

**FINAL PROJECT REPORT &
SUMMARY FOR POLICY-MAKERS
(23 December 2015)**

*“SIANI Expert Group on Higher Education for Sustainable Agriculture (HESA)
in Southeast Asia”*

(12 months – 1 Feb 2015 to 31 Jan 2016)

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1. FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

OVERVIEW

This expert group aimed to assess capacities, best practices and policy options on Higher Education for Sustainable Agriculture (HESA) in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region while exchanging knowledge, and exploring interdisciplinary curriculum reform, teaching and research-extension needs as a contribution to strengthening regional poverty reduction, food/nutritional security and environmental protection.

The project engaged academic, civil society/NGO, government, ASEAN Secretariat officials, other regional organizations, United Nations (UN) and other partners in seminar discussions, policy dialogues, document drafting “write-shops” with academic analysis and reflections on government planning about HESA related concerns to improve curricula, research and extension services.

This SIANI project focused initially on establishing three expert sub-groups in three pilot countries (5 to 7 national or regional experts each from Thailand, the Philippines and Laos, PDR). This was quickly accomplished with great interest and participation already exceeding expectations in a short time. Inaugural national Expert Group meetings included national events hosted by CUSAR in Bangkok, Thailand (19-20 March); University of the Philippines Los Baños/UPLB, (27-28 July); and National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) in Laos PDR (4 August). Representatives of each national group also attended the first regional meeting Aug 18th 2015 at CUSAR in Bangkok to present Policy Brief outlines and discuss lessons learned with potential for broader research collaboration.

SIANI/SEI has already posted some preliminary material from these meetings at <http://www.siani.se/topic/hesa> based on recent updates, presentations and reports submitted from the national Expert Groups, Regional Organization specialists, United Nations agencies and government officials. Principal promised outputs (Final Draft Policy Briefs from each Expert Group) are now completed except for SIANI-SEI final editing before publication.

Key Project Activities and Accomplishments

- Establishment of a new regional HESA network in Southeast Asia with national nodes (in Laos, Philippines and Thailand) that have initiated or increased cooperation among partners on HESA national planning for higher agricultural education as well as national and regional research collaboration.
- High level interest and participation among senior university administrators, academics, civil society/NGO, government, ASEAN Secretariat officials, UN and other partners in public meetings, seminar discussions, policy dialogues, document drafting and longer term planning about HESA related concerns.
- Collaboration and partnerships with some senior government advisors, ASEAN officials and UN agencies who are interested in the outcomes and main outputs (i.e. Policy Briefs) of this project and may consider HESA-SIANI Expert Group analyses and recommendations as reference or resource materials in national or regional planning.
- Added public exposure to HESA ideas in special academic seminars at two universities in the Philippines at Central Bicol State University of Agriculture (CBSUA) and University of the Philippines Los Banos (UPLB), and one in Indonesia (also broadcast world-wide as a webinar) which were warmly received. These were attended by senior administrators, faculty and students.
- Three key outputs (Final Draft Policy Briefs) from each Expert Group in Laos, the Philippines and Thailand were based on intensive national consultations, research and writing by partners. Once published these should be useable documents of value to governments in policy formulation and planning as well as academics or university administrators to support institutional reform, teaching, new research and service.
- Broader collaboration across Chulalongkorn University and with many other academic, regional and international agency partners to host a regional conference on - ***“Social Sciences and Higher Education for Sustainable Development in the ASEAN Community”*** in Bangkok (19-21 Aug 2015). About 50-60 participants and presenters from academia, civil society, ASEAN, SEAMEO and some UN agencies gave papers or attended. Revisions to selected papers are currently underway for a good quality peer-reviewed academic publication in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others. Some HESA partners are contributors.
- A HESA pre-conference regional workshop held 18 August 2015 involved representatives from all national HESA-SIANI Expert Groups as well as resource people from the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) Asia Regional Office, Hanoi; Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP), Regional office.

Immediate Relevance and National Application of Project Outputs

This project has already produced three national HESA Policy Briefs to help begin guiding agricultural education policy and reforms in selected ASEAN countries. Each national drafting process has been unique but one common interest expressed has been follow-up to “operationalize” Policy Brief Recommendations of national HESA Expert Groups in further dialogue with governments and university leaders.

Phase 2 (if funding continues from SIANI) will facilitate related activities in wider ASEAN contexts with more countries added.

Preliminary discussions with academic partners in HESA Expert Groups have already indicated that some plan to use published policy briefs as classroom resource materials as well as reference documents for future discussions with, or proposals to, government officials and agencies or university administrators.

Phase 2 Proposed (building on good partnerships and success)

A proposal for Phase 2 (1 Feb – 31 Aug 2016) has now been submitted to SIANI-SEI to include support for national “operationalization” and implementation activities with workshops in 2016 planned for Thailand, the Philippines and Laos. High level support and partnerships among senior university administrators, some ASEAN officials and others is also expected for continuing this work.

Subject to HESA Phase 2 funding new national expert groups and policy drafting work are also planned in 2016 for Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam engaging new national partners and potential meeting hosts. Based on preliminary conversations and correspondence key collaborators will likely include (but not be limited to): Andalas University, Padang, INDONESIA; Yezin Agricultural University, MYANMAR; Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), CAMBODIA; The CIAT/CGIAR Asia Regional Office, VIETNAM; and others.

Regionally the project will also build on preliminary meetings with the ASEAN Secretariat and others to encourage cross-sectoral, inter-agency HESA policy dialogue and planning especially among South East Asian education, agriculture and environment ministers. Good foundations for co-funding or future collaborative programming in Phase 2 HESA activities have also been laid with discussions among various agencies (e.g. CIAT, FAO, SEAMEO-SEARCA and UNESCO among others) all of which participated in previous HESA activities. These links or regional and international organizations should help sustain and expand HESA related work nationally and across the region.

Aside from regional and national partners Faculty members from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) involved in Southeast Asian regional projects will actively collaborate with HESA Phase 2 and explore other synergies.

2. SUMMARY FOR POLICY-MAKERS

The principal outputs of this project have, so far, been Draft Policy Briefs for Thailand, the Philippines and Laos, PDR with highlights summarized below. They had some common objectives and themes, but also specific challenges and goals unique to each country. Some of the analysis and principal action recommendations for national work especially aimed at government officials, politicians and university administrators as well as donors who may be able to help incentivize innovation and reforms follow.

THAILAND:

The Government of Thailand is taking steps to promote Sustainable Agriculture (SA) as an alternative to the conventional high-input, intensive agriculture farming. Some positive steps are evident in support for some small farmers. Yet, it is not necessarily clear how the government can effectively expand SA concepts and apply it to the larger, conventional agricultural system in Thailand. The policy brief suggests education can be important in advancing SA concepts, approaches and implementing practices for longer term change.

Policy recommendations suggest innovations or reforms needed in five main policy categories: 1) Curriculum and teaching transformation/modification for agricultural education; 2) Research and development; 3) Outreach; 4) Networking/Collaborations through the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and other means; and 5) General recommendations to the government about advancing SA. These ideas and suggestions implied better support for existing program or new courses (such as for as organic farming) through both lectures and field practices (experiential farming). They also called for new incentives to train younger farmers and encourage them to apply their skills in rural areas. Finally the Thai brief called for more community based-research to complement new curricula and learning also to improve SA in farmer extension services.

LAO PDR

Higher education in the Lao PDR needs to reform to better address practical concerns of students and farmers, especially labor skills development and upgrading to support Sustainable Agriculture (SA) among graduates. The focus of the brief is on improving college level education and training necessary to improve the technical knowledge and skills of the agricultural labor force while bettering respond to the needs of farmers and policy objectives of the government. It complements and reinforces Laos PDR's current agriculture development strategy which aims to modernize the agriculture and forestry sector to achieve food security and poverty reduction with ensure environment friendly agriculture practices.

The Lao PDR Policy Brief recommends 1) new support for employment opportunities to cater to the growing labor force who have good knowledge of sustainable agriculture and environmentally friendly techniques; 2) improve Society's education about alternatives through media, schools and universities and using different media including newspapers, television and radio; 3) Policies that support human resource development based on demands of the labor market such as good agriculture practice (GAP), organic and environment-friendly practices; 4) Sustainable agriculture practices included in the education system beginning at the primary school level to improve awareness of the importance of safe food and environmental protection throughout a student's life; 5) Policies to support continuous

learning and innovation for teachers to improve their work in communities as they continuously improve their teaching and curriculum. The Lao policy brief also recommends a pilot project to provide training of trainers for new university graduates so they can obtain knowledge about sustainable agriculture, and further training in specific fields such as organic agriculture.

PHILIPPINES

Higher education in the Philippines needs to better research, teach and support extension services for a more effective response to numerous environmental and agricultural development concerns. The current state of higher education is not adequate to address the many environmental, economic and social associated with mainstream industrial agriculture approaches. The global and Philippine environmental and agriculture concerns are many and complex. Educational challenges include few students are currently taking up agriculture-related courses; Courses tend to be theory-based, with less or no focus on practice; The Curriculum is not geared toward SA; Agricultural universities and colleges still teach unsustainable conventional agricultural practices and technologies; climate change adaptive farming practices, technologies and systems are not adequately addressed in curricula; Farmer-led, scientist-supported and community-based technology transfer is necessary to facilitate adoption of these technologies to improvement farm productivity; Establishing or strengthening university-farmer partnerships can help.

Recommendations include: 1) Curriculum Development/Upgrading to learn SA alternatives; 2) both internationalization and “Filipinization” (defining a unique national development model drawing on local and indigenous Philippine cultures) of the higher education system; 3) improvement of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) reform processes with new curricula (especially in organic agriculture) to better advance SA; 4) more support for holistic, integrative - multidisciplinary sciences, with Research and Development (R&D) focused on SA; 5) a call to issue a Memorandum Order (CMO) requiring all higher education institutions to perform extension services particularly in support of SA; 6) a need to support existing SA practitioners and better recognize their skills with awards even if not university degrees; 7) increase national budgetary support of SA research and teaching.

ASEAN

Each policy brief referred to ASEAN contexts, partnerships or specific suggestions for implementation of policy recommendations across the region. The new ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) also comes into force at the end of 2015. Although many implications are still uncertain ostensibly the onset of the AEC will bring ASEAN member countries into a single market and production base, enabling a freer flow of goods and services throughout the entire region. This, as the Laos Policy Brief suggested, could encourage more intensive commercialized agriculture that will require more agrochemical inputs with increased harmful effects to the environment. Higher education research and teaching across the region is needed with new policies to study and mitigate potential adverse effects of ASEAN integration on SA. It could also help in better analyzing, promoting and training for SA alternatives. The Thai Policy Brief in particular referred to future collaboration with the AUN to advance some of its concerns.

IN SUM (Next Steps). More detailed analysis and specific recommendations can be consulted in each national Policy Brief when published and available online on the SIANI website. But in sum proposed next steps for Phase 2 HESA work, subject to funding, are expected to include:

- Existing 3 national expert groups which will continue work in Phase 2 to “operationalize” Policy Briefs in Thailand, the Philippines and Laos, PDR in further dialogues with governments, new partners and discussions with officials of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta.
- Four (4) new expert groups to produce additional Policy Briefs in 2016 for Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam.
- Further, deeper collaboration advanced to bring HESA goals and recommendations into government planning processes, ASEAN regional cooperation and UN-government agreements, policies while CUSAR and its partners hope to secure new donor support for HESA-related reforms, projects and programmes.