Mochamad Indrawan ·
Jeffrey B. Luzar · Helen Hanna ·
Theodore Mayer *Editors*

Civic Engagement in Asia

Transformative Learning for a Sustainable Future

Buku OBOR

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Foreword by Surichai Wun'gaeo

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, there is a widespread sense that we live in unprecedented times, a turning point of some kind. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically heightened this sense and made it more palpable everywhere. The pandemic has also highlighted the pressing need for genuine solutions to the mounting problems we face together now as human beings. Yet, in facing these complex challenges, there is at the same time a strong sense of disconnectedness, not only in national but also in regional and international contexts. In other words, we are in urgent need of increased solidarity to envision our common future.

If you are a decision-maker, the words I have to say here, and indeed this entire volume, are addressed in large part to you. Yet they are addressed to you primarily as a fellow human being and fellow citizen who has chosen to take responsibility, within your capacity, for our common plight. In this sense, it will be of benefit to all who, like you, wish to learn in each other's company *how* we can best take responsibility together, and *how* we can thus extricate ourselves from our shared dilemmas.

Holding the reins of power, especially centralized power, one faces two substantial obstacles in working for progress or solving societal problems. The first is that one cannot know, much less feel as a fellow human being, all the myriad difficulties, sufferings, and challenges that are experienced by the inhabitants of the many communities arrayed within even a single province or country, much less an entire region or the planet as a whole. As a result, one may not be moved to respond or have no clear grounds for constructing a logical response. The second obstacle consists of the coercive power structures in our societies that prohibit more engaged, thoughtful, or innovative contributions by the people on the ground to the solution of complex social problems. Unfortunately, these structures have had a steady impact on people, creating a deficit of trust. My question is: Without trust, how can we create or even imagine a common future?

There is another kind of power in the social arena that can help us overcome these obstacles. It is the capacity to be inspired by what others have dared to think and to do, and to *learn* from them. It is a transformative power that allows individuals, communities, and entire societies to learn together. This is one of the key meanings of the term "transformative learning" in my view, and it is at the heart of civic

engagement. Open and unfettered communication is essential for it to work. It also requires that each individual, community, and form of life even—taken within its own particular context of aspirations and challenges—is accorded the dignity and respect appropriate to living beings in their own right. Yet each then also becomes potentially a source of information, companionship, knowledge, support, solutions, and a sense of what is possible. This understanding of civic engagement as a kind of societal learning based on mutual respect allows us to pursue the creation of a sustainable and just society with dignity for all by enacting it.

The concept of transformative learning is indebted to Jack Mezirow, who is responsible for a historic shift in adult education—from focusing on skills development to cultivating profound transformations in individuals' sense of themselves, of their society, and of what they could do. For Mezirow, transformative learning was often brought on by an existential dilemma, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job; but it could also be inspired by an "eye-opening" discussion, painting, or poem, or by encounters with cultural assumptions that challenged one's own (Mezirow 1991, 1998). All such transformations involved a profound questioning of deeply-held assumptions and perspectives. To come to fruition, the learning entailed by such shifts in perspective also required open exchanges among peers, guided by the search for meaning and for genuine solutions (rather than by the imperatives of the market or the state),[1] and aiming toward action.

This is precisely what the reader will find in this volume: reflections and lessons shared by those who have identified a social or ecological dilemma in Asia. The volume is a collection of original voices from the ground, through the keen eyes of experienced professionals, many of whom are founders of NGOs or social enterprises, and some of whom have worked within government for policy reform. All speak as insightful witnesses to the challenges and hopes of civic engagement within a rapidly changing Asia.

As a participant over the years in multidisciplinary platform exchanges and social movements in the region, I heartily welcome the shift this volume represents—a sharing of diverse experiences as we face pressing common issues and learn from our engagement with them. While all the authors bring academic rigor to their writing, their focus is not academic theorizing per se, but rather the need for joining together to better understand and alleviate the many forms of suffering in our region.

It was concerns on the part of academic communities within Asia that set the stage for this volume, concerns that arose as we took stock of the many crises facing us. These include emerging diseases, global warming and biodiversity loss, toxic waste, unsustainable urban development, income and wealth inequality, economies focused on extraction and growth at all costs, and poor quality education or lack of access to it entirely. The need to address the common issues that our region faces called for the kind of collective learning process that is often realized most fully in contexts of civic engagement.

[1] Freedom from market and state imperatives is present at least implicitly in Mezirow, but explicit and accentuated in Habermas (Fleming 2000).

Our journey began in October 2015, when Michiko Yoshida and I invited a small group of civil society leaders and academics from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Japan to gather at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. We agreed upon a common goal, namely, to promote strategic and participatory processes that could foment transformative learning to achieve a just and ecologically sustainable community in the region. The transformations would have to include not only changed ways of thinking and behaving, but also systemic reform in public policy and institutions. Policy advocacy in turn needed to be based upon both adequate evidence and sustainable planning. We sought to encourage broader people's participation in constructing our community of practice. As such, we wanted to facilitate the work of public intellectuals who were actively engaged in regional struggles and social movements. We envisioned multi-sectoral collaborations of key players among academics and practitioners at various levels. Making a solid case for collaborative multi-sectoral action also needed a carefully designed series of interventions, and these constitute the core of our current approach.

Concretely, we sought to achieve these goals through a series of dialogues leading to a regional workshop entitled "*Civic Engagement for a Just and Sustainable ASEAN: Our Stories and Practices*" (Yogyakarta, August 11–15, 2017). Jointly organized by the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University and the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies, this undertaking brought together grassroots innovators and social entrepreneurs, as well as researchers and policy professionals. Ably facilitated by Toshiyuki Doi (Mekong Watch) and Yeoh Seng Guan (Monash University), the workshop gave rise to energetic exchanges as well as follow-up collaborations between participants. This workshop dialogue then became the basis for the development of this edited volume. Aiming to enrich the perspectives of the original workshop participants, Mochamad Indrawan, the editor, subsequently enlarged the range of contributions to the volume.

While this book is one outcome of the Yogyakarta workshop, that same gathering became the impetus for further frameworks for collaboration, including the Bangkok Forum and Civic Engagement 4.0. The Bangkok Forum was launched in 2018 by Chulalongkorn University with the support of the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) as an integrative knowledge platform with the theme of "Future Sustainable Asia." The Forum brought civil society actors into meaningful engagement with policymakers and university professionals, with special attention to the social dimensions of sustainability. More than 800 participants joined the conference, and special efforts were made to include young adults. The Civic Engagement 4.0 platform, launched as the International Forum in Solo, Indonesia, August 21–22, 2019, brought together some 380 participants. This gathering combined academic panels with hands-on workshops and a mayors' symposium to reflect on sustainability issues from the practical perspectives of governance. The Forum relied integrally on the planning and coordination of Kota Kita Foundation, a Solo-based Indonesian CSO working for citizen empowerment and participatory urban planning (Chapter 10 of this volume). Kota Kita's dynamic engagements in Solo attracted large numbers of enthusiastic students and other young adults as volunteers and participants.

The production of this book, therefore, has been one part of a much larger process of thought, action, and relationship building on the part of many people who have focused their efforts on transformative learning and civic engagement in Asia. This book is the testimony of those committed to creating solidarity as their ethical responsibility for the future. I invite you now to join the larger process of change and reflection of which this volume is a small but significant part, by stepping into its pages, guided by your own interests and curiosity.

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Foreword by Jatna Supriatna

The world is shaped not by individuals alone, but by networks of stakeholders including government, business, civil society, and academia. As diverse stakeholders, we shape the world we share through individual actions such as the foods we eat and the energy we use. We also shape our world through our collective interactions with a web of institutions that interconnect the world.

A sustainable world can be achieved if we begin thinking differently. This means we are no longer to think of ourselves as merely autonomous actors, but also as significant nodes within a larger institutional web. The decisions we make, the clothes we wear, the community efforts we join are all mediated through that intricate web. The world is interconnected and borderless. There is no single country, organization, individual, or machine that can stand alone or change the world. We need to collaborate in order to close the gap between the many emerging issues and our own understanding and response to them.

Society needs to stabilize and govern the dynamic challenges of sustainability. This book inspires us by demonstrating what individuals and communities can do with the might of the mind and spirit so as to encourage transformative learning that can then intensify civic engagement. The stories collected here relate rich and diverse examples of transformative learning, for instance:

- A Thai professor who went out of her comfort zone and for more than ten years undertook field research and outreach to increase beach-goers' fighting chance against the deadly box jellyfish.
- An activist who went to great effort to support artisans from the Indonesian island of Sumba to produce world class woven clothing, while finding means to better connect the industry with nature, indigenous culture, and sustainability.
- On-the-ground activists from Fukushima who taught concerned citizens how to increase self-reliance in the face of a deadly triple disaster the modern world has not seen before.
- A Buddhist scholar whose compassion for people helped Asian young adults transform themselves and revolutionize their way of thinking.

These are just a few inspiring examples of how Asia's public intellectuals have readily lent themselves to transformative learning and civic engagement in order to create a just and socially equitable future for Asia.

These 24 chapters, each written by true fighters and public intellectuals, support the maxim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The expert contributors and the international editors—Mochamad Indrawan (Indonesia), Jeffrey Luzar (USA), Helen Hanna (UK), and Theodore Mayer (Thailand/ USA)—are to be congratulated for putting their hearts and minds together to produce such a vivid and colorful perspective.

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Foreword by Julian Caldecott

This book is a rich source of the thoughtful case studies from which interdisciplinary understanding and transformative learning are built. It draws on the life- and work-experiences of expert observers in diverse social and geographical circumstances across Asia. In the process, it makes original contributions to thinking about relationships between people and nature, and between people. The whole volume takes a welcome syncretic approach to ecology, spirit and community, reminding us that people live in worlds created through their own culture in dialogue with mystery, history and ecology. In exploring this from diverse points of view, the authors give attention to key tasks and challenges, including in the areas of advocacy, governance, citizen science, tradition, faith, leadership, and education. They base their thinking on many years' engagement with specific peoples, often alongside deeply experienced civil society organisations. By exploring the essential issue of 'meaning', they constructively fuse the two key themes of ecology and anthropology. The approach gives rise, for example, to the useful notion of 'heartware' in Chapter 3, which represents the emotional domain surrounding reason, wisdom and felt experience in a lived environment.[2]

The community orientation is consistent and strong, reminding us that our lives really only make sense in a social and ecological context. The result is that the book bears comparison with the foundational volume *The Wealth of Communities: Stories of Success in Local Environmental Management* by C. Pye-Smith and G. Borrini-Feyerabend (1994). This places it within a current renaissance of appreciation for community-based environmental management, which is fast becoming prominent as a key way for societies to adapt to climate change and ecological chaos. This theme, for example, has grown rapidly within government adaptation plans sent to the UNFCCC since the 2015 Paris Agreement. They include submissions from Costa Rica, Dominica, Fiji, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, Lesotho, Namibia, Nepal,

[2] Ecologist, environmental sustainability consultant, Director of Creatura Ltd, Fellow of the Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems, and author of *Designing Conservation Projects* (2009), *Aid Performance and Climate Change* (2017), *Water: Life in Every Drop* (2020), and *Surviving Climate Chaos by Strengthening Communities and Ecosystems* (2021).

Nigeria, Suriname, South Sudan, and Tonga. But the fact that apart from Nepal none of these stand-out examples are in Asia suggests the need for Asian stakeholders to arm Asian and ASEAN governments with a better understanding of these issues and opportunities, and to press them further and harder. This is an urgent task to which *Civic Engagement in Asia* is well able to contribute, responding to the need for all communities and nations to survive climate chaos inclusively, in their own circumstances and on their own terms.

For it is worth remembering that the topics addressed in this book, and the examples offered and explored, exist in a world that is now under threat as never before. The climate and ecological emergency, and world-wide public responses to it, are now critical and will remain so for the rest of our lives and those of our children. Our responsibility now is to secure the future and to build a sustainable world, without sacrificing the values of diverse human cultures that make life worth living. This can only be done though respectful understanding of diversity, and recognition that solutions can come from many sources, informed by inclusive engagement and traditional knowledge. These are facts that any reader of this book will learn to appreciate at depth. As a knowledge resource, therefore, it will be useful to anyone working in, teaching about, or seeking careers in the burgeoning applied field of sustainable development and climate change. With luck, many of its ideas will find their way into the minds of decision makers who are now shaping the future of all the Asian environments and peoples.

April 2021

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Finally, we wish to appreciate the encouraging words from Linda Stevenson of APN that "APN is delighted to endorse this publication as an outcome of a Capacity Development Programme (CAPaBLE)-supported project, CBA2018-05SY-Indrawan."

Contents

Chapter 1
Building Livelihood Sovereignty for the Mekong Region

Tran Thi Lanh

Highlights

- Indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong region are struggling to maintain their local values and rights for livelihood sovereignty.
- The sustainability values of the indigenous peoples, which have been degraded in many parts of the world, need to be preserved and supported.
- Government support for legalizing the voluntary, community, and customary law-based administration of natural resources by the local people needs to be rallied through intricate advocacy and facilitation.
- The key to building the rights-based approach was developing strong networks of "key farmers" to act as effective speakers in farmer-to-farmer and farmer-to-authority workshops.
- A significant achievement was the passing of Vietnam's 2017 Law on Forestry, which now stands as a springboard for a new series of actions by NGOs on behalf of indigenous ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

Introduction

The Livelihood Sovereignty Alliance (LISO) is an alliance of three Vietnam-based civil society organizations: the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), the Community Entrepreneur Development Institute (CENDI), and Culture Identity and Resource Use Management (CIRUM). Each of these is dedicated to working toward the livelihood sovereignty of indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong region (see Appendix A).

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"Livelihood Sovereignty" is defined[1] here as the right of people to their land, religion, culture, knowledge, and system of governance. Livelihood sovereignty can be considered "a holistic and ethical alternative solution," which consists of five interrelated rights: (1) the right to land, forest, water, clean air, and natural landscape, (2) the right to maintain one's religion, (3) the right to live according to one's own way of life and values of happiness and well-being within one's own natural environment, (4) the right to operate according to one's own knowledge and decide what to plant, initiate, create, and invent on one's own land, and (5) the right to co-manage or co-govern natural resources with neighboring communities and local authorities.

The Region's Community Spirit Forestlands

Community spirit forestlands are spaces in which villagers practice and maintain their religious values toward natural spirits via traditional rituals. This land (Fig. 1.1) has been recognized over many generations as being owned by the whole community; its management and protection are closely associated with the traditional practices and beliefs of the community, and with the roles of the elders, prestigious people, and clan heads who voluntarily implement its management.

In addition to its spiritual purpose, these forestlands provide resources to ensure the livelihood of households in the community for cultivation, housing, firewood, herbal medicines, and food. From the perspective of the villagers, these community forestland areas have always belonged to them, having been transferred to them by previous generations. However, local communities still lack rights under the law to manage and use these areas.

Central Challenge

LISO sees the central issue facing indigenous ethnic minority peoples in the Mekong region today as two fold: firstly, that of preserving spiritual beliefs and values that are embedded in their relationship to their traditional lands, and which form the basis for their customary laws for governing their land use practices. This is particularly challenging today because these beliefs, values, and practices are different from those that are being promoted globally by large transnational corporations, international financial organizations, and nation-states. However, as the devastating environmental, social, and political consequences of unbridled capitalist development become clear to everyone, the search for an alternative set of values for relating to both humans and nature is becoming increasingly urgent. We believe that the values preserved

[1] This definition was created through consultation among SPERI and traditional healers, spiritual leaders, and ordinary farmers.

Fig. 1.1 Map of community spirit forestlands preserved by LISO efforts

by indigenous peoples around the world are those that we need to adopt to sustain natural forest landscapes.

We recognize, however, that the often-destructive beliefs, values, and practices of corporations, financial organizations, and nation-states are opposed to traditional forms of governance, meaning that these traditional forms have suffered and changed a lot. Communities are also changing as a result. In order to deal with this new context, traditional governance systems need to evolve, adapt, and stand up against this destruction. This would include traditional governance strengthening its voice and

becoming better able to resist the overwhelming efforts to change and "modernize" them.

At the next level, one major obstacle to achieving customary law-based land governance is that government land law does not recognize community rights to land; it recognizes only individual households' and individual community organizations' rights to land.

Strategy

Our efforts are directed toward ensuring that indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong region retain or recover their rights to their land and that this land continues to be governed according to their customary laws. In this way, the traditional spiritual beliefs and values associated with the land can be preserved as the fundamental guiding principles governing land use. Community land ownership has not been achieved everywhere—individual household ownership is in some cases all that will be allowed by the state; but in all cases, whether the land is granted for communal or individual household ownership, we have ensured that it is governed according to local customary law. We pursue this strategy through a process of "participatory customary law-based community land allocation."

LISO has been able to facilitate accommodations between state legislation and local customary law. Here, local communities have been able to ensure that all their land is governed according to local customary law by institutionalizing their customary regulations for land management and having these legitimized by local government authorities. Contrary to some widely held views, indigenous peoples' customary law is not rigid. It is flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, situations, and needs. Some indigenous groups (e.g., Hmong) have regular ceremonies for adjusting their customary law to new circumstances.

LISO appreciated that relationships between the indigenous peoples are intimate in terms of shared philosophy, history, and personnel. More than twenty-five years of engagement with indigenous ethnic minority communities in the Mekong region define LISO's added value[2] as an organization.

Methods

These activities aim to persuade local government authorities of the superior knowledge and land management practices of the local villagers, as well as to gain their

[2] One major achievement has been LISO's success in lobbying and influencing the government to make changes to 16 articles of Vietnam's draft Forestry Law, including Article 86, confirming legalization of community ownership of Spirit Forests, Watershed Forests and Production Forests.

support for legalizing the voluntary, community, and customary law-based governance of natural resources by the local people. The first step in this process involves extensive and in-depth community-based research to understand the intimate connection between a people's beliefs and values and their relationship to the land (see Appendix B). The next step involves engaging local village elders in surveying and categorizing the landscape of their villages according to their traditional wisdom, knowledge, and customs. The third step is to empower local villagers as spokespeople and presenters of their indigenous land management practices at farmer-to-farmer and farmer-to-local authority meetings.

Achievements

The LISO Alliance has over twenty years of experience working with highland indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong region. During this time, it has built up a very strong network of "key farmers"[3] to act as effective speakers in farmer-to-farmer and farmer-to-authority workshops. They help explain the possibilities, benefits, and advantages of community-based land ownership and customary law-based natural resource management. Positive impacts achieved through the methodology of using farmers as speakers, trainers, and facilitators include the building of farmer confidence and the strengthening of solidarity both within and between villages, thereby enlivening their determination to preserve their culture of living harmoniously with nature.

Another positive impact has been the change in attitudes of local authority staff. It comes as a bit of a shock to them to hear ethnic minority farmers presenting their wisdom and practices of natural resource management and knowledge of the environment, and to see with their own eyes how effective customary laws are for natural resource protection. These shocks have caused them to change their attitudes, from seeing ethnic minority farmers as "backward" and "superstitious" to seeing them as very knowledgeable and capable. The outcome is that local authorities gain complete confidence in the ability of the local people to manage their natural environment effectively according to their knowledge and customary laws. This in turn greatly facilitates the smooth transfer of land titles from state organizations and private individuals to whole communities.

Since 1995, the LISO Alliance and its predecessor organization, Toward Ethnic Women (TEW), advocated for the allocation of land/ tenurial rights to 62,673 hectares of forestland areas to indigenous ethnic minority households and community organizations in Vietnam and Lao PDR. This includes 44,274 hectares allocated to 8,268 ethnic indigenous minority *households* in Vietnam and Lao PDR, and 18,390 hectares allocated to 77 ethnic community *organizations* in Vietnam and Lao PDR.

[3] See Appendix A for a discussion of the role of key farmers in SPERI's efforts to address structural poverty through sustainable development.

In both Vietnam and Lao PDR, land (including agricultural and forestland) is owned by the population as a whole and administered by the state on the people's behalf. Individuals and organizations are granted access to land through land use rights. Communal tenure, which is customary for indigenous communities, is not formally recognized by law. LISO, however, works within these restrictions to bring about formal recognition of indigenous customary law-based land use practices at the local government level and facilitates the legalization of regulations for the communal customary law-based governance of allocated land. In this way, LISO has been able to ensure that land use rights are defined and allocated in a way that conforms to indigenous values of communal tenure. Once the land has been allocated according to customary land use beliefs and practices, communities draw up their land use regulations, which are then officially recognized by local government land management authorities. This allows communities to maintain their own successful ecological land-based livelihoods without fear of outside commercial interventions or land grabs.

The next step is to use the successful case studies of "participatory customary law-based community land right allocation" to lobby the central government for changes in the national law. In this respect, LISO as a Vietnam-based organization has been successful in pushing for the reformed Vietnam Law on Forestry (2017) to recognize community ownership of spirit forests, traditional watershed forests, and traditional production forests. The strategic importance of this achievement is that the 2017 Law on Forestry now stands as a springboard for a new series of actions by NGOs on behalf of indigenous ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. The full backing of the law greatly strengthens the hand of the NGOs and indigenous ethnic minority farmers to act openly in pursuit of their cultural, religious, and livelihood rights.

External Factors

LISOs' work is aimed at bringing about a fundamental change in government attitudes toward indigenous ethnic minority peoples and land management practices. While entrenched attitudes and policies are major obstacles, certain external factors and circumstances have helped in achieving the goal of community land titling and customary law-based land management. Primary among these is the crisis of confidence on the part of local government authorities as to how to protect forests and natural resources from exploitation and degradation. Much of LISO's success has come from being able to supply government authorities with a workable solution to their problem, and one that is desired by and acceptable to the local people.

Obstacles

Not all customary law-based land allocation projects go smoothly. When working with indigenous ethnic minority communities, unexpected things can happen, and unexpected situations can suddenly arise that necessitate a change of action plan. Unfortunately, some donor organizations are insensitive to the need for flexibility when dealing with these situations and may become obstructive or even refuse to cooperate altogether. When this occurs, it is LISO's policy to put the needs of the farmers first and take the necessary actions, even if it requires bearing costs. Efforts, therefore, need to be made to re-educate donor organizations as to the need for greater flexibility in their funding arrangements to deal with these situations. In this respect, donor organizations, as well as local government authorities, become the target groups for necessary changes in attitude.

Vision

LISO continues to work to preserve and enhance its regional network of key farmers and young indigenous leaders that has been built up since the early 1990s by its predecessor organizations—Toward Ethnic Women (TEW 1994), Centre for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands (CHESH, 1999), and Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Development (CIRD)—and which extends from Vietnam to Laos and Thailand. Our vision is to expand this network to the whole of Southeast Asia and beyond. Connections already exist with Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bhutan, Philippines, Indonesia, Europe, and Brazil.[4]

Appendix A: The Dynamic Process of Facilitating NGO Movement to Support Indigenous Ethnic Minority People in the Mekong Region

This process began in 1994 with the establishment of Toward Ethnic Women (TEW), one of the first NGOs to be established in Vietnam. TEW's main focus was upon "Women's Rights" and it oriented its activities toward improving the situation of indigenous ethnic minority women in Vietnam, a section of the ethnic minority population that was most disadvantaged due to the negative prejudices and stereotypes that were held in Vietnamese society in general, by government officials in particular, and even among ethnologists and sociologists, that ethnic minorities were "backward", "ignorant" and "superstitious." In contrast, TEW valued the inherent

[4] Toward Organic Asia, Thailand; Hmong Association of Luang Prabang, Laos; Royal College of Natural Resource Management, Bhutan; MASIPAC, Philippines; GRAIN, Tropical Rainforest Farming, Indonesia; NatureLife International, Germany; Instituto Politicas Alternativas, Brazil.

strengths of ethnic minority women who live close to nature and gain their identity and well-being from nature via their wisdom of medicinal herbs and textile handicrafts to provide for their families' livelihoods. TEW engaged directly with the women to consolidate their strengths and promote recognition of their capabilities, and thereby change community, policymaker, and academic attitudes toward them.

TEW's solution to the problem of structural poverty facing indigenous people was first to break down the feeling of isolation. TEW did this by building up networks of "key farmers" throughout the whole Mekong region (Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand). key farmers are knowledgeable, prestigious farmers willing to learn, do experiments, share, and debate based on their knowledge and integrated and adaptable technologies. They are pioneers in setting up pilot models of farming, animal husbandry, agro-forestry gardens, and use their farms as practical forums to share their experiences and ideas with villagers from different communities, the media, researchers, and policymakers. They engage not only in awareness-raising but also in lobby and advocacy activities for land rights for the community and villagers.

Following its "*Nine-Step approach to structural poverty reduction and sustainable development*" (see Appendix C), TEW brought indigenous ethnic minoriity key farmers together in study tours, workshops, and conferences where they could learn from each other and discover that their experiences of being isolated and marginalized were experiences that others shared as well. The next Step was to build up the confidence of indigenous ethnic minority key farmers to speak out about their concerns. To achieve this, TEW held national conferences at which the farmers could speak about their grievances directly to high-ranking government officials. After this, the key farmers gained the confidence to lobby the government for recognition of their ownership of their traditional land, culture, and identity.

As a result of this work, there emerged a powerful and articulate body of indigenous ethnic minority key farmers who were able to take up the process of organizational and institutional development on their own. As Key Farmer Coordinators and Key Farmer Board Members, different key farmers became actively involved in planning and decision making at the commune, district, and provincial levels. In collaboration with local progressive authorities, and with expert advice from eminent personalities and the support of sympathetic media, they came to play an active and often leading role in lobbying government policy at both the local and national levels on behalf of indigenous minorities, especially in the area of land and forest rights. Some of the key farmers recognized and promoted by TEW became local authority officers at different levels of the official system and were able to introduce the TEW/SPERI method of bottom-up participation into the formal governing system. Some have become parliamentarians, and some have become community entrepreneurs.

In 1999, in the face of government policy of displacing ethnic minority communities from their traditional lands for industrial development (a policy that had a devastating effect not only upon indigenous culture but also upon nature), TEW established the Centre for Human Ecology Studies of the Highland (CHESH) to promote those communities living harmoniously with and nurturing nature through their customary beliefs and practices in their daily livelihood activities. The following

year (2000), TEW established the Centre for Indigenous Research and Development (CIRD) to focus upon the rights of indigenous people to live on their traditional land and practice their livelihood according to their indigenous knowledge. From 2000 to 2005, TEW, CHESH and CIRD formed a united front in support of Women's Rights, Nature's Rights and Indigenous Rights to confront the appropriation of indigenous people's natural resources by commercial and political interests.

The regional and national key farmers networks established by TEW developed and expanded across national borders to become Mekong Community for Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA), a regional network of traditional elders and key farmers and a grassroots foundation for traditional civil society organizational and institutional development across national, ethnic, and political borders.

In 2005, to provide a more concerted focus for lobbying government policy for indigenous rights to land, TEW, CHESH, and CIRD were merged into the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI). SPERI combined the results of action research undertaken in different ethnic minority communities with policy analysis to provide an evidential basis for lobbying government for policy changes. Major actions were also taken in advocating for a Civil Society Law in Vietnam and in lobbying against Bauxite mining in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

In general, the direction of SPERI's work has been to oppose the commercial appropriation of indigenous peoples' land and natural resources to defend the cultural and biological diversity of the Mekong region. At the same time, one team of senior members from TEW and CIRD established CIRUM (Culture Identity and Resource Management) to concentrate on Forest and Land Rights for vulnerable groups and on networking for self-sufficiency development. Then, in 2007, CODE (Consultancy on Development) was established from SPERI's Lobby Department as an independent consultancy to focus on bridging and strengthening Public–Private-Civil Society relations in lobbying policy on mining, hydropower, and extractive industries. In its action against Bauxite mining, CODE united 17 independent intellectuals to provide technical evidence on the social and environmental impacts if Bauxite mining was to go ahead. All three organizations share the same philosophy and Founding Board and cooperate extensively.

In the period from 2005 to 2010, SPERI focused on supporting MECO-ECOTRA, with its 6 thematic approaches (1. customary law-based community governance of natural resources; 2. community ownership of spirit forests for bio-cultural diversity preservation; 3. ecological farming for sustainable land use and livelihood security; 4. herbal wisdom for community healthcare and biodiversity preservation; 5. traditional textile handicraft for daily livelihood; and 6. farmer fields school for traditional indigenous knowledge and leadership training).

MECO-ECOTRA places serious attention on capacity building, young leadership development, and pilot actions at 4 levels: (1) household agro-ecological farming enterprising (after a community has received legal Land Right Titles); (2) communal agro-ecological co-governance based on customary law; (3) inter-community curriculums for exchanging and training of young leadership; and (4) international curriculum for young leadership empowerment and enrichment. Monitoring and evaluation have shown that wherever people over the last 20 years have

been devoted to and engaged in their indigenous ways of life living harmoniously with their surrounding nature, worshiping spirit forest, mountain, and water, they have far higher levels of community well-being and happiness.

In order to protect indigenous communities' land from encroachment by commercial interests, *strong community entrepreneurship, community enterprise and community sovereignty* needs to be developed. In order to aid this development, a strong intellectual/eco-agricultural movement is needed to demonstrate to local and national government authorities the benefit for all, in terms of biodiversity preservation and environmental protection services, of continuing that land in indigenous community ownership and management.

More recently, MECO-ECOTRA and its six thematic networks were facilitated to focus more concertedly upon **Y**oung **I**ndigenous **E**thnic **M**inority **L**eadership **D**evelopment **S**trategy (**YIELDS**) for **AG**ro-**E**cological **E**nterprising **(AGREE).** The YIELDS-AGREE strategy will operate at 5 levels with (1) Household Eco-Farming Activists; (2) Community Entrepreneurs; (3) National Intellectual Civil Society Activists; (4) Continental Independent Intellectual Activists; and (5) Global political–ecological activists, with a focus upon promoting local agro-ecological enterprises for community-based livelihood sovereignty for indigenous communities. It was to undertake this transformation that the latest of the LISO Alliance organizations, the Community Entrepreneur Development Institute (CENDI), was established in 2015.

Appendix B: Thirty-Step Method for Claiming Forestland Rights for Ethnic Groups

1. Conduct research, together with local people, on the reality, causes and consequences of landlessness, and find ways for the local people to retrieve land and forest which has been occupied by outside actors.
2. Facilitate briefings and training of key persons and traditional leaders to improve their capacity to negotiate with local authorities and land occupiers.
3. Provide training for key farmers on laws and sub-laws relating to forest land rights, pointing out errors and shortcomings in the current bureaucratic process.
4. Facilitate community-based planning for negotiations, focusing on the role of customary laws, and informing land and forest occupiers of the environmental, social, cultural, moral, and religious outcomes and consequences of the process of land and forest grabbing.
5. Seek consent from land occupiers and local authorities via processes of direct negotiation and criticism.
6. Organize study tours, sharing experiences of methods of community-based land and forest allocation and customary law-based conflict resolution, as illustrated by successful pilot models in Vietnam and Lao PDR since 1995.