

# SPERI's definition of term<sup>1</sup>

## **MEkong Community Network Action for Ecological TRAding (MECO-ECOTRA)**

MECO-ECOTRA is the Grassroots foundation for Traditional Civil Society Organizational & Institutional Development beyond national, territorial, social, and political borders.

MECO-ECOTRA operates in terms of six thematic networks: 1) Customary Law in Community Governance and Management of Natural Resources; 2) Community Ownership of Spirit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity; 3) Eco-Farming Knowledge for Sustainable Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security; 4) Herbal Medicinal Wisdom for Community Healthcare and Bio-diversity Preservation; 5) Women's Wisdom in Natural Dying and Embroidery of Textile Handicrafts; 6) Farmer Field School (FFS) for Teaching by Learning, Learning by Doing toward Leadership in Democratization and Decentralization.

These 6 thematic networks are interrelated and are aimed at providing, respectively: 1) the regulatory framework for daily life, conflict resolution and resource management; 2) the practical opportunity for voluntary bio-diversity and watershed conservation; 3) the adaptable technical basis for indigenous forms of agriculture; 4) accessible forms of community healthcare; 5) women's knowledge for indigenous manufacturing and commerce; and 6) a system for enriching all of the above knowledge and transmitting it to the young, for them to take back to their own communities and local systems of governance in a win-win strategy of constructing alternative bottom-up systems of a) legislation and justice; b) biodiversity conservation; c) agriculture and rural development; d) community health; e) commerce and manufacturing; and f) education and technical training.

MECO-ECOTRA focuses on consolidating livelihood sovereignty defined in terms of 5 interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to perform one's own religion on one's own land (unique); 3) the right to practice one's own knowledge in daily farming (practice); 4) the right to decide what to grow on one's own land (holistic); and 5) the right to co-government of one's land (strategic).

In 2010, in response to new challenges, and to meet needs raised by the farmers themselves, SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA reorganized the above mentioned 6 network themes to give priority to three themes: 1) Community Institutions in Watershed Resource Management to meet with the Community Rights to Co-manage Natural Resources strategy; 2) Eco-farming in land use planning to meet with traditional and local values and ways of life by promoting local knowledge participation at all levels of Farmer Field Schools and Curriculum Development for local governing in food sovereignty and security (household, community, region and inter-region);

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<sup>1</sup>Tran thi Lanh (2013)

and 3) Community based Eco-Enterprises in order to initiate local niche market network for security and self-sufficiency.

MECO-ECOTRA provides the visionary, strategic and practical direction of SPERI's journey based on the interactional principles of Biological Human Ecology Theory which underlies SPERI's approach to the daily challenges and obstacles as well as advantages when working with the Indigenous People in the Mekong region. It is a vital foundation development partner of SPERI and is always leading SPERI forward from 1995–2005-2015 and forwards to 2025!.

### **Livelihood Sovereignty (LS)**

Livelihood Sovereignty is defined by five fundamental interrelated rights for Indigenous People in Mekong region: 1) The right to land, forest and water (basic); 2) The right to maintain one's own religion (unique); 3) The right to live according to one's own culture (practice); 4) The right to operate according one's own knowledge and decide what to plant, initiate, create and invent on one's own land (holistic), and 5) The right to co-manage or co-govern natural resources with neighboring communities and local authorities (strategic).

### **Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS)**

YIELDS is the visionary plan of MECO-ECOTRA for inter-generational continuity and the future of Bio-Human Ecology Theory and SPERI's Strategy. YIELDS focuses on building up an interaction network of Young Leadership Engagement for Livelihood Sovereignty, interactively of five vital rights for Indigenous People in Mekong region: 1) The right to land, forest and water (basic); 2) The right to maintain one's own religion (unique); 3) The right to live according to one's own culture (practice); 4) The right to operate according one's own knowledge and decide what to plant, initiate, create and invent on one's own land (holistic), and 5) The right to co-manage or co-govern natural resources with neighboring communities and local authorities (strategic).

### **Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA) Farmer Field Schools**

Strategically, HEPA stands for **Farmer Field Schools** where Traditional Professors (Spiritual Elders), Key Farmers (who are nurturing traditional and local knowledge in farming) and Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS) can come together in order to transfer, share and enrich diversity and variety of local knowledge and local native species for nurturing confidence and freedom for bottom up participation of MECO-ECOTRA. HEPA focuses on Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning and Food Security at 4 levels: 1) HEPA household level as primary schooling in eco-farming practices for inter-generation in family and neighborhood in gardening; 2) HEPA community level as secondary schooling for modeling and advocacy for local governing in Community Landscape Viewing and Planning for Local Natural Resource Management in Community Development (Customary Based Community Governing and Managing Natural Resources); 3) HEPA regional level as high schooling for building up pilot farm and curriculums for education, connection and influence to different Vocational Technical Training Centers (VOC TECH) which focus on unsustainable modern cash cropping and; 4)

HEPA Inter-national level as University offering Young Eco-Farming Farmer from different ethnicities, localities and religions a place to come together for sharing and enriching values and behavior towards Landscape Designing Systems, Practicing Eco-Farming Lessons and learn management skills , linking Youth, Volunteer, Researcher, Scholar, Media, Spiritual Leaders, Peace Builders and people who are committed into anti-Genetic Modified Organization (GMO). HEPA creates freedom spaces where people can enjoy research, learning, interacting towards “nurturing nature” via “Teaching by Learning – Learning by Doing” for sustainability and sustainers. HEPA is aiming to lobby Land Use Planning Policy inter-nationally.

### **Ecological Farming (ECO)**

Ecological Farming defines the traditional value of MECO-ECOTRA which is the interaction of value system, customary laws and daily behavior towards natural resource management of the indigenous people in Mekong region. It differs from organic and sustainable farming in the senses of ethical philosophical characteristics and behavior toward “nature worshiping” of the different indigenous people in Mekong. Eco-Farming is nurturing and enriching traditional values and knowledge in land use planning in harvesting, using and preserving natural resources and biological diversity of nature.

### **Customary based natural resources management (CBNRM)**

**CBNRM** is a process of learning, respecting and integrated between traditional value systems (traditional belief, religion and norms) and legal frameworks in community governing and managing natural resources in order to mobilize local participation in any decision making. It requires values of decentralization to which there is recognition of traditional customary laws, local knowledge and perception of ownership of clans and community over natural resources.

### **Customary based Forest Land Conflict resolution (CFLCR)**

Customary based forest land conflict resolution is a process which is based on customary encouragement systems led by inspired spiritual elders (voluntary traditional court's with their own dignity) instead of legal punishment according to state law (top down and involuntary).

### **Grassroot Democracy (GD)**

Practically and strategically, Grassroot Democracy under MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI is the process of participatory learning and action interrelated within and between the 6 thematic networks of MECO-ECOTRA's grassroots foundation: 1) Customary Law in Community Governance and Management of Natural Resources; 2) Community Ownership of Spirit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity; 3) Eco-Farming Knowledge for Sustainable Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security; 4) Herbal Medicinal Wisdom for Community Healthcare and Bio-diversity Preservation; 5) Women's Wisdom in Natural Dying and Embroidery of Textile Handicrafts; 6) Farmer Field School (FFS) for Teaching by Learning, Learning by Doing toward Leadership in Democratization and Decentralization.