

# Overview of Day 2 of the DeSIRA Connect Workshop: Exploring Farmer-Led Innovations and Food Systems for Impact

The second day of the DeSIRA Connect workshop continued focusing on **Bloc 2: Farmer-Led Innovations and Research**. This followed the keynote presentation by **Katja Vuori, CEO of Agricord**, at the end of Day 1 who explored strategies for supporting farmer-led innovation processes.

The day started with **Panel 2: Regional Dynamics in Farmer-Led and Community-Led Innovations**, bringing diverse perspectives from across the Asia-Pacific region. **Luchie Angeles Blanco from ASIA DHRRA** outlined the importance of regional capacities and farmer organizations in advancing advocacy and sustainable development. **Mohinesh Reddy from PIFON** highlighted the role of breadfruit as a climate-resilient crop supporting community building and market systems in the Pacific. **Phouttasinh Phimmachanh of the Lao Farmer Network** emphasized collective action as a tool for policy advocacy and market participation, while **Suman Shekhar Manandhar from PROLINNOVA** detailed the challenges and drivers of agroecological transitions in the Himalayan region. **Rasheed Sulaiman from APIRAS** addressed the evolving landscape of extension services and their critical role in supporting innovation.

Mid-morning, the focus shifted to **Thematic Workshop 3: Building Conditions for Impact, Documenting Change, and Informing Policies**. This session explored how DeSIRA projects foster change at three levels: grassroots communities, value chains, and policies. Participants engaged in group discussions addressing key questions, including:

- Documenting and measuring changes driven by projects.
- Identifying partnerships that effectively generate change.
- Recommendations for scaling outcomes and achieving long-term impact.

After lunch, the day transitioned into **Bloc 3: A Conducive Environment for Scaling - Food Systems, Education, Networks, Policies, and Funding**. This theme began with a keynote presentation by **Dr. Aurélie Toillier, CIRAD, SA1 Lead of DeSIRA-LIFT**, titled "Scaling Innovation, Multiplying Conditions for Impact." Dr. Toillier highlighted how project-based approaches contribute to innovation scaling, emphasizing the need for tailored funding strategies, explicit scaling plans, and capacity development to ensure long-term impact.

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**Panel 3: Food Systems as Catalysts for Innovation** took place followed, focusing on the intersections of food systems and agricultural innovation. **Dr. Estelle Biénabé of CIRAD** discussed the role of rural-urban linkages in building sustainable markets, while **Alounxay Onta, UN Food Systems Convenor**, highlighted Laos' progress in operationalizing its national food systems agenda. **Tran Manh Chien of Bac Tom** shared insights on branding and certification to strengthen organic value chains. **Duong Thu Hang of RIKOLTO** emphasized the importance of innovations in urban food systems, including wet markets and school nutrition programs. **Anamika Dey, CEO of GIAN**, underscored the need for gender-sensitive value chains and highlighted women's vital role in agricultural innovation.

The day concluded with **Panel 4: Research, Training, and Education - Upgrading Capacities for Innovation**, which addressed emerging professional roles in agricultural innovation. **Pierre Ferrand of FAO** emphasized the integration of education and research for agroecological transitions. **Marion Tan from the University of the Philippines and MASIPAG** highlighted the co-creation of knowledge with farmers. **Rasheed Sulaiman** discussed the evolution of extension services, **Supawan Visetnoi of Chulalongkorn University** presented efforts to develop agroecological curricula, and **Marco Camagni of IFAD** emphasized capacity-building programs for sustainable agriculture.

Day 2 explored farmer-led innovations, systemic food system strategies, and the enabling environments needed for scaling impact. Across sessions, collaboration, inclusivity, and participatory approaches emerged as central themes for achieving sustainable and equitable agricultural transformations.

## Summary of Panel 2: Regional Dynamics in Farmer-Led and Community-Led Innovations

Panel 2 of the DeSIRA Connect workshop explored the dynamics of farmer-led and community-led innovations, emphasizing scaling challenges, funding mechanisms, and the importance of addressing power dynamics and enabling environments. The panel featured diverse perspectives from leaders across Asia-Pacific, highlighting successful initiatives and ongoing challenges.

### Key Insights from Panelists

#### 1. Luchie Almagro Blanco – ASIA DHRRA Luchie Almagro

Blanco emphasized the importance of regional capacities for agricultural innovation and the drivers of success in Asia DHRRA's strategic plan:

- **Participation and Engagement:** Farmer organizations (FOs) operate as service agencies, ensuring members' active participation in advocacy, policy formulation, and scaling.
- **Strategic Goals:** Asia DHRRA's focus includes empowering FOs, advocating for women and youth, and leveraging digital technologies.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Partnerships with institutions like FAO and ASEAN foster long-term initiatives and capacity building.
- **Power Dynamics:** Recognizing historical and structural power imbalances in projects is critical to fostering equitable innovation processes.

#### 2. Mohinesh Reddy – PIFON (Pacific Islands Farmer Organization Network)

Mohinesh Reddy discussed PIFON's work in breadfruit (BF) innovation as part of its broader climate-resilient farming strategies:

- **Breadfruit as a Climate-Resilient Crop:** BF's adaptability, low input requirements, and nutritional value make it central to agroforestry systems and market development. Breadfruit is also an important crop for food security and human nutrition throughout the Pacific.
- **Scaling Innovations:** PIFON promotes farmer-led research on BF propagation, shelf-life extension, and value-added products, fostering farmer-to-farmer learning.
- **Cultural Integration:** Efforts to reintroduce BF into local diets and expand its export potential demonstrate the importance of combining traditional practices with market systems.

#### 3. Phouttasinh Phimmachanh – Lao Farmer Network (LFN)

Phouttasinh Phimmachanh highlighted the successes and challenges of the Lao Farmer Network (LFN):

- **Collective Action:** LFN facilitates farmer-to-farmer learning, action research, and collective marketing to address challenges like piloting new techniques (e.g., short-duration rice).
- **Market Integration:** LFN's collective market approach enables consistent supply to larger buyers, strengthening farmers' bargaining power.
- **Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Representing farmers in national and regional discussions on agroecology and climate change is a key function of LFN.

#### 4. Suman Shekhar Manandhar – PROLINNOVA

Suman Shekhar Manandhar discussed PROLINNOVA's efforts in promoting local innovation in Nepal:

- **Farmer-Led Research:** Farmers set the research agenda, addressing problems through traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge.
- **Scaling Challenges:** Accessing funds and disseminating research remain barriers to expanding local innovations.
- **Support Mechanisms:** Establishing business support funds has enabled innovative farmers to scale their work and influence policy.

#### 5. Rasheed Sulaiman – APIRAS

Rasheed Sulaiman emphasized the trends in extension and innovation systems in South Asia:

- **Plurality of Extension Services:** Increasingly diverse players (e.g., private sector, digital platforms) complement traditional public-sector extension services.
- **Capacity Building:** Extension workers require training in facilitation, value chain development, and climate change adaptation.
- **Knowledge Intermediation:** Extension organizations play a crucial role in delivering innovation at scale, though challenges in coordination and validation persist.

### Discussion Highlights

- **Power Dynamics:** Addressing inequities in farmer-researcher relationships is vital. Farmers often lack resources and voice compared to external stakeholders, necessitating stronger FOs.
- **Scaling Innovations:** Scaling requires coordinated efforts, including enabling environments, market integration, and inclusive policies.
- **Digital Tools:** Mobile apps and digital platforms enhance farmer networks and information dissemination but require quality validation and contextual relevance.
- **Community-Led Solutions:** Success stories, such as integrating tourism and apple value chains in Nepal, showcase how farming can diversify livelihoods and improve resilience.
- **Incentives for Change:** Farmers need clear benefits to adopt new practices, emphasizing practical solutions over abstract concepts.

### Conclusion

The panel underscored the importance of farmer-led innovation as a driver of sustainable agricultural transformation. Effective scaling requires a combination of enabling policies, strong farmer organizations, and inclusive, well-coordinated extension services. Addressing power dynamics and fostering collaboration between farmers, researchers, and policymakers are critical to ensuring equitable and impactful innovation. By leveraging traditional practices, digital tools, and market systems, the region can build resilient, community-led agricultural systems.

## Keynote Summary: Scaling Innovation, Multiplying Conditions for Impact.

*Presented by Dr. Aurélie Toillier, CIRAD, SA1 Lead DeSIRA-LIFT*

Dr. Aurélie Toillier's keynote, titled "Contributing to Innovation Scaling and Impact Through Project-Based Approaches," provided an insightful exploration of how DeSIRA projects contribute to scaling agricultural innovations and achieving long-term impact. With over 80 organizations and 1,000 researchers involved globally, the DeSIRA initiative focuses on leveraging research and innovation to address complex agricultural challenges.

Dr. Toillier emphasized the multidimensional nature of innovation within DeSIRA projects, highlighting that 85% of the projects pursued innovations spanning technological, social, and institutional dimensions. Interestingly, 44% of the projects reported introducing innovations in their specific contexts for the first time, underscoring the pioneering nature of these initiatives.

The keynote outlined a three-tier framework for working within innovation systems:

1. **Macro Level:** Addressing the policy environment to create supportive conditions.
2. **Meso Level:** Strengthening services and extension systems to act as facilitators.
3. **Micro Level:** Engaging temporary groups of actors to experiment and co-develop solutions.

Dr. Toillier shared examples of innovation scaling, ranging from primary infrastructure developments, like irrigation systems, to advanced solutions such as digital advisory technologies. She noted that scaling innovations requires significant time and commitment, with some processes taking decades, as exemplified by a project in Burkina Faso that spanned 20 years.

The presentation emphasized the importance of tailoring financing strategies to the nature of each innovation. Matching financial needs with appropriate tools, such as grants or blended funding approaches, is crucial for ensuring sustainability and scaling.

Dr. Toillier concluded with actionable recommendations for projects nearing completion:

- Develop explicit scaling strategies to ensure long-term impact.
- Facilitate organizational learning to extend beyond the project lifecycle.
- Address gaps by fostering new partnerships and strengthening networks.
- Invest in capacity development to empower stakeholders for sustained success.

This keynote underscored that scaling innovation through project-based approaches demands a clear understanding of trajectories, robust coordination, and long-term strategic planning.

## Summary of Panel 3: Food Systems as Catalysts for Innovation

The third panel of the DeSIRA Connect workshop explored how food systems can act as catalysts for scaling agricultural innovations and fostering sustainability. Panelists addressed the intersections of rural-urban linkages, market dynamics, consumer preferences, and gender-sensitive value chains, highlighting practical strategies and systemic challenges.

### Key Insights from Panelists

#### 1. Dr. Estelle Bénéabé, CIRAD – Rural-Urban Linkages and Building Food Markets

Dr. Bénéabé discussed the MALICA program, which strengthens market systems through partnerships with Vietnamese and Lao organizations. Key takeaways included:

- **Market Dynamics:** MALICA addresses market fluctuations by working with multiple stakeholders, supporting institutional platforms, and promoting participatory approaches.
- **Scaling Innovations:** Action research and policy engagement are essential to influence agroecological transformation and sustainability in food systems.
- **Consumer Trust:** Building trust between producers and consumers through improved traceability and market mechanisms is central to scaling innovations.

#### 2. Alounxay Onta, UN Food Systems Convenor, Lao PDR – Operationalizing Food Systems Agendas

Alounxay Onta outlined the systematic approach to food systems transformation in Laos:

- **Three-Phase Strategy:**
  - **Foundation Stage (2021-2023):** National dialogues identified 45 pathways clustered into four thematic tracks.
  - **Transition Phase (2024-2030):** Focuses on governance, capacity building, science-policy interfaces, and multi-stakeholder engagement.
  - **Vision for Full Transformation (2030-2050):** Aims for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems.
- **Measurement Frameworks:** Progress is tracked across dimensions such as nutrition, environmental sustainability, and equity, ensuring alignment with the National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

#### 3. Tran Manh Chien, Bac Tom – Organic Food Markets in Vietnam

Mr. Chien discussed trends and challenges in Vietnam's organic markets:

- **Consumer Preferences:** Certifications play a critical role in gaining consumer trust, with branding increasingly emphasizing quality and customer care.
- **Successful Case Studies:** Examples like organic milk and high-quality oranges demonstrate how branding and certification can significantly boost product value and demand.
- **Challenges:** Limited supply of natural and organic products restricts market growth, underscoring the need for better branding and supply chain development.

#### 4. Duong Thu Hang, RIKOLTO – Promoting Consumer Access to Healthy Food

Ms. Hang highlighted the Good Food for Cities program:

- Wet Markets: Traditional markets remain vital for low- and middle-income populations. Training farmers and vendors on food safety and traceability helps improve food quality.
- School Pilot Programs: Initiatives at secondary schools promote healthier food choices among students, addressing rising issues like obesity and diabetes.
- Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: Collaboration with Women's Unions and local organizations enhances the effectiveness of training and food safety efforts.

#### 5. Anamika Dey, GIAN – Gender Sensitivity in Farmer-Led Innovations

Ms. Dey discussed gender-sensitive approaches to innovation:

- Role of Women: Women are key contributors to food systems, often bringing unique knowledge and resilience strategies. Empowerment through training and recognition is essential.
- Challenges: Cultural norms, lack of access to resources, and limited economic autonomy restrict women's participation in value chains.
- Solutions: Providing tailored tools, training environments, and capacity-building programs can help women thrive in agricultural innovation.

#### Discussion Highlights

- Consumer Trust and Certification: Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are cost-effective and build local trust but face challenges in scaling and government support.
- Organic vs. Agroecology: Organic farming follows strict standards, whereas agroecology focuses on broader principles, offering flexibility and adaptability.
- Inclusion of Women: Ensuring women's participation in training and value chains improves adoption and impact. Tailored approaches are needed to address cultural sensitivities.
- Market Connectivity: Trust and strong relationships between producers and consumers are critical for both organic and conventional markets.

#### Conclusion

The session highlighted the pivotal role of food systems in scaling agricultural innovations. Key enablers include fostering trust, engaging diverse stakeholders, and addressing gender equity. Sustainable market systems require strong branding, reliable certification mechanisms, and participatory approaches. By integrating consumer preferences, gender sensitivity, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, food systems can drive the transformation toward sustainability and resilience.

## Summary of Panel 4: Research, Training, and Education – Upgrading Capacities for Innovation

The fourth panel session at the DeSIRA Connect Workshop focused on the emergence of new professional profiles in agricultural innovation and explored how research, training, and education can upgrade capacities for innovation. The session highlighted key initiatives and challenges across regions while addressing the critical need for capacity building and innovation in agroecology (AE).

#### Key Highlights from Panelists

##### 1. Pierre Ferrand, FAO – Education and Research Linkages for the Agroecological Transition

Pierre Ferrand outlined the role of higher education in supporting agroecological transitions, particularly in East Asia. He emphasized the importance of upgrading the skills of younger generations and integrating AE into higher education institutions.

Key points included:

- Curriculum Development: Identifying curricula that emphasize critical thinking, systems approaches, and ecological principles. Examples included partnerships with universities in Laos and Nepal to revise AE-related courses.
- Knowledge Generation and Sharing: The AE Knowledge Hub, which hosts over 3,000 resources, supports evidence-based learning.
- University-Based Rural Extension: Strengthening rural advisory services through AE principles and creating incubators for collaboration and innovation.
- FAO's Role: Supporting training, policy advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives to mainstream AE.

##### 2. Marion Tan, University of the Philippines & MASIPAG – Co-Creation with Farmers

Marion Tan highlighted the partnership between the University of the Philippines and MASIPAG, a farmer-scientist organization that promotes agroecological practices. Key insights included:

- Empowerment Through Collaboration: Farmers are actively involved in research, curriculum development, and teaching. MASIPAG has successfully collected and managed over 2,000 rice varieties and promoted climate change resilience.
- Community Engagement: Students participate in fieldwork programs, living in rural communities for a year to co-develop solutions with farmers, promoting rural development and AE.
- Success Stories: The partnership has led to the institutionalization of a national organic production law and resistance to GM crops like Golden Rice.

##### 3. Rasheed Sulaiman, AESA Network – Extension as a Vector for Agroecological Farming

Rasheed Sulaiman emphasized the urgent need to strengthen public extension services and their capacity to support AE.

Key points included:

- New Competencies: Extensionists must be trained in facilitation, value chain development, climate change adaptation, and AE practices.
- Curriculum Gaps: Many universities lack evidence-based AE curricula and resources. AESA has developed training modules tailored to local contexts.
- Collaborative Efforts: Bridging research, education, and extension systems is critical to developing AE capacities and improving knowledge exchange.



#### 4. Supawan Visetnoi, Chulalongkorn University - Developing Curricula for Agroecological Transition

Supawan Visetnoi presented Chulalongkorn University's innovative program targeted at students from rural farming families, which integrates community engagement and sustainable agriculture education.

Highlights included:

- **Unique Program:** Scholarships for students from farming families to study sustainable agriculture, emphasizing practical, multidisciplinary learning. And preparing them as young professionals able to contribute to addressing global sustainability issues in agriculture.
- **Community Engagement:** Students live and work with farmers in rural areas for two years to identify challenges and co-develop solutions.
- **Impact Measurement:** Alumni feedback is collected to assess the program's impact on career trajectories and the adoption of sustainable practices.

#### 5. Marco Camagni, IFAD - Capacity Building for Sustainable Agriculture

Marco Camagni discussed IFAD's flagship programs supporting farmer organizations (FOs).

Key points included:

- **Program Focus:** Strengthening services to members, policy advocacy, and innovation for resilient and efficient production systems.
- **Co-Design Approach:** Programs are designed in collaboration with FOs to address their specific needs.
- **Gender and Youth:** Emphasizing the inclusion of women and youth in capacity-building initiatives.

#### Key Takeaway Messages

- **Collaboration and Long-Term Partnerships:** Continuous cooperation among stakeholders is essential for sustaining innovation and addressing budget constraints.
- **Community Engagement:** Integrating community-based learning into curricula ensures that programs are relevant and impactful.
- **Youth and Gender Inclusion:** Attracting young people and empowering women are critical for agricultural transformation.
- **Bridging Gaps:** Addressing gaps in curricula, extension systems, and capacity building requires closer collaboration between universities, extension services, and farmers.
- **Economic Viability of AE:** Understanding the economic returns of AE practices is crucial for scaling adoption and attracting investments.

#### Discussion Highlights

- **AI and Digital Tools:** While AI offers transformative potential, panelists debated its limitations in simulating complex systems and its role in AE research and knowledge dissemination.
- **Formal and Informal Education:** Both formal education (e.g., university curricula) and informal learning pathways (e.g., online courses) are essential for building AE capacities.
- **Private Sector Engagement:** SMEs play a critical role in innovation but require support to develop capacities and integrate into policy frameworks.

#### Conclusion

The session underscored the importance of upgrading human capacities to drive agricultural innovation. By integrating agroecology into education and training systems, fostering community engagement, and addressing capacity gaps, stakeholders can build a new generation of professionals equipped to transform food systems sustainably. Collaboration, inclusivity, and long-term investment remain pivotal for achieving these goals.