



# Agroecology & Markets: Setting the scene

Isabelle Vagneron, CIRAD

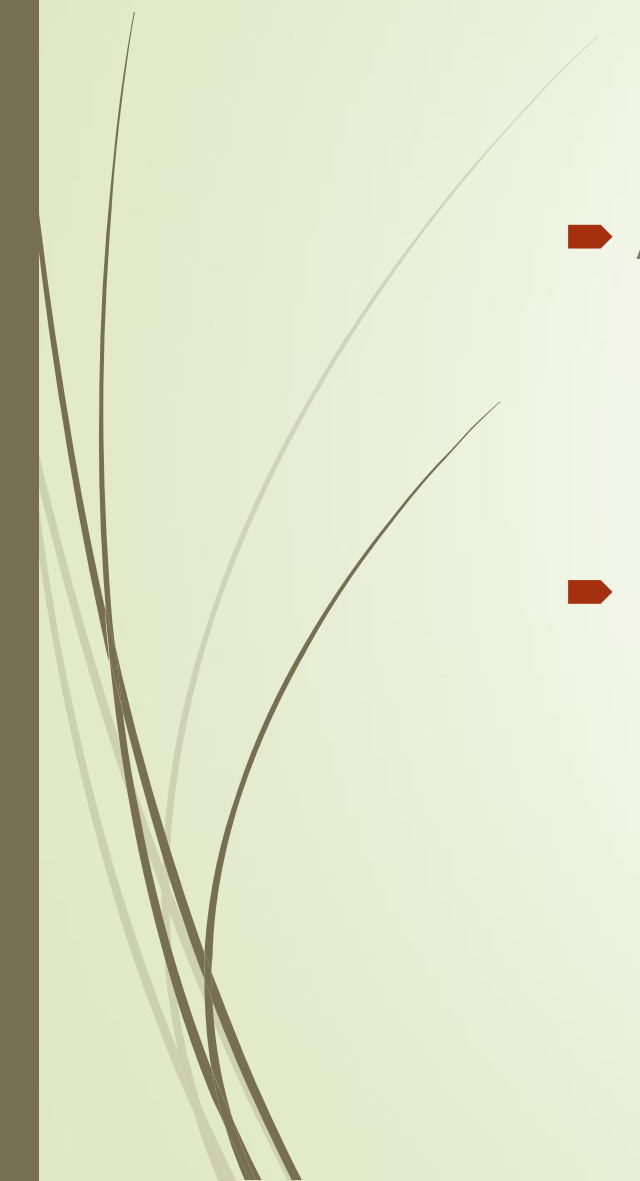
*Vansana Riverside Hotel, Vientiane,  
9<sup>th</sup> of February 2018*



WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?



# What is agroecology?

- **Agroecology** designates at the same time:
    - a scientific discipline,
    - a set of agricultural practices,
    - a political/social movement (Wezel et al, 2009).
  - Need to **improve the sustainability of agriculture**, by focusing:
    - on various dimensions: agronomic, environmental, social, economic, ethical,
    - at various scales: the plot/field, the farm, the landscape and the whole food system.
- 



# Objectives of agroecology

- ▶ produce diversified and high-quality food,
  - ▶ reproduce (or even improve) ecosystem fertility,
  - ▶ limit the use of non-renewable resources,
  - ▶ avoid contaminating the environment and the people,
  - ▶ contribute to the fight against global warming
- 

# The changing scope of agroecology

Plot	Farm	Food System
<b>New farming practices</b>	<b>Exchanges with the surrounding environment</b>	<b>Design and management of sustainable food systems</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Efficient use of natural resources</li><li>• Improved nutrient recycling</li><li>• Enhanced diversity in time and space</li><li>• Health of soils, crops &amp; livestock</li><li>• Promotion of key ecological processes and services.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plant and animal communities</li><li>• Food web interactions</li><li>• Conservation biology in agricultural landscapes and agroecosystems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Link between how food is produced and how it goes into the food system.</li><li>• Resilience, participation, localness, fairness, and justice of the global food system.</li></ul>

Environment ↔ Agriculture ↔ Food



# Food system



- A **food system** is a system that involves activities, social and institutional structures, and processes related to the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of food.
  - Who and how many people are involved in the cycle between the soil and the plate?
  - What are the relations between those who grow the food and those who receive and eat it?



# Innovation



- ▶ Not only **about technology**.
- ▶ It may be the reorganization of institutions, organizations, value chains, businesses to enable actors to innovate on their own terms (Felt et al., 2007)
- ▶ What **kind of innovation** are we talking about?
  - ▶ trying intercropping, planting legumes to improve the soil,
  - ▶ diversifying / trying new crops,
  - ▶ growing products year round / supplying a consistent quality,
  - ▶ shifting to commercial agriculture,
  - ▶ setting-up / joining a cooperative,
  - ▶ signing a contract with a buyer
  - ▶ ...



# Bringing agroecology to markets

- **Farmers** willing to change the way they do farming and/or the way they interact with the rest of the food chain
  - environmental degradation (erosion, pollution),
  - health and nutrition,
  - livelihoods.
- **Consumers** willing to buy products that have desired quality attributes (e.g., safe, fresh, nutritious, tasty, environmentally-friendly, organic, traditional).
- Situation in Lao PDR is not that of Brazil or even Thailand.





# ISSUE # 1: CREATING TRUST

# The problem with quality

- It is **EASY** for me to find a yellow mango:



- It is **A LITTLE HARDER** for me to find a mango to eat:

➤ like this...



➤ or like that:



- It is **VERY DIFFICULT** for me to find an organic / fair trade / child-free labor / bird-friendly / farmer-grown... mango



# Information asymmetries & market failures

**Producer**  
*with specific (AE) practices*

- How to make sure the consumer knows that my product has the quality attributes that he and I value?

**Information asymmetry**

**Consumer**  
*willing to pay for such practices*

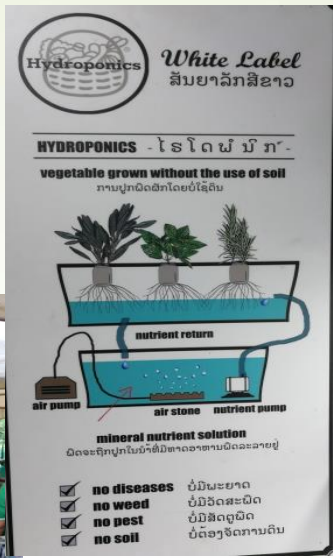
- How to make sure the quality attributes I value are present in the product?

# Creating trust



PERSONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS

REPUTATION



RETAILER

BRANDS / PRIVATE  
LABELS

PRICES



THIRD PARTY  
CERTIFICATION + LABEL

PGS



# Distance, information & trust...





## ISSUE #2: SCALING UP AND OUT



# Potential limits

- Farmers' ability:
  - to keep taking risks or to share them with others,
  - to negotiate fair prices to reward their efforts,
  - to develop / strengthen newly established market linkages,
  - to keep up with new requirements (quality, reporting, regularity)
  - to overcome poor enabling environments,
  - to retain their autonomy (diversify).
- Limited consumer awareness /
- Limited potential of nested markets.



# OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES






# Institutional innovations

- ▶ Creating new **forms of interaction and organization** that bring together actors that traditionally did not work together:
  - ▶ give a more active role to the consumers (AMAP),
  - ▶ foster direct interactions between:
    - ▶ consumers / producers to allow exchanges of information (quality),
    - ▶ farmers themselves (seed exchanges, barter, sharing of inputs, cooperatives, informal credit schemes)
    - ▶ various actors of the food chain (e.g., farmers, buyers and service providers) through multistakeholder platforms
  - ▶ create/strengthen social networks (Facebook groups).

# Encourage collective knowledge production and sharing



- Promote collaborations between all actors of the food system (e.g., farmers, NGOs, CSOs, government agencies, private actors).
- **Participatory guarantee systems (PGS)**
  - Networks created within local communities –farmers, experts, public sector officials, food service agents, and consumers– that certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders.
  - “based on active participation of stakeholders and built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange” (IFOAM)
  - Peer-to-peer systems enable awareness raising and knowledge sharing within the entire value chain.
-  Familiarize farmers with commercial knowledge and knowledge about the networks through which they can reach markets.



# Public support

- ▶ Create an enabling environment:
  - ▶ Policies (taxes, access to credit, insurance, trade, land rights);
  - ▶ Infrastructure: roads, farmer market spaces, storage areas, Internet, etc.
  - ▶ Operational system of standards, certification & inspection
  - ▶ Facilitate the dialogue between stakeholders at the local level
  - ▶ Recognize dynamic local organizations



# Questions



- **How to build/restore trust** between consumers & other stakeholders of the food system
- **How to raise awareness** of all stakeholders involved in the food system & **foster learning alliances** from producers to consumers?
- What **institutional, organizational and technical innovations** are necessary to support the emergence of markets for agroecological products?

Loconto, A., A-S Poisot and P. Santacoloma, 2016.  
Innovative Markets for Sustainable Agriculture,  
Rome:FAO.

