



Community Entrepreneur and Eco-farming

Eco-farming



HEPA 2007. Photo: Tran Thi Lanh

“Eco-farming is a cultivation method which is related harmoniously to *five fundamental characteristics of an ecosystem*, namely: 1) Diversity; 2) Uniqueness; 3) Interaction; 4) Adaptability; and 5) Sustainability. These characteristics serve as a basic foundation to create life, endurance and differences of all living things. This cultivation method reflects a moral behavioural culture of farmers towards the *intangible values* that have become their *beliefs and behavioural norms*. This is the cultivation method that *nurtures the original and unique landscape pattern presented to all living things by the Creator*. Farmers who engage in this method have nurtured *five fundamental rights of a human livelihood* which have become the core values and daily behavioural norms of their life and the livelihood identity of the farmers: 1) the right to the ecosystem (basic); 2) the right to nurture the ecosystem (unique); 3) the right to practice wisdom and experience on the ecosystem (practical); 4) the right to self-reliance and self-determination in the ecosystem (holistic); and 5) the right to co-nurture the ecosystem with neighbours (strategic). This cultivation method only exists in

remote areas where ethnic minorities live deep in the forests that are less impacted by a so-called “civilized and modern” society. These communities have never ever lost themselves by running after new technology and speedy competitions in an immoral market economy towards living things. This cultivation method differs from organic agriculture and sustainable agriculture in its values and *ten behavioural criteria*”(Tran Thi Lanh, 2007).

Eco-farming philosophy is reflected by a system of indicators of a farmer’s daily behaviours. They are: 1) *Spiritual ecosystem (worship nature)*; 2) *Farmers relate, inherit and nurture their livelihood as a gift*; 3) *Farmers are responsible for their behaviour towards the ecosystem through a system of unwritten behavioural norms (customs and wisdom)*; 4) *Respect, listen, observe, design, plan, use and enrich resources created by sun, rain and wind energies in order to create products suitable to the five fundamental characteristics of ecosystem*; 5) *Dynamic between practice and learning lessons to enrich wisdom regained from experiences in order to nurture natural landscape and resources for inter-generations that are presented equally to living things by the ecosystem*. (Tran Thi Lanh, 2007).

Agro-ecology

Agro-ecology is an approach to agricultural production that aims to increase food production by optimizing natural ecological processes, beneficial on-farm interactions, and minimizing off-farm inputs. It is built on an equal partnership between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge, biological scientists and traditional farmers and on-site experimentation.

Agro-ecological farming systems exhibit 1) high levels of biodiversity that plays a key role in regulating ecosystem functions; 2) indigenous systems of and technologies of natural resource management; 3) diversified agricultural production; 4) ability to cope with disturbance and change in the natural and human environment; 5) traditional knowledge systems and farmer initiated innovative technology; 6) natural resource management regulations based on strong cultural values and collective forms of social organization.

In many parts of the world agricultural systems have been developed to meet subsistence needs without depending on mechanization, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or other technologies of modern agricultural science. Agro-ecology builds upon these traditional systems to build up their capacity to deal with environmental stresses due to adverse climatic changes and to increase production by increasing the efficiency of natural biological processes.

Community Entrepreneur

Community entrepreneurs are those who professionally nurture and develop the cultivation method that relates to the *five fundamental characteristics* of an ecosystem that have become *beliefs in nurturing nature* of the community. Accordingly, the community can sustain the *five fundamental rights of a human livelihood* that have become the core values and daily behavioural norms in the cultivation methods and livelihood identity of the community.

More simply, community entrepreneurs can be defined as brave persons who can create free spaces to help the entire community develop their creativeness in moral interactive relations with the ecosystem, and their well-being based on their *ten behavioural criteria*.

They are venturesome and ready to sacrifice themselves for the interests of the community. Hence, they are worshiped and respected as spiritual leaders who help the community overcome difficulties, challenges and personal temptations, to maintain and develop their distinctive cultural and moral values towards a harmonious, safe and autonomous development. The non-material values created by the community entrepreneurs and their community are towards ecology, society, safety and well-being of all living things.

The capital created by the community entrepreneurs is basic and fundamental non-material values to decide the meaning and quality of life based on the *five fundamental characteristics* of an ecosystem and the *five fundamental rights* of a human livelihood.

Community entrepreneurs, according to CENDI's BHE, are defined as village elders and key farmers of MECO-ECOTRA¹(1995-2015) and YIELDS-AGREE² (2015-2025) who have been continuously pursuing their genuine values in a journey of self-experiencing, self-initiating, self-forming and self-enriching the beliefs in nurturing nature of the indigenous minority peoples and communities.

Community Enterprise

Community enterprise is a community that shares the same values and norms in the interactive relations with the ecosystem. Their cultural, social and civil political institutions are to nurture nature, the *five fundamental characteristics* of an ecosystem and the *five fundamental rights* of a human livelihood. Community enterprises never run after the technology that is immoral for the *original and unique landscape pattern* of the ecosystem and non-sustainable for human livelihood.

Community enterprise, according to CENDI's BHE, is defined as an enterprise *owned by every member of the community*. Village elders and key farmers of MECO-ECOTRA (1995-2015) and YIELDS-AGREE (2015-2025) have been continuously pursuing their own genuine values in a journey of self-experiencing, self-initiating and self-nurturing nature regardless of any social changes. They are the owners who *determine* all types of *transactions* and *market transformations* between them and the consumers.

Community enterprises inherit the traditionally voluntary core values of the community in its adaptation and response to immoral market challenges of the non-spiritual, non-cultural, non-ecological and non-community technologism.

¹ MECO-ECOTRA = Mekong Community Networking for Ecological Trading

² YIELDS-AGREE = Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy – Agro-Ecological Systems Enterprising



Mang But, Kon Plong 2016. Photo: Tran Thi Lanh,

Organic Agriculture

The practice shows that organic farming that farmers are practicing is partial and one-sided in an effort to eliminate inorganic impacts from the cultivation process and to runaway from experiencing unrest in health and environment. In most cases, the organic farmers passively engage in this cultivation method as they are dependent on orders from the consumers rather than being motivated by their awareness and moral responsibilities for the ecology, community health and environment.

Organic farming is practiced just to meet the demands of a certain group of people of high income rather than to nurture nature. Therefore, this cultivation method is not rooted in the *five fundamental characteristics* of ecosystem and the *five fundamental rights* of human livelihood.

Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture is a product of a market-driven political institution. Sustainable agriculture is indispensable when the production capacity of land (soil fertility) is overexploited and unlikely to be recovered affecting the livelihood of the whole society and declining business interests. This type of agriculture exists just to respond to the non-sustainable ecology which results in environmental deformations under the pressure of non-stop GDP-driven competition without the basic knowledge of the law and endurance of the interactive relations of the *five fundamental characteristics* of an ecosystem and the *five fundamental rights* of human livelihood. Therefore, sustainable agriculture targets technological solutions of genetic modification and inorganic nutrients imposed by humans and in abuse of nature. In this sense, this is a vicious agriculture oriented towards material growth in a non-spiritual ecosystem.

Criteria of an ecological livelihood product

5 fundamental characteristics of an original ecosystem

1. Diversity;
2. Uniqueness;
3. Interaction;
4. Adaptability;
5. Sustainability.

5 fundamental rights of a human livelihood

1. The right to ecosystem (Basic);
2. The right to nurture ecosystem (Unique);
3. The right to practice wisdom and experience on ecosystem (Practical);
4. The right to self-reliance and self-determination on ecosystem (Holistic);
5. The right to co-nurture ecosystem with neighbours (Strategic)

List of 10 standardized *ecological chains of ecological livelihood products* within MECO-ECOTRA (1995-2015) and YIELDS (2015-2025) networks

1. Clean coffee and vegetables of the Hmong ethnic group in Long Lan village, Luang Prabang district, Lao PDR;
2. Ecological black pepper of Mr. Phuoc's family
3. Ghe wine in Violak village, Po E commune, Kon Plong province;
4. Amomum of the Dao ethnic group in Sai Duan village, Phin Ngan commune, Bat Xat district, Lao Cai province;
5. After-birthherbal bathing shampoo of the Red Dao ethnic group;
6. Forest vegetables in Hepa, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province;
7. Dak Lanh's honey in Mang But commune, Kon Plong province;
8. Mang But's red rice;
9. Mang But's Genoderma Lacidum;
10. Mang But's Son Tra (*Crataegus cuneata Sied.et Zucc.*) (fruit)
11. Mang But's Lan Kim Tuyen (*Anoetochilus setaceus*);
12. Ngu Ky Tu (*Frutucs Lycii.*) (fruit)
13. Crane-necked mushroom, cloud year fungus, That diep nhat chi mai (*Paris poluphylla Sm.*) in Mang But commune.

Research Purposes

1. Research and facilitate the community to establish community enterprises owned by the community entrepreneurs of MECO-ECOTRA (1995–2015) and YIELDS-AGREE (2015-2025) networks;
2. Support the community enterprises to inspect food quality and safety and register product's trademark and copyright;
3. Document ecological chain of a product that returns to the community for inter-generation education;
4. Upon fully obtaining the three above factors, the community is able to operate their own community enterprises led by the community entrepreneurs who determine transactions and transformations in the market chain.

Approaching community and ecosystem

1. Observe the ecosystem, compare and learn from farmers whether the *five fundamental characteristics* of ecosystem are nurtured or abused by the *five fundamental rights* of human livelihood;
2. Draw ecological transects to describe the *five fundamental characteristics* of ecosystem and spiritual sites based on the beliefs in nurturing ecosystem by village elders and key farmers through their local wisdom and knowledge;
3. Discuss with all village members for their contribution of local knowledge and experience;
4. Analyze opportunities, challenges, solutions and actions of the research;
5. Collect data on history, specific ecosystem and ecological livelihood of the community in research areas;
6. Identify local ecological livelihood specialties for trademark and copyright registration for the community.

Process of researching a product's ecological chain in the spiritual ecosystem

The *five fundamental characteristics* of ecosystem – the *five fundamental rights* of human livelihood of the community – *nurturing the diversity and original landscape pattern* of ecosystem – *enriching the regional ecological livelihood identity* - collecting and storing products – processing and packing – analyzing the product safety - registration for trademark and copyright of the local specialties

Improve skills in communication and governance of product's key values (*the five fundamental characteristics of an ecosystem and the five fundamental rights of a human livelihood*).

Enhancing Community Capacity

1. Provide experiences, skills and process in storing and processing products in accordance with food quality and safety standards;
2. Provide skills in organization, co-ordination and governance of the product chain between the community and clients in accordance with food quality and safety standards;
3. Provide skills in approaching clients and introducing the product chain process;

4. Connect community with quality inspection organizations, registration for the product's trademark & and copyright;
5. Create forums to connect the community with other networks that share the same interest in the ecological product chain from Mekong region, Bhutan, Amazon and Pacific Ocean.

Creating opportunities for the community to establish community enterprises

1. Provide legal advice to help key farmers groups establish community enterprises and govern their ecological products to approach the clients;
2. Connect the community enterprises with dealers and consumers that share the same values in nurturing nature;
3. Document and build website to publicly and transparently introduce the community enterprises and their ecological product chains to clients.

Community Enterprise Philosophy

1. Community is the owner of enterprises. The community members decide the survival of the enterprise (community-driven enterprise);
2. Community determines cultural, moral and ecological livelihood added values of products;
3. Community, through the community enterprises and community entrepreneurs, connects directly with the consumers in order to convince, educate and improve their behaviours and habits through the cultural, moral and ecological livelihood added values of the products;
4. The relations in terms of livelihood sovereignty and livelihood identity of indigenous peoples between the community enterprises and the consumers become one of co-responsible for the market ethics, social ethics, cultural ethics and ecological ethics for inter-generational longevity;
5. Nurturing nature becomes the needs of both the consumers and community enterprises.

Consulting community enterprises in response to the immoral market

1. Establish a network of consumers sharing the same values in nurturing nature;
2. Connect community enterprises with legal prestigious food quality and safety inspection bodies and national traditional medicine testing units as well;
3. Facilitate to establish a National Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation of original landscapes and ten behavioural criteria of ecological chain of community enterprises;
4. Connect community entrepreneurs with original natural landscape architecture experts;
5. Connect community entrepreneurs with financial partners sharing the same values.

Values of Eco-farming

Harmony between the Land – the Spirit – the Humanity values;

Cultural, social and environmental security;

Confidence, experience, knowledge and skills;

Ecological livelihood self-reliance;

Peace between social classes, sustainability between human beings and nature;

Contributing to easing the anger of nature

Enterprise Law no. 68/2014/QH13/26/11/2014

Article 10: Criteria, rights and obligations of social enterprises

1. A social enterprise must meet the following criteria:

- a) Be a registered enterprise as prescribed by this Law;
- b) Run operations aiming at solving social and environmental issues for the interest of the community;
- c) Use at least 51 percentage of the total enterprise's annual profit for re-investment in order to fulfill the registered social and environmental objectives.

Current status of social enterprises – from law to practice

Most enterprises and companies doing profit-making business have used 51% of their total annual profit to fulfill their social and environmental obligations and responsibilities just in order to respond to the criteria stated in the Article 10 of the Enterprise Law. However, ecological, social, cultural and moral capital in the farmer – enterprise – consumer structure has not been fully and properly achieved by either the Enterprise Law makers or the enterprises. The only aim of the superficial and formal approval of enterprise's business plans is to obtain the legal status as prescribed in Point 1, Clause 1 of Article 10 the Enterprise Law no. **68/2014/QH13/26/11/2014** saying that “Social enterprise is a registered enterprise as prescribed by this Law”, i.e. any group of individuals complying with this Article can be called a “Social enterprise”!?

In practice, not only numerous self-proclaimed “Social enterprises” have yet to fully meet the formal administrative requirements of the Article 10³, but also there is a big gap in the enterprise governing in relation to the producer – enterprise – consumer structure. The consumers either have no direct approach to the site where products are produced or don't thoroughly understand the production process of the products as a system of moral norms in relation to the *five fundamental characteristics of ecosystem and the five fundamental rights of human livelihood*. On the contrary, the producers also don't know who buys their products and where they are sold. The intangible values in terms of wisdom, ethics and culture of a product is *valued* and *monetized* through *copyright sales*. Once the copyright becomes goods

³There hasn't been any agency to monitor business activities of the enterprises in their compliance with Point b and c of the Enterprise Law, or any professional government body to identify what exactly is the 51% of the enterprise's total profit to be re-invested in the community for solving social and environmental issues.

for money exchange, it determines all business operations and becomes separate from their owners - producers. Money and financial interests then have ownership to determine all business activities. Floating on the money river of the market, the copyright is deformed by beliefs and ethics of the profit making behaviours.

Very rare enterprises honestly and transparently make public their transactions within the producer – enterprise – consumer structure, their product’s labeling and enterprise governing. The consumers just care about prices, their desires and product uses and ready to pay, while the sellers care about how much profit they can make from selling goods.

Enterprises have not voluntarily made public the differences between their buying and selling prices to the producers and consumers. More risky, they have never honestly and transparently publicized the process and criteria of the products they buy and sell.

They have also yet fulfilled their responsibility to *compensate* the producers for their added values in terms of culture, ethnics and their position in the transactions chain.

Both transactional and transformational functions of the market chain have not yet been shown.

Ecology and environment have not been considered as prerequisite to decide the enterprise’s survival.

Production capital including producers (farmers) and production materials (land) has not yet been considered as the assets to decide the responsible business longevity of the enterprise.

The farmers and consumers have not been recognized as real owners to decide the business sustainability of the enterprise.

The words “Social enterprise” have first appeared for almost two decades when the earth’s natural resources and social ethics have deteriorated to the alarming level. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger and bigger. The situation goes beyond the producer’s endurance. Money-driven business has become addictive substance spreading from West to East. The civilization of a society is measured by the “civilized, modern and technological” lifestyle towards consumerism or advertisement for consumerism. The social and natural resources deprived by the enterprises through the gap cannot make more profits due to the protest movement of the laborers (producers) and depletion of the natural resources. Necessity for further exploitation is mother of intervention. From the businessmen has formed the responsibility to compensate the society and environment, and the concept of social enterprise has appeared. Since the start and development of the Neoliberalism in 1980s, it is rare to find in the world an enterprise or corporation that, through its governing and behaviours, reflects the role as an independent arbitrator to monitor products and to be a reliable bridge between producers and consumers. Accordingly, *enterprises or companies are paid by producers and consumers for their monitoring and bridging functions through differences between buying and selling prices. If the enterprises or companies fail to fulfill*

these functions, they are boycotted by the producers and consumers – they become bankrupt. The earth is exhausted, the trust of producers and consumer are in crisis, because the majority of companies and enterprises haven't fully understood that their companies and enterprises, in essence, derive from the producers and consumers and are nurtured only by the earth's resources. The bigger the enterprises are, the more mysterious gap between producer – enterprise – consumer is, and they sometimes may control all socio-economic aspects, leading the honest and transparent producers and consumers to the wrong destination.

The simple truth is laborers/producers (workers and farmers) are the owners who decide the sustainable health and longevity of enterprises, and natural resources are the only energies of the enterprises. However, so far no enterprise has fully and correctly understood that this truth is based on the five fundamental characteristics of ecosystem and the five fundamental rights of human livelihood.

From the above explanation, these enterprises cannot be called the Social Enterprises due to their nature of their existence and the rules of the Enterprise Law no.68/2014/QH13/26/11/2014 as well.

Community (producers) and consumers to control/lead the market

Throughout the history of organization development, CENDI is confident that the community has sufficient market skills, experience and knowledge, and they will play the role as Community Enterprises with their enterprise governing style and courage to accompany with the consumers, whose rights and responsibilities for direct and independent consultancy and critique would help the community enterprises recognize the shortcomings and success of each product.

Models of clean vegetables in Long Lan village (Laos), ecological garden of Mr. Phuoc's family (Vietnam) and ecological garden of Mr. Som Lit's family (Laos) are good examples of the community enterprises and family enterprises at the initial level.

The key farmers network of MECO-ECOTRA (1995-2015) and YIELDS-AGREE (2015-2025) with their 6 thematic networks are qualified to be community enterprises, and their coordinators – community entrepreneurs who are the real owners of the community enterprises and decision-makers in the market chain.

In that sense, community enterprises would fulfill a mission to keep a good balance between the two banks: State and profit-making enterprises.