



Press release

## AFD, the European Union and GRET are strengthening their action towards the development of agro-ecology in Southeast Asia

**Vientiane, July 15 2020. Matthieu Bommier, AFD director in Laos, and Arnaud Vontobel, Lao PDR Country Representative of the NGO GRET, together with the attendance of the French Ambassador to Lao PDR, Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, and the representative for the European Union in Lao PDR, Bryan Fornari, have signed at the Residence of France an agreement for the financing of the Agroecology and Safe food System Transitions (ASSET) project between 2020 and 2025, aiming at supporting the transition of food and agricultural systems towards more sustainable systems in Southeast Asia.**

Agriculture in Southeast Asian countries is today at a crossroads between, on the one hand, agro-industrial models that are highly intensive in chemical inputs and capital, with increasing risks of resource depletion and exclusion of vulnerable populations, and on the other hand, innovative agro-ecological systems that are more respectful of the environment, populations and the climate and that respond better to the growing demands for health safety. The identification of agro-ecological models integrating transitions in agricultural and food systems and mechanisms to support these transitions on a large scale is a major challenge.

After financing the ACTAE project which aimed to develop a multi-stakeholder network to promote agro-ecological initiatives in the Greater Mekong Region, AFD is continuing its action by supporting the ASSET project with a €5M grant. The European Union will also finance this project with €7M delegated to AFD. Its aim is to harness the potential of agro-ecology to support the transition of food and agricultural systems towards more sustainable systems in Southeast Asia, particularly in Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. The project will be implemented by GRET and CIRAD and will mobilize the expertise of 27 national, European and international partners, including the Ministries of Agriculture of the four countries, the FAO and UNESCAP.

The AFD and EU contribution will support the agro-ecological transition process through the strengthening of the regional multi-stakeholder network [ALiSEA](#); support to the [ASEA](#) and [MALICA](#) research platforms for the support, evaluation and promotion of diversified agro-ecological production systems and finally technical support to the [LICA](#) initiative to develop and promote a common vision of agro-ecological transition at the ASEAN level.

*"The particularity of the ASSET project is that it has been designed with an integrated approach to activate various levers of agro-ecological transition and food systems through three spheres: firstly, "technico-economic" to develop and promote adequate and efficient agricultural and market practices; secondly "political" to raise awareness of the stakes and advantages of integrating agro-ecological approaches into public policies; finally "societal" to strengthen citizens' and consumers' demand for food products that take better account of environmental and social sustainability as well as food safety,"* explains Arnaud Vontobel, GRET's Country Representative in Lao PDR.

*"The transition towards sustainable agricultural systems is at the heart of AFD's action in Southeast Asia. In a context marked by the Covid-19 crisis, it is all the more important to develop solutions to strengthen food security in the region, without however compromising the efforts that have been made in terms of respect for the environment,"* says Yazid Bensaïd, AFD regional director for Southeast Asia.

*"Current food production systems are responsible for significant carbon emissions, contributing to global warming and climate change. The transition to more sustainable food systems is extremely important worldwide considering that it is expected that nearly 10 billion people will live on the earth in 2050. Although the focus of this project will be the food chain, its impact will extend much further. It will contribute to the broader biodiversity objectives and support a more inclusive society, and more efficient health systems and economies,"* said Mr. Bryan Fornari, Head of Cooperation to the European Union Delegation to Laos *"The EU is proud to support this initiative under our Development of Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture or DeSIRA programme, which aims at supporting research and innovation."*



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### About AFD

AFD is an inclusive public financial institution and the main actor in France's development policy. It makes commitments to projects that genuinely improve the everyday lives of people, in developing and emerging countries and in the French overseas territories.

AFD works in many sectors – energy, health, biodiversity, water, digital technologies, training – and supports the transition to a safer, more equitable and more sustainable world: a world in common. Its action is fully in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its network of 85 agencies, AFD operates in 109 countries and is currently supporting over 3,600 development projects. [www.afd.fr](http://www.afd.fr)

### About the European Union

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states and is represented through some 140 Delegations and Offices around the world. As a global actor, the EU works to improve the lives of people in Europe and worldwide, providing around 55% of the world's development assistance today.

The Delegation of the European Union to Thailand promotes political, economic and cultural relations between Thailand and Europe; informs the public of the development of the EU and explains EU policies; and participates in the implementation of the EU's assistance programmes. For more information, please visit [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/thailand\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/thailand_en)

### About Gret

GRET is an international development NGO governed by French law. Since 1976 it has been striving to contribute to the creation of a fairer and more sustainable world. GRET is also a professional and innovative NGO, in its vision of the development sector, in its approach involving populations in developing countries, whom it considers as stakeholders in development, and in its practices. To successfully implement its actions, GRET creates alliances and builds diverse long-term partnerships with stakeholders from associations and the economic, public and research sectors in all its countries of operation.

Today, its staff of 650 professionals implements more than 200 projects, studies and expert consulting missions in 28 countries, mainly in South-East Asia and Africa. <https://www.gret.org/?lang=en>