



CENDI NARRATIVE REPORT TO MISEREOR

1.1. Project No.: 339-900-1071.

Title: Regional Workshop and field exchange 'Challenges of GMOs and protection of local plant varieties in South East Asia'

1.2. Project location/ region: Vietnam, the Philippines.

1.3. Reporting period: From July 1 to October 30, 2017.

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1. Brief description of report preparation

- People involved in report preparation include CENDI staff and key farmers; members of LISO Alliance (from last regional meeting held in Hanoi including SPERI, CHESH-Laos, CIRUM); experts, colleagues and farmers from leading regional NGOs such as GRAIN from Indonesia, Bio-Thai from Thailand, MASIPAG from the Philippines, and SAEDA from Lao PDR, farmers and colleagues from MISEREOR Vietnam partner groups, and young ecological farmers from CENDI-LISO Alliance – all of whom were involving in the regional forum and field activities provided information reflecting their views, comment, ideas and recommendations. A CENDI expert and CENDI project coordinator were in charge of composing this narrative report.
- Sources of information include documents from the pre-regional meeting, presentations, field reports, plans, notes, mass-media news, social media, and other materials (pictures, video clips, records from the field, etc.) and some independent sources.
- This reporting reflects our on-going learning process and also advocacy to objecting to specific impacts of GMOs such as pesticide/herbicide use, and that not cover/apply to all GMOs issues. During the meeting, discussions specifically targeting health and environmental impacts as associated with the requirement to use toxic chemicals with GMOs corn for instance were highlighted.

2. Changes in the project context

2.1. Important changes in the project setting

After promulgation of the Prime Minister's Directive No. 16 / CT-TTg dated May 4, 2017 on enhancing the capacity to access the 4th industrial revolution¹, the Vietnamese Agricultural sector has been moving further towards modernization. According to a MARD officer, the Ministry has implemented many measures to apply the Directive. For the development and application of biotechnology in agricultural production, cell culture technology has been widely applied to provide disease-free seedlings at low cost for agricultural and forestry seed production. Genetic engineering has been applied for high yields, pest and disease resistance and unfavorable environmental conditions. MARD has suggested reviewing land policies, concentrating on land consolidation, exchange of land for land consolidation for the industrialized, high-tech agriculture².

This move is the continuation of the previous policy set out in Decision 11/2006/QĐ-TTg dated January 12, 2006 by the Prime Minister approving the program for biotechnology application and development until 2020. This Decision provides an ambitious target for 2020, in which new plant varieties created by biotechnology techniques will account for over 70% of the cultivated areas, of which GMOs will account for 30 to 50%; and agricultural biotechnology will contribute over 50% to the increase in the agricultural value. Given the planning area of 9.59 million

¹ Source: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Dau-tu/Directive-16-CT-TTg-strengthening-of-the-ability-to-access-the-Fourth-Industrial-Revolution-361701.aspx>

² Source (in Vietnamese): <https://www.most.gov.vn/vn/tin-tuc/12825/tien-toi-nong-nghiep-cong-nghe-cao-thich-ung.aspx>

hectares for agricultural production in the master plan of the agricultural sector according to Decision 124/QĐ-TTg dated February 2, 2012 by the Prime Minister, the GMO cultivation will cover an area from 2.01 to 3.35 million hectares by 2020. The mentioned documents reflect the formal dominant path and endorsement for large-scale, modern agricultural investment (including genetically modified crops) rather than caring for land rights, local seeds diversity and food subsistence and livelihood sovereignty of the smallholder farmers.

2.2. Important changes of the target groups

Although MARD and the government of Vietnam officially showed their willingness to promote biotechnology and genetic engineering, many local authorities and community groups and smallholder farmers from the CENDI and LISO Alliance's project areas have experienced, and are highly worried about, the impacts of GMOs especially application of herbicides and other toxic chemicals.

When they had the chance to discuss the issue via the regional forum on GMOs held in Hanoi in late August, they raised concerns from different localities and addressed the needs to be realistically concerned to have the needs and survival of the local small farmers included as a critical consideration in any decisions by the government. In addition, farmers also express wishes and needs for protection of their local seeds sources and plant varieties as to ensure local small farmers' self-sufficiency and food security and autonomy and biodiversity.

2.3. Important changes of CENDI

There are no administrative, structural or personnel changes within CENDI in this reporting period.

2.4. Implication of the changes for the project

Despite the existence of very different, even controversial viewpoints, approaches and trends towards GMOs currently exercised by different actors in Vietnam, the forum was found to be highly beneficial for CENDI and many of the partners both domestically and regionally.

The forum was an opportunity for local NGOs and regional alliances to raise discussions and provide useful information for the target communities, as well as the public, to critically discuss the impacts of GMOs especially upon herbicides/pesticide resistance corn. Participants indicate high concerns over the critical need to limit and prohibit the use of Roundup-Ready resistant corn. Other important actions being raised are the commitments to maintain protection of local seeds and local genetic diversity for ecological cultivation production, healthy environment, and livelihood security by smallholders and local communities. Focusing upon local solutions, local knowledge, local seeds and associated technique, maintenance and improvement through seed selecting and breeding should be one of the important strategies and approaches in the coming context.

3. Implementing the project and achieving its objectives

3.1. Achievement of the project objectives (in this reporting period)

	Baseline value at project launch	Interim values	Current value (October 2017)
<i>Project Objective 1: Farmers in Vietnam and Laos have an improved understanding with regards to the effects of genetically manipulated sweet corn</i>			
Indicator 1: Farmers' understanding of GMOs has been improved	Previously, there has been no information on GMOs, or discussion of issues amongst farmers and local communities including those from CENDI project areas and other MISEREOR Vietnamese partners' sites.		<p>Local officers and farmers groups and passionate citizens, who participated in the regional forum, learnt and recognized the problems and impacts of GMOs and have shared what they learnt with other local officers, local communities, and villagers.</p> <p>In a few communities of CENDI project sites, discussions in terms of inclusion of banning of herbicides were further stimulated. On-going facilitation is leading towards including this proposal as part of the Customary Law rules to be discussed and agreed by all village and community members.</p>
Indicator 2: From an understanding of the GMO impacts, participants work in their communities to address the issue	Most of local officers and farmers, communities in the CENDI project area were not informed fully and committed to the reduction of the use of herbicides. This was partly due to no access to the appropriate information by the villagers and local communities and even local authorized		<p>CENDI is mediating the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the Regional forum on GMOs, all Violak villagers have committed not to use herbicide any more. • Most of the Vi Po E 2 villagers have agreed to stop using herbicides from 2017. Now only 3 households in this village use the toxic chemicals and are currently under strict supervision of

	<p>agencies. Also, the top-down policy process is to push for commercial cropping and the promotion of associated use of herbicides by formal scheme(s).</p>		<p>the village leading team to continue enforcing the stopping of the use of herbicides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In other communities in the Dak Nen commune, a discussion in terms of inclusion of banning of herbicides was further stimulated and on-going facilitation of this will be part of the Customary Law rules to be discussed and agreed by all village and community members.
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Conclusion: After the Regional meeting, many participants recognized the issues raised by GMOs and the impacts of the use of toxic herbicides are much clearer. There was agreement between participants to share knowledge with other people. Two villages in the Po E commune and also villages in Dak Nen area have already made a strong commitment on rejecting herbicides.

3.2. Activities and outputs

3.2.1. Organize regional forum on GMO impacts and local solutions

In collaboration with Bio Thai, MASIPAG, SAEDA, GRAIN, NTFP-Cambodia and other LISO members as well as active participation of MISEREOR Vietnamese partners and a representative from SCCF France, CENDI organized and facilitated successfully the regional sharing forum on GMO impacts and local solutions. Participants’ came from different countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, France, New Zealand, Vietnam and Indonesia; all of whom have different backgrounds and experiences. Before the forum, CENDI had spent a lot of effort, in collaboration with Regional partners, to collect and translate the 8 key documents and presentations into Vietnamese and English; these were uploaded onto the CENDI website in order to share them with participants as well as the public.

Information was also collected from local mass media included news and videos. Certain activities from the grassroots such as local nurseries efforts for restoring local seeds and local varieties from CENDI and other LISO Alliance members were collected and printed for demonstration at the Forum. During the 3-days meeting, from the presentations and highly active discussions and participation, the participants gained a better understanding of GMOs’ herbicides use and their impacts on self-sufficiency of small farmers, people’s health and the environment. After the meeting, the participants formed an informal network for informing each other of GMO impacts particularly the herbicides use, and continued making efforts to raise the importance of local solutions, for instance, to maintain and promote native seeds and

encourage each other to exchange experiences of selection and multiplying important local seeds, such as rice and other plant varieties.

The forum facilitated and highlighted discussions and experiences from different international organizations on the context of GMO crops and products and their impacts. The sharing from MASIPAG case as well as the video from MASIPAG was shown at the forum for informing impacts of GMO crops e.g. Roundup-Ready resistant corn from the Philippines onto smallholders' sovereignty in the three regions in the Philippines. The meeting also facilitated discussions of potential solutions to tackling GMOs-impacts related issues as it pertains to Vietnam and other countries. The forum enriched and strengthened the participation and solidarity amongst farmers and local actors from different regions that are currently affected by GMOs. The event served as a dialogue for sharing information and facilitating discussion amongst different participants to enhance capacity to understand the impacts of GMO/ Roundup-Ready resistant corn and potential approaches to discontinue its use in Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand. The follow-up process includes further raising awareness in society about GMO/Roundup-Ready resistant corn impacts and challenges on regional livelihood as well as biodiversity and the need to find local alternative solutions, especially the promotion of native species and local techniques for safe/ecological agricultural production and livelihood sovereignty for smallholder farmers and local communities.

3.2.2. Documentation and media on GMO and alternative solutions

So far, CENDI has produced a video clip reflecting the last Regional meeting itself, also additional the field trip to Son La area where GMO/Roundup-Ready resistant corn's impacts onto smallholders and also touched upon the need for local alternative actions, which can be used for further discussion in the field, as well as to share publicly for awareness raising and advocacy purposes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PoM4sCGvow&feature=youtu.be> Presentations at the regional forum are on CENDI website, at <http://cendiglobal.org/gmo-dangers-of-the-times-s55.html>.

Some news on the forum are covered, such as on MASIPAG website: <http://masipag.org/2017/09/masipag-participates-in-regional-sharing-on-gmo-and-local-biodiversity-in-vietnam/>, or CENDI website (in Vietnamese): <http://cendiglobal.org/vn/tim-loi-giai-cho-hiem-hoa-gmo-thuoc-diet-co-va-thuoc-tru-sau-s62.html>

Some news, images and contents of the forum has been shared on social media, such as the MASIPAG and CENDI fan pages at the following links: <https://www.facebook.com/Masipag-330604687006523/timeline>; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Masipag-330604687006523/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1488085757925071; and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Farmerfieldschool/?fref=nf>

News were promoted by mass media such as Vietnam Communist Party Online News: <http://cpv.org.vn/video/id/605337.html> and the Leader online: <http://theleader.vn/cay-trong-bien-doi-gen-khong-cham-dut-duoc-nan-doi-tren-the-gioi-2017082912441851.htm>

Another video clip news are covered by Vietnam News Agency: <http://vnews.gov.vn/ban-tin-thoi-su-tong-hop-20h-ngay-25082017> (at the minute 4:15'' to 6:37'').

3.2.3. Other actions beyond the regional forum

After the forum, CENDI staffs have continued to share information and keep in contact with all participants. A formal follow-up plan has been set up, in which selected farmers from Vietnam will visit and learn experiences in rice selection and breeding in the Philippines at MASIPAG during the Week 3rd of November 2017. Other follow-up activities facilitated by many other actors in the Region included:

1. In Lao PDR, Dam Trong Tuan from CHESH Lao is working together with our young eco-farmers, particularly Vieng Phet, Anong (former students of Mrs Tran Thi Lanh from HEPA Eco farming school) to open a discussion in Long Lan village (soon after the meeting) to re-sharing the materials from GMO meeting, especially upon impacts of Round-up ready resistant corn to villagers of the Long Lan community.
2. People from Caritas Da Lat have also organized their meeting with other local villagers to share the materials from GMO meeting, especially upon impacts of Round-up ready resistant corn in Lam Dong province, Central Highlands. Villagers are scared of the GMO impacts. A staff of Caritas Da Lat asked and gave feedback to CENDI that why we had not organized this forum much earlier? According to her, we are already too late in terms of seeing many negative consequences due to villagers having already used much herbicide recently.
3. Since CENDI has posted documents and news through media, we have received requests from Vietnamese people who are even strangers to us for access to the GMO materials of the forum. We have not yet been able to monitor-in-full their use of our material. This is something we will be looking into improving our practice in the future.
4. Mr Thongdam from SAEDA informed that, by Sept 14, 2017 his organization attended the meeting with other Laotian sectors and agencies to discuss National Seed Policy. Another related event will be organized in December, and he will share the material with us.
5. Local and international friends have made efforts to share our published videos/media pieces on movement against GMOs with other Permaculture networks.
6. CENDI coordinator (Ms. Dang To Kien) met Ms. Emmanuelle Argenson from SCCF, and transferred available information about GMOs (on her last day in Vietnam). Ms Argenson showed her willingness to share and discuss this topic with other colleagues, including MISEREOR officers.

CENDI also uses further connections, opportunities and activities for strengthening the network on organic farming with Towards Organic Asia (a Regional network based in Thailand) to continue raising concerns about GMOs especially Round-up ready resistant corn, updating regional partners under TOA of GMOs impacts in Vietnam, and seeking alternative solutions to put focus upon the importance of local seeds and native plant varieties and biodiversity. Further connections have been promoted, for instance, two CENDI staff were invited to participate in the 19th Organic World Congress (OWC) in Great Noida, India in November 2017. At this meeting, presentations looking at impacts of GMOs especially Glyphosate contamination was extremely at high concern. IFOAM looked at and discussed and passed the MOTION 79 (specifically raising awareness of Glyphosate contamination in the world to motivate people to action).

3.3. (Unintended) effects

In combination with other project activities, the results and contents from the Regional forum have become a highly useful source of information for not only learning and also engaging into this critical field of impacts of Round-up ready resistant corn for not only CENDI staff, expert, local representatives, officers and technicians but also active citizens at large, many stakeholders and concerned actors both within Vietnam and ASEAN countries to use for the different formal and informal sharing with other people, who did not have the chance to be involved in the forum.

And most significantly, CENDI field staff and regional experts in collaboration with the network of ecological farmers, the District Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, communal officers, village elders and leaders organized communal meetings and four discussions for 4 villages in Po E commune (H're ethnic group), Kon Plong district, Kon Tum province to inform villagers of the harm of herbicide usage and major issues presented from the regional forum. After the discussions, all the participants understood clearer the link between GMOs, application of herbicides, pesticides and the consequences for the environment, humans, and animals. Villagers of the two villages of Vi Olak and Vi Po E 2 made an agreement committing to reject using herbicide in their localities. The Po E communal people's committee also agreed to issue a Party-resolution soon to completely banning the use of herbicides on the landscapes and during production cultivation.

3.4. Risks, opportunities

Beside the above success in some villages in Po E commune, CENDI staff and experts will identify difficulties faced by other village such as the Vi K'Oa village, where most of households keep cultivating cassava and using herbicide simultaneously. According to Vi K'Oa villagers, cassava has become their main source of income; they have not found an alternative for herbicide and they do not have enough labor to do the weeding sufficiently well without using herbicide. Other reasons are that the villagers have not yet identified other crops to replace cassava; and according to the community discussions that the village leaders have not found the way to give up using herbicide. It is critical that villagers need an alternative means of weed control before they give up the herbicide; or further trainings and awareness and education of permaculture/natural farming methods/ecological farming highly needed in which villagers should be realized that they are taught to see any non-crop plants as weeds.

4. Conclusions

The project activities have been carried out successfully according to the objectives, strategy and plan set out in the proposal. The regional forum was essential for bringing people from different countries, contexts and backgrounds to learning about these complicated issues surrounding GMO and impacts such as Round-up ready resistant corn especially in country such as Vietnam that is so emerging and critical. The forum also allowed participants to share their current understanding and view and experiences on GMO impacts and thought through about the possible solutions. Follow-up activities are being gathered and further developed by CENDI in collaboration with farmers group and other local organizations.

Local people and officials from varied regions have shown a great interest in exchanging ideas, and were soon engaging in the techniques of local seed maintenance and promotion of native seed breeding (especially local rice and other local plant varieties) as a solution for healthy agricultural production and environment, simultaneously reducing negative impacts of GMOs. On the basis of the project relevancy, they suggest to continue other activities according to this proposal (activities such as farmer-to-farmer study visit and exchanging).

Annexes

Annex 1: Pictures of project activities



Figure 1 Group presentation



Figure 2 Presentation of a Tay ethnic woman



Figure 3: Presentation by Participant from Bio-Thai



Figure 4 Nung ethnic farmer from Lao Cai province



Figure 5: Discussion of participants from Laos and Cambodia



Figure 6 Tea break discussion between Philippine participants and others

Annex 2: Observations from the regional sharing on GMO and Biodiversity Workshop August 25-27, 2017 in La Thanh hotel, Hanoi: Lessons learnt from farmers about indigenous crop species

Indigenous varieties are considered by farmers to be of higher quality than the new High-Yield Varieties (HYV), and important for the maintenance of culture and identity, but their productivity is lower compared to HYVs.

For example, in Simacai before 1997 there was not enough to eat, but with HYV there is now enough to eat and also a surplus. It is difficult to increase the productivity of Indigenous varieties.

The problem with HYVs is that they require inputs of dangerous chemicals. Farmers are not aware of the dangers of herbicides and pesticides but, as a result of their usage, both ill health and death can occur. Farmers ask, "If they are harmful, why are they produced?" And "if they are harmful, why does the government not ban them?" Instead the government encourages their adoption and use – even providing them free in the first year. In later years, however, the market price of crops falls and the cost of chemical inputs increase and farmers fall into debt.

Farmers use HYV and chemical poisons because they follow the government policy and because "everybody is doing it". They are not being shown any alternative model so they continue doing what the government tells them.

Ethnic minority villages still have many indigenous varieties which they continue to grow by swidden agriculture and which are used for self-consumption and for cultural ceremonies. Farmers would like to be able to sell them also, but the yield is low and local people cannot afford the extra price of the higher quality indigenous varieties.

It is the same with livestock. The rate of growth of pigs fed on GM corn is very high, but the meat is not good. It takes 3-6 months to produce a pig using GM corn and 1-2 years to produce one using local food. The local pigs are of much higher quality, but the sale price is higher and people prefer to buy the lower quality meat at a cheaper price.

The problem is how to generate a modern livelihood using indigenous species. In modern markets, farmers have to compete against low quality cheap products.

Question: What are the respective production costs of HYVs and Indigenous varieties? HYVs incur greater production costs of seeds, chemical inputs (fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides), sickness and death of humans and animals, degradation of the environment and soil fertility, poisoning of waterways and death of aquatic food sources (fish, crabs, snails, frogs). The production cost of indigenous varieties is a higher investment in labour and energy for weeding.

Do the production gains from using HYVs outweigh the direct (financial) and indirect (health, environment) production costs?

Reflections from the workshop

The key farmers of the Thai, Muong, Tay, Hmong, Nung, Cil, Co Ho, H're and Ka Dong ethnic groups in nine provinces of Vietnam and participants from eight countries expressed concern about GMOs especially impacts from herbicides, and suggested urgent actions as follows:

There are 35 opinions from the participants are categorized into 3 main groups:

Group 1. The key farmers set up an action plan for the 2017-2020 period to preserve the local seed bank that has been linked with the livelihoods of ethnic minority people for generations by promoting traditional farming strategies based on indigenous knowledge (Agro-Ecology Gardening Pilot Group).

Group 2. Research the causes and consequences of genetically modified (GM) corn and herbicide, to clarify the dangers of their usage for animals, humans and other living things in soil, water pollution, biodiversity loss/disappearing in many countries (Action Research on GMOs and Herbicides for Publication and Advocacy).

Group 3. Formation of communication programs in the language of every ethnic group to help people understand the dangerous issues associated with the use of genetically modified corn and herbicides, which are introduced by MONSANTO in Southeast Asian countries (Capacity Building and Social Awareness Raising and Media)

Responsibility for poisoning

In the Western countries (e.g. USA, Germany), where most of the poisons used in industrial agriculture are produced, there are very strict rules and regulations governing their handling, use, rates of application, disposal of containers, etc. These laws and regulation have been made for the safety of the people.

People applying poisonous chemicals in the field have to wear protective clothing, use special breathing apparatus, apply the poisons from a safe enclosed space of an airplane or cabin of a tractor, and wash carefully afterwards.

There are strict instructions about the quantities of poison to be used, how they are to be mixed and applied, including under what climatic conditions (e.g. wind).

These regulations are an acknowledgement of the serious danger of these chemicals, and it is the responsibility of the government of all countries that, if they allow their use, they must also ensure that they are being used safely.

If they allow the chemicals to be used unsafely then they should be held criminally responsible for the death and sickness that resulted.

Unfortunately, in Vietnam, if such laws and regulations exist, they are not being implemented, and government officials are encouraging the use of these poisons without any protections for the users, and without any careful education of the people as to their proper use.

In Western countries, if government officials acted in this way they would be acting criminally and would be held responsible for the deaths and sickness that occurred as a result of their actions. They could be imprisoned.

Western governments, although they take actions to protect their own people, do not stop Western companies from selling to developing countries agricultural poisons that are prohibited in their own country. In this way they are also responsible for the death and sickness that their inactions cause, and should be held criminally responsible, along with the companies that sell the banned poisons. Even though governments (even in developed countries) can only regulate sale and use, not production but they should limit these chemical companies in terms of selling these into less developed countries and urged for alternative eco-solutions/ecological production and sale and use which will be much more mindful approach to the smallholders' lives and their communities.