to position PTT as Policy Think Tank for the Government and MAF, it is recommended that PTT continues to expand its collaboration and cooperation with different donors, development projects and international research institutes to support the process to enhance research capacity and funding.
- Referring to the case of Vietnam, the term “Agroecology” seems to be less familiar or commonly used, while a term relating to environmental-friendly agriculture is more commonly referred when meeting with different MARD’s departments. However, the agroecology term is commonly found in reports from donor-led development projects. Therefore, it is recommended that it is crucial to:
 - Develop an understanding of agroecology concept and elements at all levels to encourage agroecology in the agriculture development sector.
 - Identify agroecology practices/models in Lao PDR to for further improvement and scaling out, including an evaluation of existing agroecology practices to identify gaps and lesson learned.
 - Identify a responsible division/department within MAF to be responsible or focal point for promotion and support on agroecology. So that the responsive/relevant departments of MAF to advocate, disseminate and makes clear links from agroecology to relevant policies and practices such as organic production, intercropping agriculture (i.e. cassava and soy-beans to improve soil degradation), and ecotourism. As a result, the newly establish SSWG on Agroecology could play a key role to promote agroecology in Lao PDR.

Policy implementation:

- It is evident that MAF and the Government of Lao PDR have done well, in terms of putting their efforts to promote external investments to implement different enforced policies/strategies/framework.
 - To promote effective and sustainable promotion of agroecology, there is a need that MAF and the Government to continue their efforts on market access for agroecology policy for participating farmers. This is a kind of incentive to prove the benefits of integrating agroecology concept in the production of their main produce. This is also to comply with agroecology principal on changing social relations, empowering farmers, adding value locally and privileges in short value chains, in addition to food security, nutrition, climate change adaptation, and sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity.
 - It is recommended that agroecology concept shall be integrated in agricultural interventions by the private sector, by demonstrating the agroecology benefits to enhance their investment effectiveness terms of increasing productivity, reducing costs and protecting environment.
 - To facilitate the demonstrations of the benefits of agroecology practices, the relevant implementing departments should develop generic agroecology techniques for different models around crop cultivation, livestock, fisheries and forestry, and provide adequate training to extension officers.

- It is recommended to pilot a selected model for a particular area based on the potential of the area.
 - Another successful factor in addition to the market aspect, it is crucial that relevant implementing departments/development partners help facilitate farmers to integrate their familiar/local knowledge of agroecology approach into cultivation of a foundation crop or to address their challenges.
 - Promoting intercropped/intensified crops/livestock/aquatic animals should be based on their local context.
- Please note there may require large investments for some agroecology models, for examples: recycle and energy production. The Government needs to provide supports to adopted enterprises or farmer organizations to trial or adopt these agroecology models.

It is interesting to note that IPSARD used to have a number of challenges to perform their policy research role with the focus on cross-cutting issues for MARD due to understaffing, a lack of qualified staff as well as required capacity and budget, but these were addressed by raising research funds from agribusiness enterprises and development partners. On the staffing issue, IPSARD emphasized on both capacity building schemes (short and long-term training) and empowering staff with high education into management positions. These institutional challenges of IPSARD are similar to the current situation of PTT and might be a good lesson for PTT to strengthen its capacity and operations as Think Tank for MAF.

V. Conclusions

The report documented knowledge and lessons learnt from the exchange visit to Vietnam from 26-30 November 2023. Overall aim of the visit arrangement was to enhance institutional cooperation between policy researchers and policy makers from relevant departments/institution of MAF in policy formulation process, for further their engagement. Specific objectives of the visit were to learn about how policy research was engaged into policy formulation, agroecology context and farming practices.

Lao delegates from PTT research community, DOPC of MAF, and IWMI met with IPSARD and three other departments of MARD. A site visit to learn lessons from practices on rice-shrimp-fish farming in Bac Lieu in Mekong Delta region was also arranged for the visiting team.

It is found that Vietnam was a knowledgeable place to explore its different successful agroecology practices by Vietnamese farmers for improving their food security through commercialization. With the sustainable practice, the agroecology development direction was targeted in the recent Party Congress of Vietnam and a part of MARD's strategy to 2025 and vision to 2030, including some specific polices such as organic production, GAP standardization and integrated farming. A point to note was that the agroecology term was not seem to be commonly used or understood, when compared with the environmental-friendly agricultural concept.

A good lesson learnt for Lao PDR may be about strengthening policy enforcement, because the country already had the similar strategies and policies as in Vietnam. Some recommended enforcing measures include formulating specific strategy, supporting farmers to adopt suitable technologies/innovations, and engaging research evidence into policy formulation process. As the term "agroecology" is also newly introduced in Lao PDR, there need strong efforts to disseminate the concept, making links to existing practices and advocating its benefits, to facilitate broader practices.

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ANNEXES:

1. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

| No | Name | Position | Institution |
|----|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Dr. Thatsaka Saphangthong | Director General | DOPC |
| 2 | Dr. Chansamone Phongoudom | Deputy Director General | NAFRI |
| 3 | Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk | Deputy Director | Rural Agriculture Economic and Policy Research Center of NAFRI |
| 4 | Mr. Somsamay Vongthilath | Deputy Director | DOPC's Policy Division |
| 5 | Dr. Bounlert Vanhnalat | Researcher/Lecturer | NUOL |
| 6 | M Dr. Keuangkham Sisengnam | Researcher/Lecturer | NUOL |
| 7 | Dr. Phanhsy Maniphet | Researcher | NAFRI/PTT |
| 8 | Mr. Thavixay Soulinh | Researcher | NAFRI/PTT |
| 9 | Ms. Sengphachanh Sonethavyxay | Policy Research Expert | NAFRI/IWMI |
| 10 | Mr. Souphalack Inphonephong | National Researcher | IWMI |
| 11 | Ms. Phonethip Banouvong | Administrative and Finance Officer | IWMI |

2. VISIT AGENDA

| Time | Activity | Venue | Expected learning & methodology |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Day 1 – 26 November 2023 | | | |
| 12:00pm | Travel from Vientiane to Hanoi, and hotel check-in | | |
| Day 2 – 27 November 2023 | | | |
| 7.00 to 8.00 am | Team breakfast | | |
| 8.30 to 10.00 am | Meet with Dr. Son and Director of IPSARD | IPSARD meeting room 102 16 Thuy Khue str | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vietnam's experience in engaging research evidence into policy planning and development process, lessons learned for Laos, by Dr. Son - Exchange information on agroecology directions and policies, by Dr. Thang - Following up discussions with the visitors - Confirm the agenda of the day, the site visit in the following day by both parties |
| 11.00 to 12.00 am | Meet with Fisheries Department | Fisheries Department | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on the policy (development process, contents, implementation) in the livestock sector, by LPD - Exchange information on livestock policy direction in sustainable development, agroecology inclusive |
| 12.00 to 13.30 am | Lunch break | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|---|
| 14.00 – 15.00pm | Meet with Livestock Production Department | Livestock Production Department | - Presentation on the policy (development process, contents, implementation) in the fisheries sector, by FD - Exchange information on fisheries policy direction in sustainable development, agroecology inclusive |
| 16.00 – 17.00 pm | Meet with Crop Production Department | Crop Production Department | - Presentation of the policy (development process, contents, implementation) in the crop sector, by CPD - Exchange information on crop policy direction in sustainable development, agroecology inclusive |
| Day 3 – 28 November 2023 | | | |
| Visit rice-shrimp farming model in Mekong Delta River province | | | |
| 06:35 – 08:55 | Fly from Hanoi to Can Tho | | |
| 08.55 – 10.30 | Travel from Can Tho to Bac Lieu province | | |
| 10.30 – 12.00 | Meet with Gao Ong Tho company | Phuoc Long dist., Bac Lieu | - Visit rice-shrimp farming - Follow up discussion with visitors |
| 12.00-14.30 | Lunch break and hotel check in | Bac Lieu city | Sunrise Bac Lieu hotel |
| Day 4 – 29 November 2023 | | | |
| 7.00 – 8.00 am | Breakfast | | |
| 8.30 – 11.30 am | Travel from Bac Lieu to Can Tho airport | | |
| 14.00 – 16.20 pm | Fly from Can Tho to Hanoi | | |
| 17.20 pm | Check in hotel | | |
| Day 5 - 30 November 2023 | | | |
| 10.30 to 12.00 am | De-briefing on lessons learnt and further application plan | A Hotel in Hanoi | A session will be facilitated by IWMI's consultant. |
| 14.00 to 15.30 pm | Travel back to Vientiane | | |

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- Mr. Souphalack Inphonephong, National Researcher, IWMI.
- Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk, NAFRI.
- Ms. Sengphachanh Sonethavixay, NAFRI/IWMI.
- Dr. Phanhsy Maniphet, NAFRI.
- Mr. Thavixay Soulinh, NAFRI.
- Dr. Bounlert Vanhnalat, the National University of Lao PDR (NUOL).
- Dr. Keuangkham Sisengnam, NUOL.
- Mr. Somsamay Vongthilath, the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DOPC).

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- Mr. Vu Nhu Cuong, the Director General of the Department of Crops Production.
- Ms. Duong Thanh Thao, the Chief Executive Officer of Ong Tho Rice Corporation.

Cover photo:

The visiting group and the rice-fish-shrimp farming team in Bac Lieu (photo credit: Phanhsy Maniphet)

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INTERNATIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (IWMI) SOUTHEAST ASIA

c/o National Agriculture and Forest Research Institute (NAFRI)

Vientiane, Lao PDR.