
MINUTES SFRAS MEETING 1ST DECEMBER 2021 – RAISING THE VOICE OF FARMERS IN RAS

Host HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
Weinbergstrasse 22a
8021 Zurich

Meeting mode: Online

Facilitation: David Bexte, Helvetas; Patrik Aus der Au, Helvetas; Cesar Robles, Helvetas

Participants SFRAS members

Recipients SFRAS members, A&FS Shareweb

Minutes written by: David Bexte, Helvetas

Agenda

Time	Input
9:15-9:25	Welcoming & brief introduction SFRAS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technical introduction• SFRAS introduction• Brief Meet & Greet
9:25-9:40	Biovision's Farmer Communication Programme – Bridging the gap between agroecological research and its implementation, presented by Martin Schmid
9:40-9:55	Q&A
9:55-10:10	Reflections on the growth and success of the Lao Farmer network and implications for similar initiatives, presented by Phouththasinh Phimmachanh
10:10-10:25	Q&A
10:25-10:40	Break
10:40-10:55	Presenting the Equal Profit certification model (https://de.equalprofit.org/ , Video)
10:55-11:05	News from members
11:05-11:45	Introduction of the working groups 3 working groups focussing on effectiveness and sustainability concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms• Strategies to convince policymakers to consider the voice of the farmers//local stakeholders• Motivation of farmers/local stakeholders to continue engagement Plenum discussion
11:45-11:55	SFRAS – future meeting setup and potential contributions of all members
11:55-12:00	Closing & Outlook <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feedback form

Participants

David	Bexte	Helvetas
Patrik	Aus der Au	Helvetas
Cesar	Robles	Helvetas
Gian	Nicolay	FiBL
Martin	Schmid	Biovision
Christina	Grünewald	Swisscontact
Malte	Reshoeft	HEKS
Shruti	Patel	ETH
Phoutthasinh	Phimmachanh	Lao Farmer Network
Sandra	Fürst	Skat
Christa	Suter	Fastenopfer
Joachim	Jung	Vivamos Mejor
Bruce	Campbell	SDC
David	Schwitter	World Vision

Thematic session

All presentations are available [here](#).

Introduction to SFRAS (by David Bexte, Helvetas)

- The SFRAS secretariat will remain till 2025 with Helvetas as mandated by SDC, David Bexte (Advisor Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture and Food Systems) taking over from Stefanie Kägi who left Helvetas;
- Reminder: SFRAS to be understood as an informal exchange and learning network;
- Membership: Experts from Swiss development, research, education, and private sector organisations involved in Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in developing countries;
- 2x Meetings per year, pre-covid physical meetings with lunch (self-payment) as default setup → afterwards purely online meetings → What is the way forward? (see agenda item SFRAS – future meeting setup);

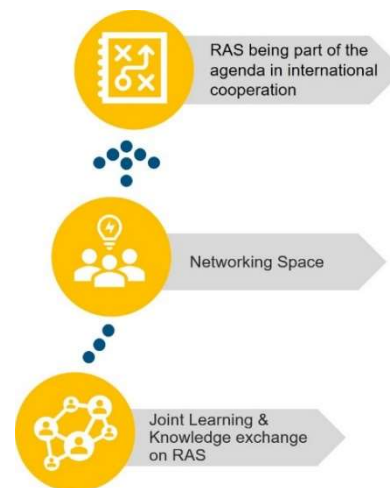


Figure 1: Objectives SFRAS

Biovision’s Farmer Communication Programme – Bridging the gap between agroecological research and its implementation (by Martin Schmid, Biovision)

The presenter introduced Biovision’s Farmer Communication Program (FCP) to the audience. The program aims to translate scientific research - focussing on ecological agriculture - into application in Kenya and Tanzania. It embraces five communication tools & channels: A Farmer Communication Outreach programme, a Farmer Magazine on organic agriculture, the magazine Mkulima Mbunifu, a web portal Infonet biovision, and the TOF Radio (see the presentation for more information on each of

the five). The FCP has a 2-way communication model which means (a) bringing relevant and usable information knowledge to farmers and (b) carrying questions and comments back for processing and answers to reach farmers subsequently with targeted information. Farmers can give feedback through voice calls, SMS, email, and farmer listener groups. The whole programme is supported (also financially) by the Africa Biovision Trust.

Overall, apart from narrowing the science-application gap the programme contributes to the increased adoption of agroecological practices and gives a voice to farmers.

Q&A:

- The 1st question concerned the *links with farmer unions* in Kenya and Tanzania. There are links via the Farmers Resource Centres with farmer cooperatives and unions if they exist. So those people in the Farmers Resource Centres act like local extension officers which are in contact with public extension officers and all the different actors in the counties.
- Another set of questions was on the *financial sustainability of service delivery* and a potential *financial contribution* of the farmers. In the last ten years of the programme there has been a lot of efforts to make it financially more efficient and to further institutionalize the FCP or at least parts of it. There is no full cost recovery at the moment, and it is difficult to get public funds for financing parts of the FCP. Generally, there is no charge for the services, although a small voluntary contribution is desired for some tools, such as the magazines. One of the main challenges is that the efforts (mainly administrative and legally) needed for getting a financial reward will be higher than the revenue itself. Also, in keeping with the ethos of agroecology, the ethical question arises as to whether it is fair to charge for traditional knowledge which belongs to the people themselves.
- Another set of questions was on the *feedback mechanisms* and if farmers get individual answers. Martin highlighted the mix of the different feedback mechanisms being available (see presentation for more details). Also, depending on which feedback channel is used individual responses are possible. For instance, via email and telephone individual answers can be provided.
- The last question concerned the *political nature of the FCP*. Martin underlined that the FCP is tailored to agroecological practices and science. However, the staff of the farmer resource centres is involved in political platforms and participates in multistakeholder platforms mostly on county level. They are perceived often as the voice of the farmers.

Reflections on the growth and success of the Lao Farmer network and implications for similar initiatives (by Phouthasinh Phimmachanh, Lao Farmer Network)

The presenter introduced the Lao Farmer Network to the audience. The network was established in 2014 after initial discussions during a farmer's conference in 2012-13. Currently, 92 farmer organizations are part of the network and over 30,000 farmers participate in it. In 2020 59 farmer groups existed.

The network aims to improve cooperation among small holder farmers in order (a) to strengthen their organization, (b) to promote sustainable agriculture (including climate resilience), (c) to generate more incomes through agri-business development, and (d) to influence policies. A secretariat ensures that the day-to-day business is handled in an effective and efficient manner. The network is guided by a management committee and an advisory committee.

By being a member of the network, the farmers have access to several services related to strengthening the farmer organization and to increasing sustainable production. Furthermore, various economic services are offered via the network. For instance, farmer organization-related services include capacity assessment and strategic planning at farmer organisation level, leadership development and basic financial management. To increase sustainable production promoted by the network, videos on

agriculture production and processing are shared on social media. Economic services include the assistance on partnership arrangements with buyers, and the provision of grants for a start-up revolving fund at farmer organization level and matching grants to individual farmers to start an agri-business.

Major strengths and Weaknesses include the following

Strength	Weakness
Powerful and recognized voice of farmers	Limited financial sustainability to operate the network and to provide services to members
Simple extension services by farmer experts	Not yet officially registered
Private sector wants to work with the network	Financial services to members limited

It is foreseen that the network will continue to grow in terms of membership. An important aspect in this regard is the planned establishment of a registered commodity network. Providing economic services to members focussing on improved market access will remain a key element of the network. Furthermore, policy work focussing on the impact of COVID19 (particularly related to increased transport costs) and on commercial agriculture development (particularly related to providing & maintaining access to low interest credit) will be crucial.

For further information please contact Phouthasinh Phimmachanh directly (email can be provided on request) and/or visit the homepage of the Lao Farmer Network <https://laofarmers.net/> . The network has also a YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEoV6_ZYR59wwvhtjPo05qw with many interesting videos providing more details of its work.

Q&A:

- The first question was about the current status of the LFN and whether there are attempts to transform it into a national farmer union, and whether this would be accepted by the state. The current government appreciates the work of the network and sees its benefits. The network is currently trying to get registered, but since the framework for this registration is missing, this is a challenge (it exists for agricultural cooperatives, for example).
- There was the wish to know more about the origins of the network. Phouthasinh highlighted the initiative by the individual farmer representatives who met during a major conference. They decided among themselves to formalize it. Helvetas with its Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP, 2001-2014) played a role in the foundation of the network.

Equal Profit certification model (by Equal Profit, video presentation)

Equal Profit is an initiative promoting a fair and just certification model guaranteeing equitable value distribution among supply chain actors. Unfortunately, Rahel Wyss being the co-project leader and an SFRAS member could not attend the meeting. However, a video was shared providing more details about the idea and the work of equal profit. The video can be found here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYLAY7M3saM> .

Equal Profit has 3 major objectives:

- Breaking down power dynamics and creating shared value in global supply chains
- Ensuring equitable profit distribution and a prospering income for farmers
- Transparency, traceability, equity and just prices for consumers

The Equal Profit Certification is based on the principle: *the more you contribute, the more you earn*. It means that each actor should receive a financial share that is proportional to the effort that each actor puts into the global supply chain. The effort is measured based on the costs/risks borne by each value chain (VC) actor. The individual financial share is calculated applying a set of different calculations involving a calculation of the total cost, the cost % of each VC actor and of the net profit. The cost % of each actor is equal to the profit % for each actor out of the total profit. For instance, if a farmer has a cost % = 25% (e.g. 2,5 Euros out of a total cost = 10) and the total profit = 5 Euros than his profit is = 1,25 Euros. Ultimately, every VC actor receives the same net profit margin = Net profit /revenue.

The Equal Profit platform collects and verifies all data as well as making all data transparent to all VC actors. The figures are accessible through a QR-code on the equal profit certified products.

For more information on equal profit please contact Rahel Wyss (email can be provided on request) or go to the equal profit homepage <https://de.equalprofit.org/> which has a contact form.

News from members

The following members shared some information:

- **Christa Suter, Fastenaktion (former Fastenopfer):** Christa Suter on behalf of Fastenaktion presented the new programme *Rights-based and agroecological initiative for sustainability and equity in peasant communities* (RAISE). In January 2022 the 1st phase will start (Duration 4 years, total duration of the programme 10 years). Partners in the project are Veterinaire Sans Frontière Suisse, Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE, Philippines), Rural Women Assembly (South Africa), Dreikönigsaktion (DKA, Austria) and La Sociedad Científica Latinoamericana de Agroecología (SOCLA, Latin America). It will be implemented in 10 countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Fastenaktion and its partners won the call for proposal Human Rights in Food Systems published last year by SDC.

It addresses the question of how to involve farmers/peasants in policy discussions and focuses on the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP). At the grassroots level the program aims to inform smallholder farmers, pastoralists, women and youth about their rights (human right education/ peasant rights education) and to empower them. The right holders will define lobbying/advocacy strategies targeting duty barriers at local and national level such as governments to be aware of peasant rights and to respect them. At global level Fastenaktion will lobby for new special procedure on UNDROP such as a voluntary peasant fund and a UN special rapporteur. In addition, the program will support the establishment of a global platform on peasant rights for increasing global awareness on peasant rights.

- **Shruti Patel, NADEL:** NADEL will offer a new course on behaviour change strategies which includes agricultural technology adoption. More details are available on the NADEL website <https://nadel.ethz.ch/>
- **Johannes Brunner, BFH-HAFL:** HAFL encourages you to get in contact with them if you are interested in additional support to deepen questions related to RAS and agricultural development. There is strong interest in establishing partnerships so that HAFL bachelor and master students can apply their knowledge and support organizations and institutions in gathering in-depth knowledge. Please contact Nancy Bourgeois Luethi (internships) or Prof. Dr. Filippo Lechthaler (Master program) in case you are interested.
- **Sandra Fürst, Skat:** Sandra Fürst shared an update on one activity being implemented within the Alliance for Sustainable Food Systems and Empowered Communities (SuFoSEC; Skat being a member of the alliance with the additional partners being Swissaid, Fastenopfer, Vivamos Mejor, VSF-Switzerland and Aqua Alimentata). Skat recently conducted an agro-ecological learning journey. It focused on learning models and, in particular, how farmers learn and how this

influences the uptake of agroecological practices. There is also a policy component. A concrete product will be an inventory of learning models which will be presented and available for comments next year.

Group work and discussion

Participants were assigned randomly to 3 working groups.

Guiding question: How can we make _____ more effective and sustainable?



- Group 1: Inclusive Multi-Stakeholder Platforms
- Group 2: Strategies to convince policymakers to consider the voice of the farmers/local stakeholders
- Group 3: Motivation of farmers/local stakeholders to continue

Group 1: Inclusive Multi-Stakeholder Platforms

- ▶ Recognize the links between the different levels (local, regional, national): Ensure that any local initiative has a link to the national level because often this is where the solution will be found, otherwise frustration might set in and the motivation might be negatively affected;
- ▶ Provide services: Services provide an incentive, motivate members and create a purpose;
- ▶ Identify incentives: Identify very early what are potential incentives for the members of the platform;
- ▶ Build on an existing seed: Any multi-stakeholder platform should not come in alien but rest on an existing local motivation, expression or common interest;
- ▶ Include both public and private actors for financial sustainability: Both private and public can play a role and their potential financial contributions for financial sustainability should be considered;
- ▶ Clear responsibilities with potential consequences: Ensure that clear responsibilities concerning membership requirements and expectations concerning the commitment exist – e.g. if you show not up as representative of a group/community you will lose that role;

Group 2: Strategies to convince policymakers to consider the voice of the farmers/local stakeholders

Key question: How to face the imbalance of power?

- ▶ Bring people together and create the space where they can meet and express their needs;
- ▶ Support farmer networks or other channels that farmer can organize themselves have more power;

Entering points

- ▶ Interest groups: Create interest groups during a reform process (e.g. land rights, using the momentum) and bring these voices on a higher level;

- ▶ Climate change adaptation measures: governments are forced to do something concrete, and they need local stakeholders and their knowledge;
- ▶ Bottom-up approach: Link local farmer needs to local policy stakeholders which know these farmers → these policymakers can bring the requests on the regional and national level;
- ▶ Strengthening education systems: Raise awareness that education is a resource and together with public and private partners support measures related to it (development of new curricula, involvement of relevant private sector actors, create professional organizations) → increases local capacity which ultimately will lead to increased pressure on local policy makers to listen and to act;

Group 3: Motivation of farmers/local stakeholders to continue

Key question: What are drivers to cooperate?

- ▶ Seeing concrete benefits of the efforts: For instance, improved access to agricultural inputs as a result of policy changes caused partly by local efforts is a reason to continue those efforts;
- ▶ Appropriate communication tools: Rely on easy to attend/user-friendly communication tools (use WhatsApp, Facebook...);
- ▶ Two-way communication: Local stakeholders need to be able to share their own experiences which that they are heard;
- ▶ "Personalized" network: Networks should not be totally anonymous → better organize members in smaller groups to build up partnerships;
- ▶ Flexible contributions: Promote a flexible pool system for contributions and financing the network coordination/administration (investment motivates to participate?) → pool system (also) within a smaller group; farmers participate and pay as a group;
- ▶ Information quality: Ensure high quality of information shared via the platform (tried and tested) → it builds trust among the members and into the network;

SFRAS – future meeting setup

The participants were asked to let the secretariat know how the SFRAS default meeting setup should be for the new mandated period (for the past meeting setup please see agenda item 1). For this purpose, 2 mentimeter polls were conducted:

- How would you prefer SFRAS to meet? A) In person; B) Digital; C) Hybrid
- Would you like to maintain a rotating venue model?

Concerning the 1st question a majority opted for hybrid (7 out of 10 votes). In person came 2nd (3) and none voted for purely online. Therefore, future meetings will have a hybrid setup.

Concerning the 2nd question all voted in favour of maintaining a rotating model. Some underlined this point by explicitly stating that this has been appreciated very much by members in the past. In addition to hosting a meeting it would be very much appreciated if the hosting organization would also co-moderate. Of course, the responsibility for organizing the event and the documentation will remain with the secretariat. Prior to the meeting, the secretariat would liaise with the SFRAS member from the hosting organization and/or the co-moderator to ensure that everything is well in place.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that hybrid meetings require a certain technical infrastructure. However, to avoid that this would prevent organizations from hosting meetings Helvetas is willing to support on this. If support is required, this will be discussed with the hosting explicitly prior

to the event. As this is a particular service to SFRAS the secretariat would greatly appreciate if it is communicated at least 6 weeks in advance.

Closing & Outlook

The date of the next meeting will be communicated in due time. Most likely the next meeting will take place early in the 2nd quarter of 2022, hopefully in a hybrid format.

The host thanked all members very much for their online participation and wished everyone a nice festive season and a good start 2022.