

**SOCIAL POLICY ECOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SPERI)**

# **Annual Report**

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**Development of Mekong Community Networking  
and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA)**

**(January to December 2012)**



**Hà Nội, December 2012**

## General Information

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<b>Project/ Programmatic Cooperation</b>	Continued Proposal <sup>1</sup> on Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA July 2010-July 2013)
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<b>Country of implementation</b>	Vietnam and Laos <b>Civil Society Action Network with Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, India and Bhutan</b>
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<sup>1</sup> MECO-ECOTRA proposal is set for 10 years timeframe 2005-2015.

The 1<sup>st</sup> phase proposal was MECO-ECOTRA 2006-2009.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase proposal is continued MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013.

### **MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI Vision 2012-2022**

Livelihood Sovereignty of the Indigenous People all over the world as well as in Mekong region is determined by five fundamental interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to performance 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). This is the vital empowerment strategy for the Indigenous People in order to sustain and enrich their original civilized dignity and achieve their self-determination towards their own ancestral traditional value of "Nurturing Nature"! SPERI has the Independent Practical Intellectual Foundation Based development philosophy of "Nature Worship" and engaging with the Indigenous People in order to convert the "Money Worship"!

### **MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI Mission 2012-2016**

**MECO-ECOTRA** is a Grassroots Indigenous foundation that stands for Traditional Civil Society Organizational & Institutional Development beyond national, territorial, social, and political borders. It operates in terms of six thematic interrelated 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. **MECO-ECOTRA** focuses on consolidating livelihood sovereignty and providing strategic lessons learned for SPERI during working with the Indigenous People and initiating **SPERI's Biological Human Ecology Theory**. It is a vital foundation development partner of SPERI and is always leading SPERI forward from 1995–2005-2015 and forwards to 2025!.

In 2010, MECO-ECOTRA - SPERI reorganized the above mentioned 6 interrelated thematic action networks into three priority themes in order to meet up with changed legal political context: 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); and 3) Community based Eco-Enterprises in order to initiate local niche market networks for security and self-sufficiency.

### **MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI priority 2012-2014**

\* Providing essential opportunities for MECO-ECOTRA in order to stimulate : “Nurturing Nature” by enriching ethical principles and traditional partners and wisdom in nurturing Biological Landscaping diversity through behavioral system towards natural resource management and environmental protection.

\* Empowering Customary Law in Community Governance and Natural Resources Management in order to determine Community Ownership of Religious Forests and Bio-Cultural Diversity via Eco-Farming Knowledge in Sustainable Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security and Farmer’s Field School for Teaching by Learning, Learning by Doing toward Leadership in Democratization and Decentralization.

\* Initiate Community Ecological Enterprising for daily livelihood security via Herbal Medicinal Wisdom for Community Healthcare and Bio-diversity Preservation and Women’s Wisdom in Natural Dying and Embroidery of Textile Handicrafts.

## Acronym

AIPP	Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact is a regional indigenous peoples' network based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
CBI	Community Based Institution
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCFD	Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development – France
CEDAC	Cambodia Center for Study and Development in Agriculture
CESD	Centre for Ethnicity Studies and Development, Chiang Mai University
CIRD	Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development
CIRUM	Culture Identity and Resources Use Management
CODE	Consultancy on Development
CHESH	Centre for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands
FFS	Farmer Field School
HEPA	Human Ecology Practice Area
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Cooperation and Development
INEB	International Network of Engaged Buddhists
MECO- ECOTRA	MEkong COmmunity Networking and ECOlogical TRAding
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid– Norway.
PADETC	Participatory Development Training Center, Laos
RCSD	Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University
SPERI	Social Policy Ecology Research Institute
TOA	Towards Organic Asia Network
VTC	Vietnam Multimedia Television

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## **Introduction**

This continued proposal of July 2010 – July 2013 is continuity of “MECO-ECOTRA development strategic framework (2005 -2015) which we have been implementing via a contract No. VN102011 – ICCO – SPERI during the first three years 2006 – 2009”. For the year 2012, the continued proposal of MECO-ECOTRA (2010-2013) concentrated on strengthening core values of MECO-ECOTRA six-interrelated thematic action networks which has been woven into the three main approaches: Providing essential opportunities for MECO-ECOTRA in order to stimulate: 1) “Nurturing Nature” by enriching ethical principles and traditional partners and wisdom in nurturing Biological Landscaping diversity through both policy making and practical behavior in Land Use Planning towards natural resource management and environmental protection. Therefore, “Community Ownership in Religious Forest Rights and Biological Cultural Diversity Preservation” theme is playing a key function for lobbying Land law 2013 and coming “Protection and Development Forest Law” in 2014. 2) Empowering Customary Law in Community Governance and Natural Resources Management in order to determine Community Ownership in the Religious Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity Preservation via Eco-Farming Knowledge in Sustainable Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security and Farmer’s Field School for Teaching by Learning, Learning by Doing toward Democratization and Decentralization. 3) Ecological Enterprise for daily livelihood security via Herbal Medicinal Wisdom for Community Healthcare and Bio-diversity Preservation and Women’s Wisdom in Natural Dying and Embroidery of Textile Handicrafts. Then, upgrading capacity for SPERI organization in two directions: First is specializing Senior Staffs to become Practical Academic in Policy Analyzing Skills for research, training and information sharing, and second is shifting Indigenous Students from Farmer Field School’s learners to become Learning Leaders in order to take over the customary and autonomous value system of MECO-ECOTRA in one hand. In other hand, intensively build up efforts and find solutions for achieving “Mekong Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS)” for sustaining and developing MECO-ECOTRA in order to cope with new political economic dimension.

2012 also the year to weave time frame, to integrate field activities for tailoring MECO-ECOTRA’s action plans, lessons learned and solutions in order to meet up with Bread for the World (BftW); Norwegian People’s Aids (NPA); CCFD and other small grants of 40% of the total, equivalent 450.000 Euro contributed by above 3 donors for MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI implementing year and of which, will contribute to total budget contribution for the MECO-ECOTRA framework period 2010-2013 with 60 % funded by ICCO.

The report will give an overview of the major implemented progress and achievements; describes important changes and challenges in the context of the program, how MECO-ECOTRA responded for and shared key lessons learnt successfully and unsuccessfully from January to December 2012 mainly to ICCO, but reference to other above three share funding donors of 40% .

Finally, the report suggests recommendation and adjustments for following up action plans.

## ***Recent Changes and Challenges affected to 2012 implementation***

Mekong region in 2012 is the year of many hottest political economic changes over Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar globally and inter-nationally.

First change was happened in Vietnam is **REDD<sup>2</sup>**. In September 2009, Vietnamese Government signed MOU with UN organization to implement first phase of the “UN-REDD Vietnam program” to be implemented during 20 months with total budget of USD 4,504,756 (of which the UN-REDD MDTF funds USD 4,384,756). The objective of the program is “to assist the Government of Viet Nam in developing an effective REDD regime in Viet Nam and to contribute to reduction of regional displacement of emissions”. This will contribute to the broader goal of ensuring that *“by the end of 2012 Viet Nam is REDD-ready and able to contribute to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation nationally and regionally”*. In order to catch up the time frame of REDD, subsequent legal papers for fulfilling REDD were issued : 1) a **join circular 07/TTLT-BNNPTNT – BTNMT** dated January 29th, 2011; and 2) **Directive 1019/TTg-DMDN** dated June 26, 2011 by the Vice–Prime Minister which said that: *“re ‘arranging renovation of State-owned forest Enterprises.’ Item 1. People’s Committees at provincial and City under Central government levels to co-ordinate with Ministries: Resources and Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development in guiding the closing of land lease contracts, the issue of certificates of land use rights over the acreage of State forest enterprise (limited liability companies with one partner, unlimited liability companies with two or more partners, joint stock companies) which are anticipated to be retained for the management of their deployment in productive enterprise objectives. Completion to be effected by the end of 2011. In 2012, complete determination of boundaries, pegging out boundaries, survey of pegs and boundary lines for land use by State forest enterprise and units responsible for public utility provision”*; 3) the **Resolution No.19 – NQ/TW** dated October 31th, 2012 session 6th of Communist Party Central Congress Term XI wrote: “Continuously reforming land law and land policy in order

<sup>2</sup> The UNFCCC conference in Bali recognized Viet Nam as one of the top five most affected countries in the world as a result of climate change. Since the beginning of Global process, Vietnam has made clear its position on REDD+ through a submission to the UNFCCC Secretariat in February 2008 and become one of nine countries identified for implementing country under UN-REDD Program. In September 2009, Vietnamese Government signed MOU with UN organization to implement first phase of the “UN-REDD Vietnam program” that implementing during 20 months with total budget of USD 4,504,756 (of which the UN-REDD MDTF funds USD 4,384,756). The objective of the program is “to assist the Government of Viet Nam in developing an effective REDD regime in Viet Nam and to contribute to reduction of regional displacement of emissions”. This will contribute to the broader goal of ensuring that “by the end of 2012 Viet Nam is REDD-ready and able to contribute to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation nationally and regionally”.



to promote Vietnam moving forwards into industrialization towards modern nation by the year 2020". It means that those legal papers aiming at handing over the forest and land right titles to state forest enterprises, companies as well as individual by the end of 2012 must be completed in order to offer a convenient environment and condition for REDD pilot in Vietnam in one hand, other hand for capitalist investors to exploit the natural resources faster in the last 2 years while offering very few opportunity to the 15 million indigenous ethnic minority to access to forest and land, even their ancestral forest and land lost two years ago through above legal papers (*see more at changes and challenges of annual report 2011*).

Therefore, together with MECO-ECOTRA, SPERI continues moving forwards our advocacy horizontally and lobbying vertically for getting back religious forest and land for the indigenous ethnic minority through maximizing bottom participation in forest and land policy making process in Vietnam activity planned .

Laos, 2012 is a new member of WTO legally and is a place of fighting over natural resources between Vietnamese and Chinese companies which is hottest not only economic problem, but also is a vulnerability for future Laos's indigenous population. For example, a new government policy "State land Lease and Concession, 2009" - allowing foreign companies in leasing land for 30 to 70 years. With new member of WTO and open up land for welcome joined ventures, capitalist investors and companies for logging, for constructing and commercialization in order to build up the country<sup>3</sup> for catching up of being member of WTO only based on land and natural resources which will drive Laos country, especially their Indigenous ethnic minority people become more and more isolation and unconfident in the near future. However, there is a positive legal political initiative, that is ongoing strategy of Laos in order to open up the legal spaces for 49 official ethnic minority groups's customary practices into formal justice recognition. The minister of Justice, Dr. Chaleun Yiapaoher described these ethnic customs as 'informal law' and he stated that the Party and government recognized the importance of each ethnic group's customs and respected the fact that they had been practiced and relied upon for generations. Other genuine opinion given by a researcher – Mrs Tran thi Lanh who has been engaging with Lao's Indigenous and Ethnic Groups since 1999 up to know continuously and insight their daily customary laws through their own value system applying in daily governing and managing their own community and natural resources surrounding them, She said: "*Customary Law is Law of the Indigenous and Ethnic Groups in Laos*"! ("*Customary and Autonomous*" unpublished document – December 2007 by Mrs Tran thi Lanh – Founding President of Centre for Human Ecology Study of Highland - CHESH).

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<sup>3</sup> There are three big scale projects including Bor Ten – Vientiane rail way project, Savanhakhet-Laobao border rail way project and Xayahury hydro power project has been approved. It seems that the 3 projects are well on progress. Total cost of Xayahury hydro power project is about USD\$3 billion; Total cost of Savanhakhet-Laobao border rail way is about USD\$ 5 billion which is expected to start in January 2013 and will be completed in the next 4 years. Total cost of Borten to Vientiane high speed rail way project is about 6.7 USD\$ billions which has been approved by the National Assembly of Laos in October 2012. The two rail way projects will serve mainly for the transporting of extracted raw materials from Laos to China and Vietnam.

Myanmar in 2012 also the year for converting political system and open up for foreign investors legally where Chinese multinational companies have been occupying the most rich landscape.

Cambodia in 2012 also the place of hottest violence caused by overlapping between companies of China and other neighboring countries in order to force appropriation of rich tropical rainforest and land for mining, hydropower and commercial exploitation.

Thailand is a place of discriminating legally between Indigenous ethnic minority and Thai, lasting over the decades.

Mekong region's Natural Landscape and biodiversity where the Indigenous ethnic minorities are living and practicing their knowledge for their daily livelihood and religion towards "nature worship" has been displaced for capitalist investors.

A similar signal happening within countries in Mekong is the application of development direction from western style by offering excellent conditions for capitalist investors, multi-national corporations, joined ventures and opening up opportunities for them to access long term use rights of forest and land in one hand; other hand, inside countries, they try to create legal papers in order to promote forest and land to become marketed, exclusively and resettling indigenous ethnic minority people away from their ancestral forest and land for extractive industry, recreation and urbanization.

Those above legal changes have presented a major challenge to which SPERI has responded by focusing its energy and resources on lobbying on behalf of the Indigenous people in order to protect their land use right and their ancestral religious forest and land for their own Livelihood Sovereignty in the Mekong region. SPERI works based on MECO-ECOTRA and MECO-ECOTRA focuses on consolidating Livelihood Sovereignty which is defined in terms of 5 interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to performance 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). Those above mentioned legal political changes in Mekong region caused a big obstacle for MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI during implementing activities.

Two biggest questions are "Is there any more land for about 70 million indigenous ethnic minority people to survive if legal papers practically achieved in Mekong region", and, "How MECO-ECOTRA can continue its mission toward consolidating grass root Livelihood Sovereignty under 5 basic interrelated rights mentioned above if there is no more land for them to practice their daily life in Mekong region"?!

SPERI recognized the dangers in earlier 2012 and moved faster and larger seeing the future of daily livelihood survival and spiritual value nearly 70 million of the Indigenous ethnic minority are under threatened in the Mekong region. Livelihood, according to the indigenous ethnic minority people is a holistic meaning of their life which determines their

own dignity and value, their own social organizational and institutional structure (customary laws) as well as their own cultural characteristics, and these are always interrelated interdependently with their own ancestral natural spaces and resources. Forest and Land, according to the indigenous people's belief system is unique sacred space that nature offers for them to sustain and determine their identities.

Therefore, in Vietnam, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI concentrated intensively into community rights to religious/spirit forest and land in different target groups of MECO-ECOTRA. The subsequent actions were trying to policy lobbying horizontally and vertically based on two themes: 1) Customary Law in Community Governing and Managing Natural Resources and 2) Community Ownership of the religious forest and bio-cultural diversity preservation. Outputs of these are to reach the outcomes of 1, 2 and 6. Sequences of these outcomes will contribute into social action largely.

In Laos, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI focus on 4) Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning and Food Security; 5) Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA) Farmer Field School and Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (**YIELDS**) in order to reach outputs for outcomes 3 and outcome 5.

In Thailand, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI refresh local wisdoms and exchange adapted solutions of traditional professors (elders) in Nong Tao, Maesamai, Hin Lad Nai and Maetha village in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai province for Young Eco-Farmers learning and internship. This activity, in one hand, consolidated outputs for outcomes 3 and 5 and other hand widened MECO-ECOTRA with network of Towards Organic Asian (TOA) and International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) beyond Mekong region to Asia and worldwide.

In Myanmar, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI initiated different opportunities for young peace builders, coordinators from METTA and "Kalayana Mitria Foundatioin" from Myanmar came to HEPA inter-national Farmer Field School for Internship and sharing. As well, SPERI seniors visited METTA and Southeast Norwegian People's Aids (NPA) in Myanmar for global programmatic visionary exchanges and to intend building up "Land core group inter-national cross cutting issue" based on the "customary law in community governing and managing natural resources", which will make connection to MECO-ECOTRA. This activity aimed to expand outputs for outcome 3 and 5 through two themes: "Customary Law in Community Governing and Managing Natural Resources and Farmer Field School". In Cambodia, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI connected with MVI organization's director – Mr Youra who based on Moldonkiri province, and came to visit HEPA farmer field school of SPERI and finding solutions for connection between Moldonkiri and Vietnam in order to deal with the pressure of Vietnam Multi-national companies to grab forest and land in Moldonkiri and seeking young farmer activists from Moldonkiri to HEPA farmer field school in Vietnam for studying and; CEDAC organization where SPERI senior and CEDAC's director and coordinator share regional network for ecological enterprise as well as young eco-farmers from SPERI came to CEDAC for learning

and networking in Organic Product Enterprising Skill in the previous period (2010-2011-2010) as well in coming years which intend to associate with TOA young eco- farmers movement for small scale farmer Asian wider in coming years . These activities aimed to reach outputs for outcome 3 and 5.

Other implications of the above political economic challenges were **the threatened eradication of the original traditional civilized dignity of indigenous people in Mekong and elsewhere**. If those who worship nature no longer have forest and land space for their worship, the indigenous people will become marginalized forever by modern development in the region. This prompted SPERI to seek opportunities for seniors to professionalize their skills in academic analyzing and writing the results of its activities since 1995 by cooperating with the Anthropology Department of Waikato University in New Zealand for upgrading academic capacity for writing. The holistic aim of this cooperation is to widen the value system of the Indigenous ethnic minority in Mekong into the Pacific and worldwide, for “Nurturing Nature”, a Philosophy of Life and Development of the indigenous people needs to be highlighted.

### ***Main Achievable Outcomes from Jan. to Dec. 2012***

As description of updated policy changes, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI have adjusted and prioritized outputs and outcomes to recent changes and challenges.

***Outcome 1 : To have three strong MECO-ECOTRA key farmers networks in the way that their own CBOs and CBIs can influence policy making processes in all aspects at commune level and Outcome 6: The discourses between MECO-ECOTRA and local policy makers is wilfulness, consciousness and sharing social – culturally and politically correct.***

#### **Outputs level:**

**Series of genuine indicators, sequent events and specific located ha number** of the Community Religious and Herbal Forest for Traditional Wisdom and Knowledge Practicing daily, Clan Forest for Watershed Preservation for Traditional Ways of Livelihood and Forest Land for Farming in Nghe An and Lao Cai cases where Black Thai and Hmong Indigenous Ethnic Minority living for hundred years was forced appropriation (grabbed) by Decision No. 661/QD-TTg/1998 under un-transparent administrative management attitude and empty mapping capacity associated with poor cooperation of governing between Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) and Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment (MONRE) is one root problem caused to conflict over the forest and land in one hand; other hand, all these implemented processes were ignored both local authority in Nghe An and Lao Cai as well as their local people participation.

Numbers of field visit witness with MECO-ECOTRA’s Traditional Professors (Elders), Key Farmers, Young Eco- Farming Farmer, Local Authorities and Forest and Land Specialists in both Nghe An and Lao Cai provinces, Numbers of MECO-ECOTRA’s Custo-

mary law based training workshop, around table negotiation of inter- district and provinces has been statement, minutes and documented for social larger action later on.

Sequences and subsequence, a series of workshop on conflict overlapping land boundaries, some overlapping previous forestland allocation in all pilots on forest and forestland allocation to communities and individual household organized at the inter-district level with farmers and authorities from Lung Sui commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province; Dinh Lap district, Lang Son province; Truong Son commune, Quang Ninh district, Quang Binh province; Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province coming to Simacai district to share knowledge of the new challenge. Key farmers and key advisors<sup>4</sup> of MECO-ECOTRA actively participated in coordinating and sharing their knowledge and skills in analysis problems and solutions to solve the problems with other NGOs<sup>5</sup> and communities in Lang Son, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh, Nghe An, Thua Thien – Hue province. They also involved at the beginning of a initiating the Ethnic Minority Forest Land Rights Network, which is facilitated by CIRUM. The network is a result of works of the land coalition<sup>6</sup> and the MECO-ECOTRA network, which facilitated by SPERI. The Ethnic Minority Forest Land Rights Network matches well with six-themes of MECO-ECOTRA and this network will work as a long-term strategy for EM actions and development, as well as for lobbying and advocacy at different levels.

In October 2012, SPERI in cooperation with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) of Nghe An organized a regional workshop on “community forestry: Policy and Practices”. This workshop had 60 participants who are key farmers, communal, district and provincial authorities, researchers and media from Hanoi, Lao Cai, Lang Son, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Binh provinces. The workshop produced a proceeding on overview about community forest policies, different community-based forest management cases and final recommendations of the workshop. Results of this workshop contributed as input for a workshop in November 2012.

In November 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 at La Thanh Hotel in Hanoi, CODE, CIRUM and SPERI together organized a national conference on “Productive Forest Land for Indigenous Ethnic Minorities”. This workshop involved about 70 participants<sup>7</sup> in which had a half of partici-

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Tran Quoc Viet; mr. Nguyen Khac Thu, mr. Sam Quoc Viet, mr. Hoang Seo Cau, mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, mr. Nguyen Van Huy, mrs. Tran Thi Lanh, Prof. Khong Dien, etc.

<sup>5</sup> NGOs: CIRUM, CIRD, RDPR, CRD, CWS.

<sup>6</sup> Land coalition: CRD/RDPR/CODE/CIRUM

<sup>7</sup> Participants consisted of 1) representatives of farmers who face serious shortages of land coming from mountainous ethnic communities of Northern, Central and Central Highland regions, provinces of Lao Cai, Son La, Bac Can, Lang Son, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Kon Tum ; 2) communal and district officials coming from Hmong, Thai, Tay, Nung, Van Kieu, Bana, Ro Ngao and Kinh ethnic communities; 3) representative from the National Assembly office; 4) representative from the Nationalities Council of the National Assembly, 5) the Economic Committee of the National Assembly, 6) the Committee for Education and Propaganda of the Party's Central Committee, 7) the Government Office, 8) the Bureau of Forestry, 9) the Land Research Institute of the Bureau of Land Management, 10) the Fund for Participation and Accountability, 11) the Department of Policy and Legality, Bureau of Land administration, 12) Vietnam Paper Corporation, 13) Vietnam Forestry Corporation, 14) Representative from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 15) Representative from Ho Chi

pants is key farmers and local authorities; and a half of participants are policy-makers, high ranking people. The concept of Community Ownership of Spirit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity Preservation was discussed openly which is the core value of community forest (*pilots at outcome 2*) and plays a central role in the practice and maintenance of community beliefs and customary laws, as well as in the maintenance of watershed and protected areas for community's daily life and farming practices. Today, this is step by step being recognized by not only “Worship Spirit Forest of the Indigenous Religion” in different communities in Vietnam and Laos<sup>8</sup> socially, but also be legalized by local authority as well as mushrooming in different national press<sup>9</sup>. An outcome of the conference was: “The spirit forest of the indigenous people” should be a vital part of “the special forest of land and forest law”. The recommendation (see annex 1)<sup>10</sup> of the workshop was sent to 1) Chairman of National Assembly of Vietnam; 2) Chairman of Nationality Council of National Assembly; 3) Members of National Assembly, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, 13<sup>th</sup> Term 2012, straight away at the same day November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 and proceedings were produced.

**Conducted a Bio-Human Ecology and Ethnobotany Research:** This research aimed at stimulating field data and information from MECO-ECOTRA’s interrelated thematic action network of : 1) Herbal Wisdom and Community Health Care and Biological Cultural Diversity Preservation; 2) Women Wisdom in Textile Handicraft and 3) Eco- Farming in

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Minh National Political Academy, 16) Representative from Land Law Drafting team 17) representative from Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), 18) Bread for the World (BfdW), 19) Website of Vietnam Communist Party, 20) Politics and Social television - VTV1, and 21) the 20 different media, television, Radio of Vietnam, 22) The Coalition Group of CIRUM/RDPR/CIRD/OXFAM/CODE/CIRD and their key farmers who on behalf of their communities.

<sup>8</sup> In Laos, positive news is that the government will work towards integrating the customary practices of the 49 official ethnic groups of Laos into the formal justice system, to make the country's laws more coherent. The minister of Justice, Dr. Chaleun Yiapaoher described these ethnic customs as ‘informal law’ and he stated that the Party and government recognized the importance of each ethnic group’s customs and respected the fact that they had been practiced and relied upon for generations

<sup>9</sup> Such as the Nation television, Communist Party of Vietnam Online newspaper and 27 different provincial and national newspapers in Vietnam.

<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to revise land law towards : 1) Provide specific policy to ethnic minority peoples ; 2) seeing that specialized-used and protection forests are not only allocated to subsidized salaried state management boards, but also to local ethnic communities for their own protection and management under a specific, suitable policy, which has regard to and is based upon ethnic people’s land and forest valuing perception and practice of voluntary ‘natural worship’ without government salary payment. For instance, traditional water protection forests, herbal forests, clan forests should be considered as protection forests. Sacred forests, spiritual forests should be seen as special-use forests. The state should enact policy that accepts various distinctions and respects every ethnic customs and their perception of forest and land. Specifically, legal framework should be provided to enable ethnic people to maintain their religious practices towards this type of land and forests. 3) Rearrange and withdraw major portions of the most favourable production land from state enterprises and companies to allocate to ethnic peoples. The system of state forestry and agricultural enterprises should be reformed towards services for inputs and outputs of forestry production. Responsibilities and obligations of forestry enterprises should be as equal to those pertained to the mountainous households. This is the most efficient measures for utilization of land and forest resources, while at the same time promoting the strength of 15 million mountainous people. Ethnic people should have rights to pay taxes direct to state budget instead of through such intermediaries as forest enterprises or companies. Do not allow the existence of disguised land renting and getting taxes from that. This is a critical issue in the transitional period, whenever a considerable amount of forest enterprises and companies become intermediary actors to separate authorities from peoples and make people misunderstand the nature of a state of the people. 4) Reorganize the forest protecting force to become an actual force of the people, to combine people’s forest protection to the ethnic people’s monitoring and supervision, so as to ensure holistic efficiency of forestland use;

Land Use Planning with regards to illustrate ways of natural resources utilities and preservation of the local people's knowledge and behavior in order to monitor the Biological Human Ecology Theory of SPERI. The research started in August 2012 and continue until August 2013. The research's approaches and methodologies are dynamic bottom up participation which inclusively respect the Traditional Professor's lectures and supervises<sup>11</sup>, gathering and opening up opportunities for both researcher and Young Eco – Farmer's learning and exchanging. Final document, curriculum, academic articles will be authorized and copy rights by local traditional professor (Elders), people, Young Eco- Farmers and returned to Local Official in order to certify for legal application in the future in MECO-ECOTRA products as well as SPERI Biological Human Ecology Theory for applying. The research aims are 1) Strengthen local knowledge of biodiversity within MECO-ECOTRA and facilitate the understanding of this by others; 2) training and capacity building for young indigenous staff of SPERI; 3) link ethnobotany research to bio-diversity preservation and natural resource management and training in eco-farming; 4) raise the awareness of community development workers of the research approach of working with and learning from local people (healers). The results of the work will be shared with a wider audience to advance the cause of indigenous people in their role in direct conservation. It will produce results of direct use for the community initially through a document describing each elder, community and species that acknowledges each healer and his/her community's practices in using and protecting wild species.

To promote knowledge dissemination, SPERI maintains its cooperation with VTC (Vietnam Multimedia Corporation) to broadcast documentary films under programme on "forest and forestland allocation to the community", particularly focus on 'spirit forest' on different channels: VTC5, VTC14. In May, SPERI signed a MOU with Communist Party of Vietnam online newspaper to produce and broad documentary films at Internet TV. This channel may not have big number of viewers, but it is the way to recognise local perceptions regarding to community ownership of spirit forest, community forest and customary laws.

In December 2012, learning from different pilots which facilitated by MECO-ECO/SPERI in Vietnam, meeting with Laos students in FFS-HEPA and learning from documents about Hmong peoples in Long Lan village and Hmong Association in Luang Prabang, the Communist Party of Vietnam online newspapers came to film achievements on community-based customary law for governing and managing special forest and watershed forest; well-integrated between traditional beliefs, knowledge, skills and species for livelihood sovereignty of Long Lan village. This film documentary will be broadcasting for sharing, public awareness raising and social influence.

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<sup>11</sup> knowledge between healers and to younger generations; compile a record of healers' knowledge for curriculum development in FFSs; and to train young indigenous farmers in the various tasks and techniques of ethnobotany and the use and preservation of native plant species. The research is being conducted through MECO-ECOTRA (mainly healers), young indigenous students at FFSs (YIELDS), SPERI's senior staff and academic and educational affiliates and seeks to create publishable as well as practically applicable results, e.g. for training in research to help SPERI staff and YIELDS prepare for future undergraduate and graduate studies.

Coming time, SPERI expand its cooperation and work hand-in-hand with 1) Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, National Television (VTV), Press; 2) National Assembly of Vietnam Online NewsPaper<sup>12</sup>; 3) Literature and Ethnic minority Press; 4) Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration on subject of “community ownership of Spirit Forest.

### **Outcomes level:**

In the process of sequent events intensively participatory fields visit witness, discussion, sharing, debating and negotiation by around table meeting, conversation, training workshops and conferences among different elders, key farmer, young eco- farmer, focal authority, forest and land specialist and SPERI supervisors, media, researcher during 2012, which emphasized the problem made by program 661/1998/QĐ-TTg of overlapping caused grabbing the spiritual forest, community herbal forest and traditional clan forest for watershed preservation in traditional farming land in both Nghe An and Lao Cai to the problem of overlapping land claims resulting from the poor administration of policy 661 in 1998 (five million ha of reforestation programme) SPERI has brought to light a process of land ‘grabbing’ by different stakeholders such as State forest enterprises, management boards of protection forest. This discovery and revelation of overlapping land boundaries and ‘stealing’ of spirit forest first by state forest enterprises and their subsidiary companies, and second by management boards for protection forest, aided and abetted by naïve and outdated forest and land-mapping techniques, is in addition to the revelation of no-cooperation among official bodies. For example, at the district level, a management board for 661 program at district level not cooperating with Foresters and National Resource and Environmental Protection staff; at the province level, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development neither coordinating nor cooperating with Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Department; and at the central government level, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in their ways of mapping and land use planning not cooperating or coordinating with the way of governing natural resources by the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment who have the power to legitimise and certify land right titles. The fact that this function has rested with the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment only since 2002 has resulted in confusion due to it lacking the capacity to deal effectively with land title issues at a time a land market was developing. These lesson learned also were exchanged and broadened within MECO-ECOTRA network as well as to other coalition on forest land network such as CIRUM/RDPR/CRD/CODE through exchange visits, seminars and workshops.

In addition, SPERI has also learned that in 2006 the Government issued a decision No. 672/2006/QĐ-TTg dated 26/4/2006 to set up cadaster maps and forestland allocation at

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<sup>12</sup> National Assembly of Vietnam Online NewsPaper is: 1) the voice of the National Assembly, the forum of national assembly members, people’s council and people.



17 provinces<sup>13</sup> in the north and south of Vietnam. As a result of work toward legalizing community forest pilots in Lao Cai and Nghe An (see detail at outcome 2) and sharing with CIRUM and CIRD' works in Lang Son and Quang Binh province, the program discovered serious challenges regarding overlapping land boundaries, some overlapping previous forestland allocation in all pilots on forest and forestland allocation to communities and individual household which facilitated by SPERI and CIRUM in Lao Cai, Lang Son, Nghe An and Quang Binh provinces.

We suppose that other provinces would face with the same problems as in Lao Cai, Lang Son, Nghe An and Quang Binh provinces. This new challenge was brought into discussions at different levels: 1) first at the inter-district level with farmers and authorities from Lung Sui commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province; Dinh Lap district, Lang Son province; Truong Son commune, Quang Ninh district, Quang Binh province; Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province coming to Simacai district to share knowledge of the new challenge; 2) secondly at province level, with high-ranking authorities and national media being invited to Simacai to witness the situation; and 3) thirdly at the national level (*a National conference organized on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2012 as mentioned at outputs of outcome 1*).

Subsequent events follow the national conference organized on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2012, from January to April, 2013, a series of seminars for sharing will be facilitated: 1) Academic based analysis toward forest and land policy for indigenous people in Vietnam will be raised again by Regional Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and Administration I (*see annex 2<sup>14</sup>*); 2) Politic based analysis will be raised by the Ethnic Minority Department of the Ethnic Minority Council of National Assembly (see action planned) ; and 3) Independent social, political, civil and religious critical analysis will be raised by the Religion and Ethnicity Department of the Fatherland Front (see action planned). These diverse seminars<sup>15</sup> will focus on the 7 recommendations of the 1st November, 2012 conference (see [annex 1](#)) and create platforms for policy analysis and policy guidelines and feedbacks regarding to community ownership of spirit forest; communal land use planning; forestland for ethnic minorities in upland areas; and customary laws based conflict resolution, especially overlapping land claims. The platform involved multi-stakeholders (key farmers, local authorities, activists,

<sup>13</sup> 17 provinces include 8 northern provinces (Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Yen Bai, Tuyen Quang, Hoa Binh; Quang Binh, Quang Tri va Thua Thien - Hue) and 9 southern provinces (Quang Nam, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Dong Nai, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh).

<sup>14</sup> : MOU signed between Acting Director of Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and Administration I – Associate Prof. Ngo Ngoc Thang and Prof. Dr Khong Dien – Director of SPER in January 11, 2013

<sup>15</sup> Follow up of the national workshop on “Productive Forest Land for Indigenous Ethnic Minorities” organized on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 at La Thanh Hotel in Hanoi, Mr. Dang Van Chien – head of the Standing Committee of Vietnam National Assembly, Mr. Lu Van Que – the Chairman board of the Vietnamese Central Fatherland Front and Mr. Doan Minh Huan – Deputy Director of Regional Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and Public Administration they gave advice and agreed with SPERI to organize three policy seminars with participation of policy makers, authorities, researchers, CSOs, local communities and media. Topics of these seminars relate to spirit forest, productive forests and land, community based land use planning. These seminars will be organized from January to April 2013 just before the land law draft debated amongst meeting of the National Assembly.

researchers, policy-makers, media). The platform organised seminars, workshops and produced policy papers, proceedings and policy-recommendations. The outcome of these 3 forums will become inputs for SPERI, CODE and CIRUM for Second National Conference<sup>16</sup> (planned at the end of April – before 5th congress of National Assembly Term XIII in earlier May, 2013).

Other motivations resulting from the above legal challenges led SPERI to connect with International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). INEB, which was established in 1989 by leading Buddhists including the 14th Dalai Lama, the Vietnamese peace-activist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Theravada Bhikhu Maha Ghosananda as its patrons, is a network of spiritual friends from 30 countries and 6 continents. It supports coordination and collaboration between socially conscious Buddhist groups from different countries and encourages dialogue and partnership with activists and other spiritual traditions. Efforts and achievement of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI through “Community Ownership of Spirit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity Preservation” has been recognized by INEB through visiting, sharing and presenting at the international conference held in Srilanka in October 23-28th, 2012 “Global action for Climate Change”. As the result of that conference, two weeks after, INEB joint committees meeting at Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, Yokohama on the 8th November, 2012. In Japan, Mrs Tran thi Lanh was voted to become an executive committee member of INEB . This is a signal for both MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI to shift up beyond Mekong region to other continents for learning and sharing in coming decades (see annex 3<sup>17</sup>)

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<sup>16</sup> The Second National Conference will emphasize specifically, and deeply and precisely, 5 of the 7 recommendations: 1) forest land policy theoretically and practically has to be returned to 15 million indigenous people who have been living and surviving on that land from generation to generation, and Government should produce new policies for supporting small-scale farmers for surviving on their forest land. State Forest Enterprises should only play the role of providing technical services, and if possible to learn how to initiate local niche markets for self-sufficiency for indigenous people. 2) Spirit/Religious Forest, traditional watershed forest and clan land which belongs to different indigenous groups must be returned to 15 million indigenous people legally, using the advantages of Circular 07/TTLT/2011. Therefore, policy makers should realize that beside the formal, costly and ineffective bureaucratic system of conservation there exists a parallel indigenous system of preserving nature based on the voluntary actions of people following their own belief in nature. 3) Land Law 2013 must respect bottom-up village participation in any land use planning. Cancelling the community role in Land Use Planning in Land Law 2013, which used to be recognized in Land Law 2003, means creating by law more conflict in the future, especially when a market in land is being developed. 4) The National Assembly should have a professional committee to advise on land issues and land use planning. 5) The customary laws of 15 million indigenous people need to be legally recognized for Co- Governance of natural resources. These 5 key recommendations will then be sent to the pre-plenary meeting among 40 parliamentarians who are representatives for indigenous ethnic minority in Vietnam for discussion and summary for final key contents inputs for National Assembly Congress No. 5<sup>th</sup> Term XIII in earlier May 2013 for debate. The outcomes of this will contribute to the finalization of Land Law in June, 2013. Beyond this, the Religious/Spirit Forest issue including religious land will continue to be raised by MECO-ECOTRA- SPERI and its dozen different media alliance in order to move forward to another lobbying action aimed at the Forest Protection and Development Law in 2014.

<sup>17</sup> - Letter of Invitation to be an Executive Committee, dated on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012 by Founder Chair of the Advisory Committee and Chair of the Executive Committee

Mr. Xayxualu Her who is a leader of Hmong Association in Luang Prabang province involved in project in Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang village<sup>18</sup> as giving advices and facilitating some field activities and help to explain and encourage more Hmong villagers of Den Xa Vang to join and set up an interest group of animal raising. Mr. Xayxualu Her applied lessons from the training on planning and reporting to their association managing system. They found that application as an effective way to manage their own association. The Hmong association operation and results were appreciated by the provincial leaders. Visiting Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat villages, the vice chairman of Luang Prabang district commented that CHESH Lao has applied good way to approach community, and then some lessons and experiences can be produced. Other projects/ areas have already faced shortcoming of unstable use of such infrastructure as drinking water system. Then he suggested CHESH Lao to help and provide advice other projects/ areas in participatory building up, managing and maintaining community infrastructure (*see more annex 4*<sup>19</sup>).

In 2012 there has been an upsurge of media interest in the work of SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA; in particular by Communist Party of Vietnam Online News Paper, and National Television<sup>20</sup>. As a result of this interest, the concept of ‘spirit forest’ used by indigenous communities to nurture natural resources for hundreds of years has now become well informed and respected by scientists, politicians, media and researchers; as has the existence of ‘customary law’ as a viable basis for community and natural resource governance. As a result of the above discovered situation, SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA will now focus up to June 2013 on lobbying for community ownership of Spirit Forest as a key to protecting both the identity of indigenous peoples and forest biodiversity. For example, at latest version of amended land law, at articles 142 is about religious land. This article only defines religious land include construction of temple, kinship house of prayer, shrine, house of cult which only refer to beliefs and religion of Kinh majority. This article does not include spirit forestland in which there is ‘spirit forest’.

***Outcome 2: Community Based Institutions in Forest Management in all project sites will be given legal recognition in forest management***

### **Outputs level**

The two communities and 55 Hmong households (*unexpected result*) in Ta Lung Sui got land and forest use right certificates (‘Reb Book’) over 765.9 ha of their traditional forestland and Pom Om village, Hanh Dich commune got land and forest use right certificate over

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<sup>18</sup> Pilot proposal on Enriching Customary Law in Forest Management and Land Use Planning at Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages in the ‘Phu Sung’ watershed areas in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos

<sup>19</sup> Annual report on Pilot proposal on Enriching Customary Law in Forest Management and Land Use Planning at Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages in the ‘Phu Sung’ watershed areas in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos, Jan. to Dec. 2012

<sup>20</sup> Global Cooperation Channel TCT 10, VCT 1, VCT 4 and VCT 14

426,52 ha of their spirit forest, traditional watershed forest and community usage forest. Land use planning and community regulations on forest management which were built up by all villagers and were well integrated between traditional land use plan, customary law on land and forest governance (natural resource management) and state policies were legalized by the Chairman of Simacai People's Committee, Lao Cai province and the Chairman of Que Phong People's Committee, Nghe An province. This land use planning is foundation for any social, cultural, environmental and economic development of communities. By such a way, local community and individual household are able to assert the exclusive rights to forestland under the existing legal frame i.e. the Joint Circular No. 07/2011/TTLT-BNN&BTNMT.

Land allocation in Ta Lung Sui community, young students at FFS-Simacai had an opportunity to participate in all process of community-based land and forest allocation. By involving directly since the beginning, they learnt and understood in the all process of and how does it mean by community-based forest and land allocation, as well as how to integrate traditional knowledge and customary law into land use planning which will be submitted and approved by authorities. All process and lessons learnt of the community-based land and forest allocation have been documented to be guidelines and curriculums on community-based land and forest allocation to share with other communities, FFSs, local authorities and disseminate through the press.

Simacia people's Committee and Department of Forest, Lao Cai province officially required to expand to other communities in Lao Cai at their papers at workshops organised in Lao Cai and Hanoi. Department of Forest, Lao Cai province will base on guidelines on community-based forest and land allocation in Simacai to develop a guidelines which will be applied to whole Lao Cai province.

Que Phong People's Committee also officially required expanding a pilot in Pom Om village to Tri Le commune, which is Mong commune and remains conflicts over land and forest for many years amongst Tri Le commune.

Four case studies on community-based forest management were conducted in Ta Lung Sui village, Simacai district, Lao Cai province; Pom Om village, Que Phong district, Nghe An province; Truong Son Forest cooperative, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province; and Cao Quang commune, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province. Case studies that are at Ta Lung Sui, Lao Cai province and Pom Om village, Nghe An province were conducted at pre-survey and during the process of community-based land and forest allocation and involved all key farmers (elders, healers, women and youths) in the case studies. Case studies in Son Kim 1 commune, Ha Tinh province and Cao Quang commune, Quang Binh province were conducted by key farmers at Son Kim 1 commune and Cao Quang commune, staff of CIRD and SPERI. All case studies contributed as key papers at regional workshop organized in Vinh City, Nghe An province in October 2012 and national workshop in November 2012 and presented at proceedings of the regional and national workshop.

One research papers which was done by senior SPERI staff<sup>21</sup> on estimating forest carbon biomass in stem for a forestland area managed by local community at Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province. Data mainly collected by villagers with some supervision from local technicians. Despite data quality issues, this raise the significance of participatory inventory approach, which enables villagers to take part in the process of learning and estimating what is available in their own forest. This will further promote a greater sense of autonomy and ownership in the local community of their local landscapes. In the growing interest of the implementation of Payment for Environmental Services (PES) and Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), empowering local villagers with forest measurement skills is even more beneficial for the villagers themselves. Findings can contribute evidence for the REDD+ program indicating forest managed by local community enhances forest carbon biomass in the landscape (*See annex 5*<sup>22</sup>).

### **Outcomes level**

*Official recognition to community forest of two pilots:* the customary forest land territories of Pom Om community (Black Thai) in Que Phong district, Nghe An province and Ta Lung Sui community (Hmong) in Simacai district, Lao Cai province which is community based, clan based and family based forest land, traditional spiritual watershed, productive forest and land are official recognised by authorities. In addition, the customary forestland territories pilots contributed to: 1) settlement of forestland overlaps among different users in the pilots; 2) to better local governance of forestland and forest by recognition of communal and district authorities for the practices of customary institution of the two pilots; 3) better implementation of community participatory forestland allocation and land use planning at local level; 4) to promote stronger grassroots movement for the community forestland rights; 5) to create critical discourse in forestland rights of ethnic minorities in uplands of Vietnam; 6) to promote Mekong regional network for the forestland rights; 7) to promote stronger existing network of indigenous minority young leadership via Famer's Field School. (see more at [annex 6](#)<sup>23</sup>).

SPERI works with MECO-ECOTRA network to focus on consolidating livelihood sovereignty defined in terms of 5 interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to performance 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 (crop and breed) on one's own land (holistic); and 5) the right to co-government of one's land (strategic). These 5 interrelated rights are integrated in order to promote and consolidate the sharing

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<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Dang Tu Kien is Masters' student at the Australian National University.

<sup>22</sup> Case study papers on: Estimating forest carbon biomass in stem for a forestland area managed by local community. Study site: protection forest of Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province, furthest Northern region of Vietnam.

<sup>23</sup> Annual Report on Ensuring community rights to forestland and empowering indigenous minority youth leaderships supported by NPA – Norway, dated December 19, 2012.

of social, moral, environmental, and economic responsibility. With the achievement of these five rights of livelihood sovereignty, all organisms, human and natural will be living in harmony with each other enjoying peace, security, friendship, happiness and wellbeing, in inter-related self-determination and contribute solutions to increase carbon sinks (such as community based forest management, small-scale eco-farming and agroforestry) and promote low carbon models (renewable energy, energy efficiency through design/planning and eco-farming).

*Outcome 3: A specialized Mekong regional network on eco-farming action for lobbying sustainable land use planning at community level will be achieved.*

### **Outputs level**

As mentioned at outcome 2, Land Use Planning and community regulations that were well integrated between traditional land use plan and customary law on land and forest governance (natural resource management) was legalized by the Chairman of Simacai People's Committee, Lao Cai province and the Chairman of Que Phong People's Committee, Nghe An province. This land use planning is foundation for any social, cultural, environmental and economic development of communities. Land Use Planning in two pilots were developed following the interactive value system including three core values of Eco-farming: 1) common belief, religion, and system or norms; 2) local knowledge/customary laws and skills; 3) natural principles and patterns, which is the foundation of natural resources management, nurturing and enriching traditional values and knowledge in land use planning in harvesting, using and preserving natural resources and biological diversity of nature by indigenous peoples in Mekong region. These core values create a guiding framework for learning and teaching Eco-farming at FFS and also are a strategy for development of inter-generations, especially YIELD.

Continuing from previous period (2010 and 2011), the curriculum has been enriching from practical experiences from the ground by healers, key farmers, young students, SPERI staff and volunteers. The curriculum is further updated and enriched by information flow from fieldwork and activities at FFS and eco-farms themselves. As mentioned at outcome 1, **a Bio-Human Ecology and Ethnobotany Research has been conducted** since August 2012 and scheduled to continue until August 2013. This applied research is seeking to demonstrate the botanical knowledge of indigenous ethnic minority healers of the MECO-ECOTRA; facilitate the sharing of that knowledge between healers and to younger generations; compile a record of healers' knowledge for curriculum development in FFSs; and to train young indigenous farmers in the various tasks and techniques of ethnobotany and the use and preservation of native plant species.

In this period, the existing eco-farms<sup>24</sup> from different areas have maintained its connection with a network of farmers' field schools by providing practical lessons and

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<sup>24</sup> Eco-Community in Long Lan community, Luang Prabang, Laos; other farm owners: Mr. Xomlit in Luang Prabang, Laos and Mr. Mr. Hoang Huu Phuoc

curriculums on the ground. They become good spaces for key-farmers, students, researchers, development workers, the media and policy makers to visit and share experiences to make use of the lesson learned for their own work. But more importance is to gain access to the wisdom, local knowledge and customary law that connect to the process of governing natural resources. In addition, the eco-farming practice maintains and protects soil, water (natural resources), varieties and biodiversity<sup>25</sup>. Network of Eco-farming, through its pilots, shows reliable indicators for public awareness raising and lobbying on land use planning, small and stable solutions for sustainable livelihoods for indigenous peoples. For instance, is not only about their indicators from their farms, but they now confidently share their experiences to other farmers, researchers and policy-makers.

In 2012, SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA have **expanded strong network in Mekong region** and became a strategic partner of the Towards Organic Asia (TOA) network, which seeks to promote Organic Agriculture and Agro-Ecology initiatives in the Mekong including Bhutan, and towards Asian countries. MECO-ECOTRA has network with numbers<sup>26</sup> of eco-farms, eco-villages and organizations in Laos; Thailand; Cambodia; Myanmar and Bhutan.

From 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR seven participants of total thirty-three young organics from ten countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Bhutan, Germany, France, United States and Australia) united for the “Mekong youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-Ecology” at Tha Tang Organic Farm in Sekong province, Laos. The four-day intensive workshop has a chance to exchange and share their visions with other like-minded fellows. The workshop encouraged the discussion among young organics on visioning community farms, roles of young farmers, common language in diversified farming as well as happiness and wellbeing. The workshop expected to contribute to the building of capacity of Asian young farmers and activists through: i) Gaining a big picture of current situation and future challenges on agriculture in the context of globalization, and develop model for future cooperation; ii) understanding power of new media and benefits of using media and innovation, in particular social media and the Internet in order to support their networking role and public communication among youth group and wider network; iii) Building networking capacity for a group of young organic leaders and encourage continuing and long-term engagement among participants; iv) participating and organizing an international event at the Asia-Europe Peoples’ Forum on issue relate to agro-ecology and food sovereignty in the Mekong region and Asia. (*See at Annex 7<sup>27</sup>*)

In 2012, a series of film documents was made by the Communist Party of Vietnam online newspapers about eco-farming and training at FFS in Simacai and HEPA, as well at Mr. Phuong’s farm, Quang Binh province; Long Lan community, Luang Prabang, Laos. All

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<sup>25</sup> See a draft report on ethnobotanic in Long Lan and Hepa.

<sup>26</sup> Numbers of eco-farms, eco-villages: Tha Tang organic farm and training center in Laos; Greenmarket in Thailand; Nong Tao, Maesamai, Hin Lad Nai and Maetha village in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai province.

<sup>27</sup> Report on Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-Ecology / 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum, 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR.

of film documentary were broadcasted on Internet TV of the Communist Party of Vietnam online newspapers, and broadcasted at different channels of VTC.

### **Outcomes level**

Main outcomes: the group of young organics has drafted and finalized “Occupy Your Life” Manifesto (*See Annex 8<sup>28</sup>*) to convey their messages on taking back the roles of food production and health care as well as to inspire and encourage small-scaled diversified farming worldwide. After the gathering at Tha Tang Farm, the young organics attended the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Peoples’ Forum from 17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. They organized a small workshop on “Occupy Your Life: Young Farmers’ Perspective on the Future of Agriculture” at D’ Rose Hotel on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2012. During this workshop, the young organics distributed and presented their manifesto, and then later they had a chance to exchange their ideas with participants who attended their workshop. At the end of the workshop the young organics submitted their recommendation to AEPF9 Committee and a part<sup>29</sup> of their manifesto put into final declaration of Asia-Europe Peoples’ Forum (*see annex 9<sup>30</sup>*). In 2013, the young, diversified farmers’ gathering will be hosted by HEPA/ SPERI.

In 2012 Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat village, Luang Prabang province achieved great results. Thanks to previous stud tours, discussion and training courses, interest group members recognised the need to change way of raising domestic animals, and then they made more living facilities and cages for them. They gradually change from letting animals free to keep them in cages, so as to help to improve living environment. They set up regulation on stable animal raising and applied fine of 50.000 kip to a violating case of freeing pig and transferred that to the community fund. This is an indicator showing the improvement of interest groups and community self-governance (*see more annex 4*).

Achieving stable livelihood sovereignty while protecting the natural resources is really a critical challenge and long-term process. In order to promote ‘eco-farming’ as a strategic solution for sustainable land use planning and management depends upon highly society commitments and policy option to supporting ‘eco-farming’. Coming years, we also need to improve small scale networking strategies within local areas, FFSSs. We need to improve our networking capacity and reach to provide more support and solidarity to promote Eco-farming in an increasingly critical situation within the region, culturally, economically and environmentally for more effective lobbying on land-use planning and practice at community level.

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<sup>28</sup> Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology; Occupy Your Life Manifesto. 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum, 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR.

<sup>29</sup> Our health and the health of the earth and future generations depend on healthy soil, strong food communities and small-scale diversified farms. There are growing movements of young farmers and alternatives agriculture, which can provide solutions to many of the global challenges we are facing. To support these, we should promote local food systems and strengthen networks for farming with dignity integrity and self-reliance.

<sup>30</sup> Final Declaration: 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum – 16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Vientiane, Laos.



***Outcome 4: The present community eco-enterprises will be strengthened***

**Output level**

To achieve outcome 4, it is strongly link to achievement of outcome 3. The role of farmers has to be adapted not only as the producer but also the social entrepreneur who has enough capacity and pays attention to risk management, cost effective investment in tackling their own constraints and in the ‘niche’ market of their products.

SPERI proactively participates in a regional project on ‘the role of Mekong Region Partnership in ‘Toward Organic Asia’ to explore opportunities for long-term cooperation between partnership in Mekong region including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Bhutan, Thailand, Vietnam and CCFD – France. This brings a good opportunity to gain experiences and strength capacity by connecting farmers and partnership for exchange in the Mekong region (*also mentioned at Outcome 3*).

In this period, the existing eco-farms<sup>31</sup> from different areas have maintained its connection with a network of farmers’ field schools by providing practical lessons and curriculums on the ground.

In 2012, through expanding network of MECO-ECOTRA with Towards Organic Asia (TOA) Network partners include: Cambodia Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Cambodia; Tekdeysuannapum, Cambodia; International Volunteer of Yamagata, Cambodia; Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar; Kallayanamittra Foundation, Myanmar; Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), Laos; National Organic Studies, Bhutan; Center for Bhutan Studies, Bhutan; Thai Green Market Network, Thailand; Alternative Agriculture Network, Thailand; City Farm Movement, Thailand; School for Well Being Studies and Research, Thailand to explore opportunities for long-term cooperation between partnership in Mekong region including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Bhutan, Thailand, Vietnam. MECO-ECOTRA will connect with numbers of eco-farms, eco-villages and organizations in Laos; Thailand; Cambodia; Myanmar and Bhutan for learning and sharing in order to promote and expand eco-farming in Mekong region, as well as gain more influence for Vietnam (*as mentioned at outcome 3*).

All eco-farms, eco-villages and eco-enterprises are good learning environment for key-farmers, students, researchers, development workers, the media and policy makers to visit and share experiences to make use of the lesson learned for their own work. But more importance is to gain access to the wisdom, local knowledge and customary law that connect to the process of governing natural resources. In addition, the eco-farming practice maintains and protects soil, water (natural resources), varieties and biodiversity<sup>32</sup>. Network of Eco-

<sup>31</sup> Farm owners: Mr. Xomlit in Luang Prabang, Laos; Mr. Mr. Hoang Huu Phuoc, Quang Binh Vietnam; Ba Vi herbal Collective of Dzao group in Ba Vi commune, Ba Vi district, Hanoi; Eco-Community in Long Lan community include 66 households, Luang Prabang province, Laos; Na Sai and Pom Om village, Que Phong district, Nghe An province.

<sup>32</sup> See a draft report on ethnobotanic in Long Lan and Hepa.

farming, through its pilots, shows reliable indicators for public awareness raising and lobbying on land use planning, small and stable solutions for sustainable livelihoods for indigenous peoples. For instance, is not only about their indicators from their farms, but they now confidently share their experiences to other farmers, researchers and policy-makers.

### **Outcomes level**

Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology which organized in Laos from 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR encouraged the discussion among young organics on visioning community farms, roles of young farmers, common language in diversified farming as well as happiness and wellbeing. The workshop contributed to the building of capacity of Asian young farmers and activists through: 1) Gaining a big picture of current situation and future challenges on agriculture in the context of globalization, and develop model for future cooperation; 2) understanding power of new media and benefits of using media and innovation, in particular social media and the Internet in order to support their networking role and public communication among youth group and wider network; 3) Building networking capacity for a group of young organic leaders and encourage continuing and long-term engagement among participants; 4) participating and organizing an international event at the Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum on issue relate to agro-ecology and food sovereignty in the Mekong region and Asia.

Reaching out this outcome the network and SPERI have faced with many difficulties and challenges and take very long way. In 2012, SPERI did not achieve much.

***Outcome 5: A source of young leadership for Community Institutions in watershed management, Eco-Farming for sustainable Land use planning and Community Enterprise for fair trading will be built up***

### **Outputs level**

One Mong ethnic youth (Vang Sin Min)<sup>33</sup> who graduated from the first training course at FFS-Simacai become a coordinator of FFS-Simacai. Mr. Van Sin Min has had more than six years learning and working with SPERI in Simacai district, Vietnam and Luang Prabang, Laos. His capacity on coordination and action research has been improved remarkably, particularly since August 2012, he has participated actively in ethnobotanic action research as a key facilitator, translator and researcher of several participatory action ethnobotanic researches with Mong people in Long Lan, Luang Prabang, Laos and with 20 different ethnic minority healers who came from Lang Son, Lao Cai, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Ba Vi – Ha and Quang Binh province to Hepa.

Another Mong youth, Mr. Giang Seo Anh has continued learning and improving Lao language, as well as community development works by working directly with CHESH-Lao

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<sup>33</sup> See more at personal evaluation of study tour trip in Chiang Mai from 3-13 October 2012 by Dr. Keith Barber – senior lecture of Anthropology of the University of Waikato

program in Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat village, Luang Prabang province, Laos. He can communicate well in Lao and Mong language.

The above two young Mong staff are valuable resource persons of MECO-ECOTRA in Laos, Vietnam as well as Mekong region in the future.

In July 2012, there were 22 of 23 students (95,7%) graduated a two-year joined training program between SPERI and Vocational and Technical School of Lao Cai province organised at FFS Simacai. All graduated students got good knowledge and animal raising and practical eco-farming design skills, training of trainers. Until now, there have seven students (32% of total graduated students) works for agricultural extension unit of communes; three students (14%) continue higher learning and other 12 students (54%) work at home and their communities.

In March 2012, nine young Lao students were selected including three 3 girls and 6 boys to attend a two-year training program on eco-farming. After a two month orientation training program, FFS-HEPA selected 7 students for two-year training program on eco-farming. Two students did not show that they are interested in learning as well as they did not meet basic requirements of FFS-HEPA. FFS-HEPA decided to send them back to their village in Laos.

Another group of seven selected Lao students including two girls who have continued the third year training on advanced Eco-farming in FFS-Hepa. In the third year, they were identified their own needs for further learning for their own future. Adding to this, they understood and gained confidence on 'learning by doing method' and self-learning process at FFS-Hepa. Besides learning, they played a role as practical training assistants for new young Lao students who came in March 2012. In November 2012, two of them have gone back to their villages for self-learning at their community in Laos.

In April 2012, FFS-HEPA was successful accepted five scholarships by Ecumenical Scholarship Programme (ESP)-Germany for five Lao students, who are third year training program, to continue another two-year training program on Advanced Eco-farming at FFS-HEPA. The total scholarship budget is 25.100 Euro. This is not only to get more resources for students to continue learning. But this continues to confirm and recognise training program at FFS-HEPA as a professional training institute on eco-farming, and community development.

Practical modes of education at FFS in Simacai and HEPA, involving teaching by learning and learning by doing pioneered in network of Farmer Field Schools, which facilitate by SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA, are now getting better informed to public. In 2012, FFS-HEPA received and coordinated learning and exchange tours for several selected Viet-

namese delegation and 14 selected international delegations with total of 51 international visitors to HEPA<sup>34</sup>.

In addition, FFS-HEPA has also selected as a training center for capacity building for young farmers on Eco-farming from a network of TOA in Mekong region.

FFS at Dong Le town (CCCD), Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province was hand over to CIRD as CIRD has become an independent organisation from SPERI since July 2012. However, FFS-CCCD and CIRD still works in coalition with SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA.

### Outcomes level

In 2012, four (4)<sup>35</sup> who covered by a join support between ICCO and a scholarship program of BftD and are ethnic minority groups in Vietnam graduated advanced eco-farming training program at FFS-HEPA after 4 years. All students were impressed and felt that that the training on advanced eco-farming and ‘learning by doing and teaching by learning’ work well with them. The training were involved all knowledge and skills of students and it required deep thinking to invest, design and practice eco-farm, but at the same time it is very close to the farming life. Through the training, they all improved their practicing eco-farming knowledge and skills; training on traditional customary laws on natural resource protection and management, community government, local knowledge and skills, especially herbal medicine; a series of farming techniques and solutions sharing by key farmers, experts and volunteers from different areas. In addition, their TOT skills, computer and English skills, facilitation and coordination skills were improved remarkably. For example, they all can communicate from fairly to well English; fast typing with 10 figures and take notes for meetings, using very good computer and software such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Mind Map; taking pictures and filming. Four young students<sup>36</sup> have become members of the management board of FFS-HEPA as well as eco-farming trainers to other younger ethnic students coming from Laos. They have been working actively with foreign volunteers to promote and practice eco-farming design and practices, build up curriculum from their practice. After finishing training program, all of them would like to continue the development of eco-farming and training of trainers for the broader community (*see annex 10*<sup>37</sup>)

In order to expanding network and providing opportunities for young adults in Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) and plus India to strengthening their visions, capacity and self-confidence in networking with other young adults.

<sup>34</sup>In fact, there were much more requirements from many international visitors visiting FFSs in Simacai and HEPA. But SPERI/FFSs were very careful selected to accept. Most of international visitors have a long relationships and strategic partners of SPERI.

<sup>35</sup> Mr. Ly Seo Vu, Mr. Giang A Su, and Ms. Giang Thi Chung come from the Hmong community, Simacai district, Lao Cai province, and Mr. Loc Van Vin comes from the San Diu community, Dinh Lap district, Lang Son province.

<sup>36</sup> Four graduated students in FFS-HEPA: mr. Ly Seo Vu, mr. Loc Van Vin, mr. Giang Seo Su and mr. Sam Viet Thanh; One graduated students in FFS-Simacai and became coordinator of FFS-Simacai: mr. Vang Sin Min.

<sup>37</sup> Evaluation of the advanced training program on ecological farming systems supported by the Bread for the World (BftW) Ecumenical Scholarship Program (ESP) by Mr. Cory W. Whitney – Independent Consultant

SPERI in coalition with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) – Thailand, Sewalanka Foundation – Sri Lanka, Youth Buddhist (YBS) – India, Kalayna Mitta Foundation (KMF) – Myanmar joined to build up a project on Sustainable Community Development through Spirituality and Cultural Enrichment. Each member of the coalition was responsible to organise ten-month internships for young indigenous students in Mekong region plus India.

- SPERI sent one San Diu student who graduated from FFS-HEPA in Vietnam attended a ten-month internship at INEB, Thailand commencing in August 2012 and FFS-HEPA organized a ten-month internship for two students (one from India, one from Myanmar) at FFS-HEPA commencing in August 2012. These internship program aim for young adults on eco-farming and eco-village design education and training of trainers, community development knowledge and skills, networking, particularly networking with young indigenous peoples in Mekong region, exchanging and learning other cultures and knowledge, learning English, Thai and Vietnamese language;
- One Mong students (Giang A Su) attended a ten-day training workshop on internship orientation for host organisations organised by FK – Norway from 20-30 July 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand.

**Outcome of MECO-ECOTRA Chiang Mai:** From 3-13 October 2012 Four Young Ethnic Leaders and two elders from the MECO-ECOTRA network and one Authority undertook a study tour of villages in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces in Northern Thailand in association with CESD and RCSD at Chiang Mai University. Six villages were visited: two of which were already part of the MECO-ECOTRA network and four of which were not. Network contacts were renewed or established in each village.

At the end of the study tour, the key participants, Messrs Phonethip, Xayxualu Her, Mai Xuan Tuyen, Vang Sin Min, Ly Seo Vu and Chi Ly all formally presented the lessons they had learnt from the six villages visited in the form of their own action plans in their own spheres of operation within the MECO-ECOTRA/YEILDS network. These plans were carefully prepared and presented in considerable detail, and continued to be worked on over the following days in preparation for presenting them to their own communities for feedback when they returned.

Far reaching outcomes of the tour: connections made between Mesamai and Long Lan for continuing interaction and exchange on forestland use planning and spirit forest protection; determination by Mr Mai Xuan Tuyen, Chairman of Cao Quang Peoples' Committee to implement community forest action plan; plans for exchange and study tours between Karen youth at Hin Lad Nai and young ethnic leaders from Hepa leading to wider connection with Young Karen Network in Thailand; the discover of 'Home school' and village self-development activities at Doi Phasom in forest protection and water conservation, self-sufficiency, energy conservation and alternative fuel; the lessons of the contrasting experiences of cash croppers and organic farmers at Mae Tha; the impact of the example of

the confidence and ability of the young MECO-ECOTRA leaders, and the Bio-Human Ecology teachings of Mrs Lanh, on raising the ethnic consciousness and intellectual awakening of 2 female (Hmong and Karen) CESD Masters students. (see annex 11<sup>38</sup>).

Achievement of FFS-Simacai continue to be recognized wider by governmental and NGO organizations. FFS-HEPA has hosted several study-visits for other NGOs and development agencies. The number of Vietnamese and International people submitted to be volunteers increasing remarkably, but HEPA selected very carefully and kept in few numbers of volunteers. In 2012, at FFS-HEPA, there were three international volunteers<sup>39</sup> who worked at FFS-HEPA from six months to 18 months.

In April 2012, FFS-HEPA facilitated a study tour for key farmers, communal and district authorities of Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province. One of big impact of this study tour were that in July 2012, Department of Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province organized a training workshop on treatment organic waste and gray water by a banana circle<sup>40</sup>. This workshop involved head of 33 kindergartens and 17 semi-boarding primary schools of Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province.

Ms. Nguy Thi Tuoi<sup>41</sup> applied a lesson learned on banana circle for organic waste and gray water treatment, which she learned during three-month interns at FFS-HEPA in 2011 to develop project on deploy and apply banana circles for HMong households in Can Ho commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province. This project<sup>42</sup> was accepted by Unilever Vietnam Fund and has been implemented in whole Can Ho commune in 2012.

A series of curriculum, applied researches and documents have been conducted, documented and posted at Website of Farmer Field School at <http://ffs.speri.org/>. This website is a forum on eco-farming design principles and approaches; eco-farming solutions and related issues for young indigenous students and any interested people. One of limitations of the website is Vietnamese language.

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<sup>38</sup> Personal evaluation of study tour for elders and ethnic young leaders of MECO-ECOTRA to Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 3 – 13, 2012 by Dr. Keith Barber.

<sup>39</sup> Australian volunteers (Robert Gray and David Bauer) were supported by by (VIDA), Australia; one Dutch volunteer

<sup>40</sup> <http://thainguyen.edu.vn/Thanhvien/phongdaitu/84/13813/Tap-huan-xu-ly-nuoc-thai-va-rac-thai-bang-mo-hinh.aspx>

<sup>41</sup> Ms. Nguyen Thi Tuoi was a student of Hanoi Agriculture University. She took a three-month to learn and practice eco-farming solutions and techniques and did her graduated thesis on water harvestmen system of eco-farm at FFS-HEPA in 2011. She was selected to be a young vice-chairwoman of Can Ho commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province which belongs to the project on 600 young vice –chairman of the government due to the decision No. 08/2011/QĐ-TTg dated 26/1/2011 by the Prime Minister.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.unilever.com.vn/aboutus/foundation/aboutunilevervietnamfoundation/2009winningprojects/index.aspx>

***Outcome 7: SPERI will become a professional research and training organization***

**Outputs level**

**Academic Research Cooperation:** Dr. Barber of the Anthropology Department at Waikato University returned to Vietnam and Laos in August –December 2012 to complete a 32 page research report on CHESH-Lao 1999-2009. This report titled “Cultural Identity, Network Action, and Customary Law: The CHESH-Lao Program 1999-2009” has been submitted to SPERI for review and decision on publication. Dr Barber also acted as academic advisor in SPERI’s “Bio-human Ecology and Ethnobotany Research Project” on Herbal Knowledge within the MECO-ECOTRA Network for 2012-2013 (*see annex 12*<sup>43</sup>).

**Honorary Research Associate:** In 2012 Mrs Lanh took up a position as Honorary Research Associate at the Department of Anthropology. This position was offered to her in recognition of the importance to Anthropology and to the research community generally at Waikato University of the work of SPERI in the Mekong region. The position provides Mrs Lanh with access to the University’s office and research facilities in return for contributing to the research environment at Waikato. In June, Mrs Lanh gave a lecture for graduate students in courses on “Anthropology and Development” and “Ethnic and Indigenous Minorities” and in July presented a Seminar at the University titled “Nurturing Nature – a philosophy of life and development” in which she described the history and philosophy and practice of TEW/SPERI.

**Masters and PhD research:** the University of Waikato has approved Masters and PhD research proposals for two SPERI senior staff. Masters and PhD students will do research within its MECO-ECOTRA network in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia; one (Mr. Pham Van Dung) was successful accepted a scholarship from New Zealand Government and he will take Masters Program on anthropology during two year commenced in Jan 2013. One PhD position (Mr. Dam Trong Tuan) has approved research proposal and is awaiting scholarship support. He has to delay his applicant for scholarship due to SPERI human resource requirement at this moment. (*See annex 13*<sup>44</sup>).

**Further opportunity for Masters’ Degree:** One senior staff (Ms. Dang To Kien) was successful accepted for a Masters’ Degree by the Australian National University and got scholarship from Australian Leadership Award, and from AusAID. The Masters’ position has been taken place in April 2012 and will be completed in June 2013.

Following the CCFD speaking tour of France by Mrs Lanh in March 2011, a number of institutional network developments occurred which continued into 2012<sup>45</sup>. In May 2012

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<sup>43</sup> Cultural Identity, Network Action, and Customary Law: The CHESH-Lao Program 1999-2009

<sup>44</sup> Outcome of MOU between SPERI and the University of Waikato for 2012 dated 13 December 2012

<sup>45</sup> In October 2011, SPERI was invited to Bangkok to participate in CCFD sponsored workshop on the new Toward Organic Asia (TOA) programme of Chulalongkorn University’s School for Wellbeing. This included Sharm conference sponsored by INEB, which included representatives from Bhutan. The outcome of this was first, an invitation for Mrs Lanh to attend the 17<sup>th</sup> World conference of IFOAM in Korea in October 2011

Mrs. Lanh took a visit Bhutan and attended the conference on Climate Change in Sri Lanka in September 2012. In Sri Lanka, Mrs Lanh's presentation created a great deal of interest among delegates from Thailand (TOA), Myanmar (Metta and SEP), and Japan (Eco-Village), and the demand for a further roundtable discussion to learn more of SPERI's work and philosophy. In Sri Lanka Mrs Lanh was also very active in nurturing young activists from Thailand and Myanmar. Finally, in November 2012, in recognition of the importance of SPERI's contribution to the development of activist networks in Asia, Mrs Lanh was invited by INEB to join its Executive Board along with representatives from 30 other countries (*as mentioned at outcome 1*)

**Documentation and Publication:** One book about 15 year working history experiences of SPERI (TEW/CHESH/CIRD) has finished final one and One article about more than 10 year working history experiences of CHESH in Laos (called CHESH-Laos). This book and article are an introduction to the work of SPERI (Social Policy Ecology Research Institute). SPERI is a Vietnamese grown NGO that started out in the early 1990s as a small organization called TEW (Towards Ethnic Women).

SPERI in cooperation with CIRUM and CODE build up a joint media group, which is based on media group of SPERI, as a key strategy to coordinate and strength capacity of media group who share common concerns to ethnic minorities and natural resources management based on local people. This strategy engages with several selected newspapers including the Communist Party of Vietnam online newspapers; VTV1 and other relevant journalists producing articles to rise to the public awareness on indigenous ethnic minority's issues, particularly land and forest and promote and support for advocacy and lobbying at local to national level.

Websites of SPERI regularly update news, lessons learned from the fields and articles and research papers done by SPERI and its partners. These websites create forum for different peoples who want to learn, share and discuss issues and problems regarding to indigenous peoples and their natural resources. Numbers of viewers have increased regularly.

In 2012, SPERI has an important decision that separated CIRD to be an independent organization again, which is as a result of a decision No. 97/2010/TTg-CP by the Prime Minister in regards to re-registration of science and technology organisation. But the nature of decision No. 97 is to control and narrows down 'space' of voices, criticism and actions of NGO in Vietnam. CIRD will continue its original issues regarding to ethnic minorities such as land and forest and livelihood sovereignty of ethnic minorities. CIRD works in coalition with SPERI based on sharing common values, strategy and working themes.

Funding-cooperations between SPERI and the Bread for the World (BftW)<sup>46</sup>; Norwegian People's Aids (NPA)<sup>47</sup>; CCFD<sup>48</sup> have started since 2011 and continued. Total budget

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<sup>46</sup> Phase 1: Empowerment of ethnic minorities In Northern Laos by traditional land use planning and resource management from 1-12/2010. Project ID: B-LAO-0911-0003. The total budget is 58.488 EUR; phase 2: Empowerment of ethnic minorities in Northern Laos by traditional land use planning and resource management from 1/2011 to 12/2012. Project ID: B- Lao- 1011- 0006. The total budget is 89.478 EUR.



contributed by the BftW, NPA, CCFD and other small grants<sup>49</sup> is parts of the Meco-Ecotra framework proposal submitted to ICCO in 2010 with the grand total budget is around 1.000.000 Euro, of which ICCO supported 600.000 Euro and the rest was contributed by BftW, NPA, CCFD and other small grants which are around 450.000 Euro.

### Outcomes level

SPERI is getting to become a more professional Research and Training Institute through its research papers, case studies, publications and training programs and curriculums at FFSs.

SPERI associated with CIRUM, CODE and CIRD actively and precisely in advocacy and lobby on several articles of amended Land Law in 2013. In addition, SPERI works as the field date and evident supervisor and provider for Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration (area I); the Ethnic Minorities Council of the National Assembly, The advisory council for ethnic minorities and land of the Farther Land Front. A series of case studies, policy analysis papers and many informal sharing were well informed to key advisors and key persons who are responsible and directly involved in the process of amended Land Law.

Besides that SPERI has professionalize deeply cooperation on research and training with numbers of Universities such as the University of Waikato, RCSD<sup>50</sup> and CESD<sup>51</sup> of Chiangmai University, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration (area I), as well well-known individual academics and researchers<sup>52</sup> in Vietnam and Internationally.

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<sup>47</sup> Phase 1: Action research cooperation on Meco- ecotra in Lao Cai province from 4-12/2011. Project ID: NF05. The total budget is 46.086 Euro; Phase 2: Ensuring community rights to forestland and empowering indigenous minority youth leaderships. Pilots: Ta Lung Sui village, Simacai district-Lao Cai & Pom Om village, Que Phong district-Nghe An from 1-12/2012. Project ID: 03/2012/NPA/Gc. The total budget is 76.658 EUR.

<sup>48</sup> Phase 1: Action research on Ecological pilot in Long Lan village, Luang Prabang, Laos from 4/2011 to 4/2012. Project ID: LAO- 001- 11- 3792. The total budget is 22.800 EUR; phase 2: Long Lan Farmers' Field School: A Regional Model for Sustainable Community Co-Management of Natural Resources from 5/2012-7/2013. Project ID: LAO-0020- 12 -140. The total budget is 71.225 EUR.

<sup>49</sup> Other small grants: UNDP: project on Role of Customary Law io Ethnic Minority Community Development", under the Project "Strengthening the Capacity of the Vietnam Lawyers' Association during 6 month in 2011. Project ID: '2010-06-03. The total budget is 32.313 EUR; ESP provided scholarships: 1) Advanced eco-farm training course at FFS-HEPA for 4 students during two years, from 5/2010-6/2012. Project ID: S-VNM- 1005-0002- ESP. The total budget is 12.659 EUR; 2) 5 scholarships for Eco- farm training course (Intermediate level) for 5 students during 2 years, from 5/2012-5/2014. Project ID: S-VNM- 1205- 0001- ESP. The total budget is 25.100 EUR; FK – Norway supported a coalition project on Sustainable Community Development through Spirituality and Cultural Enrichment during 10 months, from 8/2012-6/2013. Project ID: 101611 AS. The total budget is 15.837 EUR.

<sup>50</sup> RCSD = Regional Center of Social Science Research and Development of Chiangmai University

<sup>51</sup> ECSD = Ethnicity Center Study and Development of Chiangmai University

<sup>52</sup> Mr. Nguyen Ngoc - Writer and Educational Researcher; Mr. Nguyen Trung – independent economics researcher; Mr. Ton Gia Huyen – formal general director of Land Department and land policy researcher; Ass. Prof. Dr. Khong Dien – Ethnologist; Prof. Dr. Le Van Tiem – soil science; Prof. Dr. Le Van Khoa – Soil and Environment Science; Prof. DScs. Dang Trung Thuan – Geologist; As.Prof. Dr. Ho Uy Liem – Formal Acting VUSTA,

In addition, SPERI strengthens its **documentation and Publication**: a series of publications have been documented and prepared for publication. For example, one book about 15 year working history experiences of SPERI (TEW/CHESH/CIRD) has finished final one and One article about more than 10 year working history experiences of CHESH in Laos (called CHESH-Laos). This book and article are an introduction to the work of SPERI (Social Policy Ecology Research Institute). SPERI is a Vietnamese grown NGO that started out in the early 1990s as a small organization called TEW (Towards Ethnic Women). When TEW grew, it diversified into different areas of specialization. Thus were born CHESH (Centre for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands) and CIRD (Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development). The fusion of TEW and CIRD into a single umbrella NGO (SPERI) marked the conclusion of a first set of activities and results and at the same time the start of a new vision for new growth for the next decade. We say that this book is only an introduction to the work of SPERI because it is almost impossible to bundle all the work done over the last ten to fifteen years into one document and do justice to all of its achievements. Through the pages of this book and article, we sincerely hope that the reader will share the experience of all SPERI staff members, who invariably appreciate that, unlike in a museum, the treasures hidden in tribal villages are alive and present and worthwhile to be preserved. This book and article will soon posted on SPERI's Website. In 2013, we will look for a publication.

#### **Education Program at HEPA<sup>53</sup>**

HEPA follows a hands-on experiential education methodology with a strong emphasis on learning by doing and in cementing that learning through teaching. In farming practices, students are given room for exploring approaches based on their traditional, or other, environmentally and socially sound practices. The core values of eco-farming and the students relate these core values to their own community and discuss any beliefs or ideas in relation to their traditional ethics. Through this process they become familiar with self-regulation and accepting feedback two important aspects of learning at HEPA.

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policy criticism; Dr. Vu Thanh Tu Anh – Fulbright Research Director in Vietnam; Mr. Nguyen Khac Thu – formal chairman of Huong Son People' Committee, Ha Tinh province; mr. Vu Van Can - Senior expert on botanic; mr. Do Tuoc – senior wild animals; Dr. Keith Babber is senior lecture and research at Waikato University; Honorary Prof. Dr. Friedhelm Göldenboth at the University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart , Germany and other high ranking authorities at provincial to National Assembly; Central Party and Government (not given names).

<sup>53</sup> See annex 10

**Feedback and Assessment:** One strength of this program is that students are highly encouraged to develop critical thinking, and learning through comments and feedback from each other. This kind of feedback happens in two meetings a week (Wednesday and Saturday), wherein students and staff share points about the functioning of the education program and the farming practices. Students report to SPERI support staff once per month, and minutes are shared from each meeting. They keep a diary on all farming activities, course-work, any issues, or other HEPA related activities, and deliver this diary to SPERI when it is full (SPERI now has 30 or more of these). Reading through these and offering feedback could be an easy way to support students learning.

An education program should ideally have a built in feedback system to offer students an opportunity to learn from successes and failures from their own and from an outside perspective. This is especially true of a hands-on education where students spend more time working on their own and get more chances to experiment. Ideally, training should be followed with the learning-by-doing and then feedback, a chance to talk about how it went and to hear what the impressions of others were and where the strengths and weaknesses are for the work. However, feedback about the education program and the student progress and learning is not formalized and does not happen regularly. HEPA is working on making a system for this but at the moment the students are learning from doing, making mistakes is a part of the process but there is no function of the system to offer feedback about successes and failures. There are some critical questions to be answered about the model for the training that happens at HEPA. Primarily this is in the honing and clarifying the difference between the larger vision and the actual practice on the ground.

## ***What went well and what didn't***

### ***What went well***

**First example went well**, the achievement of lobbying Circular 07/TTLT/2011 in Simacai and in Nghe an case, series of training workshop, a round table negotiation and debate openly at different forums among elders, key farmers, young eco-farming leaders of MECO-ECOTRA in places at levels from community to inter – districts, inter- provinces and inter – region horizontally which attracted different stakeholders and actors from different background, particularly television and lower parliamentarians. It impacts into high ranking policy maker included the Land Law Drafting Team. Social action has been widening and inspiring into Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and Ethnic Minority Council of National Assembly, then “make noise” to Religion and Ethnicity Department of Fatherland Front Committee. Sequences of outcomes from the process of applying advantage signal of Circular No 07/TTLT/2011 in order to gain back religious forest and land for community in Simacai of Lao cai and Que phong of Nghe an has been well known. Result of all in November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, SPERI associated with CIRUM and CODE to open the national conference “Land use and management in mountainous ethnic communities”(La Thanh hotel, Hanoi, November, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012). Participants consisted of 1) representatives of farmers

who face serious shortages of land coming from mountainous ethnic communities of Northern, Central and Central Highland regions, provinces of Lao Cai, Son La, Bac Can, Lang Son, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Kon Tum ; 2) communal and district officials coming from Hmong, Thai, Tay, Nung, Van Kieu, Bana, Ro Ngao and Kinh ethnic communities; 3) representative from the National Assembly office; 4) representative from the Nationalities Council of the National Assembly, 5) the Economic Committee of the National Assembly, 6) the Committee for Education and Propaganda of the Party's Central Committee, 7) the Government Office, 8) the Bureau of Forestry, 9) the Land Research Institute of the Bureau of Land Management, 10) the Fund for Participation and Accountability, 11) the Department of Policy and Legality, Bureau of Land administration, 12) Vietnam Paper Corporation, 13) Vietnam Forestry Corporation, 14) Representative from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 15) Representative from Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, 16) Representative from Land Law Drafting team 17) representative from Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), 18) Bread for the World (BfdW), 19) Website of Vietnam Communist Party, 20) Politics and Social television - VTV1, and 21) the 20 different media, television, Radio of Vietnam, 22) The Coalition Group of CIRUM/RDPR/CIRD/OXFAM/CODE/CIRD and their key farmers who on behalf of their communities.

The following main contents in 07 recommendations of the Workshop are analysis and summarized by the organizers and SPERI supervisor Mr Ton Gia Huyen (national advisor for Land issue in Vietnam), and sent straight away in November 5<sup>th</sup> in order to provide hottest information and key solutions to the ongoing 4<sup>th</sup> Session of 13<sup>th</sup> Term National Assembly for group discussion in November 6<sup>th</sup> and for plenary debate in November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 regarding Resolution No. 438/NQ-UBTVQH 13 dated January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and Detail Plan No. 152/KH – DGS dated May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012 of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on the supervision of ‘the implementation of policies, legal document on residential land, production land for ethnic minority peoples’:

**Firstly**, Shortage of residential land and production land.<sup>54</sup> Ethnic minority peoples of some localities even do not have production land, lose sacred forests for worshipping their ancestors, and lose land for practicing management, worshipping, and nurturing nature according to belief system of ethnic groups. Losing spiritual forests, herbal forests, and clan forests means losing existence spaces for multi-generational traditional culture of ethnic peoples. Shortage of production land signifies insufficient vital foundation for maintaining livelihood security of mountainous ethnic peoples, and its outcome contradicts the orientations of the Party, such as Guideline No. 29 in 1983, Resolution No. 26 of the 7<sup>th</sup> Plenum of 9<sup>th</sup> term Party Central Committee in 2003, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenum of 11<sup>th</sup> term Party Central Committee in this October. Though mountainous areas contain vast areas of land, there remains land distribution inadequacy, low use efficiency, and messy exploitation. This

<sup>54</sup> Inadequacy, inequality of residential land and production land between farmers and officers/ worker of enterprises: each officers/ worker of enterprise has 113.36 ha of forestland. Each mountainous farmer household has only 0.62 ha of production land . Average land per resettled household is merely 400 m<sup>2</sup> of land.

phenomenon causes serious degradation of bio-diversity of land and forest and the erosion of cultural identity of ethnic groups, that becomes an unacceptable paradox for the country's current development process;

**Secondly**, This paradox has been a focal point causing contradictions and conflicts reaching the level of complaints, denunciation and insecurity in mountainous society, and potential social unrest. If there is no sufficient synchronous measures, there will explode spontaneous selection of state power by the people;

**Thirdly**, Since 1983, Guideline No. 29, then Resolution No 26 the 7<sup>th</sup> Plenum of 9<sup>th</sup> term Party Central Committee in 2003, and the most recent 6<sup>th</sup> Plenum of 11<sup>th</sup> term Party Central Committee, all reflect highly the political will for solving problems. Political will is the most significant foundation for implementing solutions and pilot models dealing with ethnic peoples' shortage of residential and production land. The remaining issues are the realization of this will in the entire political system and attitude in implementation on the basis of people, community participatory democracy, co-responsibility with involvement of local people, so as to stabilize soon peoples' spiritual and material life;

**Fourthly**, It is necessary to revise land law towards : 1) Provide specific policy to ethnic minority peoples ; 2) seeing that specialized-used and protection forests are not only allocated to subsidized salaried state management boards, but also to local ethnic communities for their own protection and management under a specific, suitable policy, which has regard to and is based upon ethnic people's land and forest valuing perception and practice of voluntary 'natural worship' without government salary payment. For instance, traditional water protection forests, herbal forests, clan forests should be considered as protection forests. Sacred forests, spiritual forests should be seen as special-use forests. The state should enact policy that accepts various distinctions and respects every ethnic customs and their perception of forest and land. Specifically, legal framework should be provided to enable ethnic people to maintain their religious practices towards this type of land and forests. 3) Rearrange and withdraw major portions of the most favorable production land from state enterprises and companies to allocate to ethnic peoples. The system of state forestry and agricultural enterprises should be reformed towards services for inputs and outputs of forestry production. Responsibilities and obligations of forestry enterprises should be as equal to those pertained to the mountainous households. This is the most efficient measures for utilization of land and forest resources, while at the same time promoting the strength of 15 million mountainous people. Ethnic people should have rights to pay taxes direct to state budget instead of through such intermediaries as forest enterprises or companies. Do not allow the existence of disguised land renting and getting taxes from that. This is a critical issue in the transitional period, whenever a considerable amount of forest enterprises and companies become intermediary actors to separate authorities from peoples and make people misunderstand the nature of a state of the people. 4) Reorganize the forest protecting force to become an actual force of the people, to combine people's forest protection to the ethnic people's monitoring and supervision, so as to ensure holistic efficiency of forestland use;

**Fifthly,** Regarding state management: 1) Strengthen and build up communal administration to be strong enough with sufficient personnel and resources to deal with strict and effective local land management. 2) Readjust and complete communal land use planning with a strategy of implementation, supervision, management of land use planning in a disclosed, transparent and democratic manner. 3) Soundly implement democracy principles which have regard to respecting customs, traditional cultures, and perceptual values of each ethnic identity. 4) Strengthen people's supervision capacity at communal level, enhance forest and land management and administration skills for people and community after land allocation, so as to assure the build up of a forestry society of self-reliance, self-responsibility, civilization, stability, and charms of cultural identities of each ethnic group;

**Sixthly,** Administrative power of all levels should become a central position to assemble social forces to involve in a solution to the mentioned paradox, of which communal level should be a foundation for initiations;

**Seventhly,** Respect resolutions of land overlapping, recalling adjacent forests and land from management boards of protection forests on the basis of ethnic people's ethics and participation; replicate and extend successful pilot models of community customary law-based land allocation in combination with forest allocation according to Joint-circular No. 07/TTLT/2011 in provinces of Son La, Lao Cai, Lang Son, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh. Special attention should be paid to pilot models of 'community rights towards spiritual forests, herbal forests, traditional clan forests, watershed forests' on the basis of integration between customary laws and statutory laws with advice from Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI) and Culture Identity and Resource Use and Management (CIRUM). Their efforts in land allocation in combination with forest allocation have been made upon 38,000 hectares of community forestland, production land, based on customary laws, Decree 163/1999/ND-CP and Joint Circular 07/TTLT/2011 and the instructions of land use planning towards ecological farming by the mentioned organizations in the above mentioned provinces;

These above seven key contents which was recommendation to the National Assembly Congress No 4 Term 13 on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012. The recommendations were also sent to Communist Party leaders, Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, Polit-Bureau, the Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development, Natural Resources and Environment, and the Land Law Drafting Team.

Subsequent events, from January to April, 2013, a series of seminars for sharing will be facilitated: 1) Academic based analysis toward forest and land policy for indigenous people in Vietnam will be raised again by Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy (see MOU signed); 2) Politic based analysis will be raised by the Ethnic Minority Department of the Ethnic Minority Council of National Parliament (see action planned); and 3) Independent social, political, civil and religious critical analysis will be raised by the Religion and Ethnicity Department of the Fatherland Front (see action planned). These diverse seminars will focus on the 7 recommendations of the 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2012 conference. The outcome of these 3 forums will become inputs for SPERI, CODE and CIRUM for Second National

Conference (planned at the end of April – before 5<sup>th</sup> congress of National Assembly Term XIII in earlier May, 2013).

This Second National Conference will emphasize specifically, and deeply and precisely, 5 of the 7 recommendations: 1) forest land policy theoretically and practically has to be returned to 15 million indigenous people who have been living and surviving on that land from generation to generation, and Government should produce new policies for supporting small-scale farmers for surviving on their forest land. State Forest Enterprises should only play the role of providing technical services, and if possible to learn how to initiate local niche markets for self-sufficiency for indigenous people. 2) Spirit/Religious Forest, traditional watershed forest and clan land which belongs to different indigenous groups must be returned to 15 million indigenous people legally, using the advantages of Circular 07/TTLT/2011. Therefore, policy makers should realize that beside the formal, costly and ineffective bureaucratic system of conservation there exists a parallel indigenous system of preserving nature based on the voluntary actions of people following their own belief in nature. 3) Community Based Land Use Planning must be recognized in Land Law 2013. Cancelling the Community Based in Land Use Planning in Land Law 2013, which used to be recognized in Land Law 2003, means creating by law more conflict in the future, especially when a market in land is being developed. 4) The National Assembly should have a professional committee to advice on land issues and land use planning. 5) The customary laws of 15 million indigenous people needs to be legally recognized for Co- Governance of natural resources.

These 5 key recommendations will then be sent to the pre-plenary meeting among 40 parliamentarians who are representatives for indigenous ethnic minority in Vietnam for discussion and summary for final key contents inputs for National Assembly Congress No. 5<sup>th</sup> Term XIII in earlier May 2013 for debate. The outcomes of this will contribute to the finalization of Land Law in June, 2013. Beyond this, the Religious/Spirit Forest issue including religious land will continue to be raised by MECO-ECOTRA- SPERI and its dozen different media alliance in order to move forward to another lobbying action aimed at the Forest Protection and Development Law in 2014.

**Second example went well,** in March, 2012, HEPA students hosted a team of Toward Organic Asia (TOA) combining different young organic farmers and people who follow organic life from Lao, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, France, Holland and India and one of them was a Secretary of INEB. The most important achievement during visiting HEPA in this trip is that the visitors were emotional inspired by seeing HEPA students worship nature on the top of HEPA forest named “Spiritual Da Tree with 9 pillars”. Then the visitors stepped down into different eco-farming farms, where they realized ways of nurturing nature that students practice in their own eco- farming farms. Outcomes straight away of the visit were: 1) INEB officially invited SPERI’s vice director to visit an organization in Scotland who has similar philosophy and action with SPERI in May, 2012 for exchanging. Subsequent event from this, a week after, INEB invited another senior staff of SPERI to

participate in Bangkok conference for Young Leadership Internship Action period August 2012-May 2013. Outcomes from this meeting in Bangkok was: 1) one HEPA student joined internship at INEB in Bangkok from August 2012- May 2013; and two Indian and Burmese young farmers came to HEPA for internship at the same period, August 2012- May 2013. Effect indicator from HEPA student who joined internship at INEB Bangkok is that he became actively involved in action network amongst young farmers from different countries in Mekong included 6 different HEPA students from Vietnam and Lao attending two forums: one was exchanging lessons learned from organic farming headed by Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC) from October 11<sup>th</sup> to 15 and other is the 9th Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum from 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, October 2012 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. At this forum they voiced their own struggle fighting against land grabbing caused by legal support in both Vietnam and Laos. Here, HEPA students opened their willingness to welcome and host an Asia young diversified farmer's gathering at HEPA Farmer Field School next August, 2013 in order to share their pressure and find solutions for regional young farmer action in coming years.

### *What didn't went well*

First example, according to Outputs for Outcomes 4, both MECO-ECOTRA was slowly to achieve due to many reasons from subjectively and objectively, for examples:

First, as the situation of the legal political economic mechanism in Mekong countries, all power maker in the region implicated that they all are chasing after the industrialization for modern their nation as quick as possible<sup>55</sup>. Second, it stills very few clients who recognized the really problems caused to holistic healthy, wellbeing and happiness socially, morally, culturally and economically by cash cropping and modernizing. Social understanding and willingness towards “Community Ecological Enterprising” is still far away. In general buyers enjoying with industrial food and products in ‘SUPERMARKET’ and according to social image, ‘SUPERMARKET is a place for civilized citizens in City Style’, while seeing ecological food at different garden market or local untidy corners for exchanging as kinship exchanges are only for lower classes and poor people. That leads MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI face obstacle for strengthening this initiate in one hand. Other hand, as the supervise role and functions for “Community Ecological Enterprise” strategy, SPERI is still really young experiences and capacity. However, MECO-ECOTRA, elsewhere in different communities such as ecological vegetable productions of Hmong in Long Lan village; herbal medicine collective of Dzao people in Ba Vi commune, Ba Vi district in Hanoi; numbers of eco-farmers in Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh - Vietnam and Luang Prabang, Laos has been maintaining their strategies under Eco- Farming for self-sufficiency and for niche image for ecological economical pilots which are well known surrounding networks locally, regionally and even internationally such Long Lan village in Luang Prabang case.

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<sup>55</sup> Many updated legal papers in Mekong counties are trying to open up for capitalist investor by join venture using natural resources for development leads small scale farmer suffered and no longer have enough land for farming



SPERI expects that by involving TOA, INEB in Inter-national Farmer Field School HEPA, the Outputs for Outcome 4 “Community Ecological Enterprise” for Ecological Niche Market Network will be better in the future.

Second example, due to “working cooperation between ICCO and SPERI at this period (2010-2013)” has been not went well administratively and cooperatively, for example: 1) many question raised by the Program Officer during 2012 has been not making any senses for understanding or encouraging for both better learning and sharing between ICCO and SPERI. More than that, not only the questions raised cost a lot time for answered which were legally completed years ago, but also by answering those questions we heart ourselves in both senses: once is the TRUST VALUE that we have been gradually building up since 1995, second, is suspecting things in the past time administratively governed between ICCO and SPERI. Third, is nothing contribute to better work for MECO-ECOTRA, SPERI as well as ICCO, even some signal of the questions was reflecting dominant which we have never ever seen during working with ICCO since 1995. SPERI, as an Unique and Practical Intellectual Independent Institution, who are confident and clearly working vision and action in the areas which ICCO moving forwards such as “ Right Based Approach” focus on Forest, Land, Democracy and Decentralization Programmatically and Co – Responsibility, we insight what we are doing, how we are building up as trustable as possible in trying our best to be a faithfully cooperation with ICCO in the region as well as ICCO worldwide. It was a pity that in the last two years, since PO Vietnam took over the function, all the efforts that we gained so far was un-respected. SPERI is calling for open up for 1) PO Vietnam spends more time with SPERI as well as target groups, even by email, mobile or Skype online for better understanding in dealing with who is who as being partners, not create a culture of giving and receiving between Donor and Partner that is taboo for both ICCO and SPERI and 2) A meeting directly between ICCO regional director, PO and SPERI seniors in order to open talk for better recognition in the future for all.

## ***Lessons learned***

### **To alleviate Poverty of relationship between Public – Business and Civil Society Cooperation by Social Action Networking for better understanding**

Most important lessons learned in this period is through the ways of civil society action network of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI in lobbying and involving multi-actor programmatically for Co- Responsibility and Decentralization through “Customary Based Conflict over Forest and Land and Allocation”, the biggest contribution in the last 12 months is to slow down the dangerous hurry up of the joined Circular 07/TTLT and Directive 1019/TTg- DMDN/2011 that stated that: *“the issue of certificates of land use rights over the acreage of State forest Enterprises (limited liability companies with one partner, unlimited*

*liability companies with two or more partners, joint stock companies) which are anticipated to be retained for the management of their deployment in productive enterprise objectives. Completion to be effected by the end of 2011. In 2012, complete determination of boundaries, pegging out boundaries, survey of pegs and boundary lines for land use by State forest Enterprises and units responsible for public utility provision”.*

*In contrast, not only “In 2012, it can not complete determination of boundaries, pegging out boundaries, survey of pegs and boundary lines for land use by State forest Enterprises and units responsible for public utility provision”, but also it converted the top-down dictates of both legal papers into re-investigating and re-monitoring forest and land areas which are managed by State Forest Enterprise and its subsidiary companies legally by the Decision No.1881/QĐ-TTg dated December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012 just 37 days after National conference on “Forest and Land Policy Management in Indigenous Ethnic Minority Areas” in November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 held by SPERI associated with CIRUM and CODE with 22 different Key Stakeholders under witness of 20 different medias participated and outcomes of this conference is 07 key recommendations sent to National Assembly 4<sup>th</sup> Term XIII’s Parliamentarians straight away in November 5<sup>th</sup> for group discussion on “Resident and Farming Land for Indigenous Minority” issue in one hand, other hand this became a hottest concern nation wide for diverse actors towards religious forest and land for indigenous farmer. The 07 recommendations also sent to highest ranking leaders of Vietnam such as General Party Communist Leader, Prime Minister, President of National Assembly, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development; Minister of Natural Resource and Environment; Land Law Drafting team, President of Vietnam. It is amazing following up from now to the next April before National Assembly Congress 5<sup>th</sup> Term XIII will continue in May 2013, these 07 recommendations will summarize into 05 key recommendations precisely concentrates on Forest and Land for 15 millions Indigenous Ethnic Minority People in Vietnam and Community Based Land Use Planning must be legalized in Land Law 2013!.*

### ***Gender and the right based approach***

Any approach towards any action of MECO-ECOTRA is based on Right Based traditional classical democratic approach which has been originally practiced by indigenous customarily themselves. These resulted in all successful achievement of MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI since 1995 up to now. For further reference please visit: <http://speri.org/eng/info/311/Application-of-Biological-Human-Ecology-for-community-development-of-ethnic-groups-in-Mekong-watershed-867.html> in order to reference our 09 steps of approaching the indigenous ethnic minority while working and learning with them. Other is SPERI’s definition of development term at the bellow paragrap of: ***SPERI’s definition of term***

**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 performance 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); 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 (basic); 2) the right to performance 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).

### **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 (basic); 2) the right to performance 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).

### **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 (VOCTECH) 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 worshipping” 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. Eco-farming also is a strategy for development of inter-generation leadership for Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS) and self-sufficiency.

#### **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-EOCTRA’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.

## ***Partners of SPERI***

1. A group of independent researchers and advisors: Respected scholars (professors) and researchers, local and national politicians (including members of the Vietnam National Assemble), many of whom SPERI has had relationships for 10-15 years. High Ranking Policy Makers who have been engaging with MECO-ECOTRA and understanding the ways of living and believing towards natural diversity preservation of MECO-ECOTRA (nature worship) since 1995-2005-2015 will be maximized in cooperation and development for further steps towards small-scale farmer network for subsistence and self-sufficiency locally, nationally and regionally. SPERI, via MECO-ECOTRA, is also gaining and achieving unique trust between High Ranking Policy Makers during partnership and engaging together over almost 20 years since 1995.
2. People's Committee and its functional relevant department of Simacai district, Lao Cai province; Que Phong district, Nghe An province;
3. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Nghe An Province.
4. Forestry Department of Lao Cai province;
5. Lao Cai vocational training school, Lao Cai province;
6. The University of Waikato, New Zealand;
7. Environmental Department of Hanoi Agricultural University;
8. Vietnam Multimedia Corporation (VTC)
9. Community Party of Vietnam Online newspaper
10. Herbal medicine Associations at different communes of Simcai district, Lao Cai province; Que Phong district, Nghe An province;
11. Other NGOs: CIRUM, CODE, Panature and others.
12. The Ministry of Agro-Forestry of Laos (MAF) which is a partner of Center for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands (CHESH) is an umbrella for international cooperation and development in Laos (so called CHESH Lao Program).
13. Land Allocation Department of the Ministry of Agro-Forestry of Laos plays a role to link and scale up recommendations from the pilot project via policy making process.
14. Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO) is in charge of carrying out the cooperation and development program between MAF and CHESH.
15. Luang Prabang District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) takes responsibilities to directly advise local peoples in terms of community development, techniques, legal supports, etc.
16. The Syhanuvong University with CHESH Lao Program co-conduct action researches in the pilot sites.

17. The Luang Prabang provincial of traditional health care office involves to advice for herbal medicine networks which are being facilitated by SPERI.
18. The HMong Association in Luang Prabang involves to advise solutions to settle conflicts over natural resources in project areas and guides HMong people to maintain cultural identities via customary law and traditional rituals.
19. Key farmer networks between Long Lan, Xieng Da and Nam Kha which has been facilitated by CHESH Laos Program over the last ten years plays a role to share experiences with villagers in the pilot sites to learn and apply.
20. Mekong Ethnic Minority Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA) facilitated by SPERI shares experiences and case studies for villagers in the pilot sites protect to learn and apply.
21. The Local Luang Prabang provincial media (news, TV and radio) involves disseminating, raising public awareness and scaling up lessons learnt, experiences of the pilot project.
22. Thai Volunteer Services (TVS) to organize an internship learning process on Peace Building in Mekong Region;
23. RCSD/CESD, Chiang Mai University facilitates training on research methodology and conduct field research;
24. International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)
25. Towards Organic Asia (TOA) Network partners include:
  - Cambodia Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Cambodia
  - Tekdeysuvannapum, Cambodia
  - International Volunteer of Yamagata, Cambodia
  - Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar
  - Kallayanamittra Foundation, Myanmar
  - Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC), Laos
  - National Organic Studies, Bhutan
  - Center for Bhutan Studies, Bhutan
  - Thai Green Market Network, Thailand
  - Alternative Agriculture Network, Thailand
  - City Farm Movement, Thailand
  - School for Well Being Studies and Research, Thailand
  - Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Vietnam
  - Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA), Vietnam.

## Annexes

1. Recommendation from the workshop on Land use and management in mountainous ethnic communities, La Thanh Hotel, Hanoi, November, 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.
2. Annual report on Pilot proposal on Enriching Customary Law in Forest Management and Land Use Planning at Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages in the ‘Phu Sung’ watershed areas in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos, Jan. to Dec. 2012.
3. Agreement on Cooperation to organise scientific workshop, signed on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2013 between Social Policy Ecology Research Institute and Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration (Area I)
4. Letter of Invitation to be an Executive Committee, dated on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012 by Founder Chair of the Advisory Committee and Chair of the Executive Committee
5. Case study papers on: Estimating forest carbon biomass in stem for a forestland area managed by local community. Study site: protection forest of Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province, furthest Northern region of Vietnam.
6. Annual Report on Ensuring community rights to forestland and empowering indigenous minority youth leaderships supported by NPA – Norway, dated December 19, 2012.
7. Report on Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-Ecology / 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum, 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR.
8. Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology; Occupy Your Life Manifesto. 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum, 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Sekong province and Vientiane, Lao PDR.
9. Final Declaration: 9<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People’s Forum – 16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Vientiane, Laos.
10. Evaluation of the advanced training program on ecological farming systems supported by the Bread for the World (BftW) Ecumenical Scholarship Program (ESP) by Mr. Cory W. Whitney – Independent Consultant
11. Personal evaluation of study tour for elders and ethnic young leaders of MECO-ECOTRA to Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 3 – 13, 2012 by Dr. Keith Barber.
12. Cultural Identity, Network Action, and Customary Law: The CHESH-Lao Program 1999-2009
13. Review Outcome of MOU between SPERI and the University of Waikato for 2012 dated 13 December 2012.