



AFA Strategy Paper 2011-2015

INTRODUCTION

The past nine years, 2002-2010, have seen us struggling to take root and make ourselves known and heard at the international, regional, and national levels as a regional alliance of small scale women and men farmers' organizations (FOs) in Asia. Slowly but surely, our efforts are paying off.

Our alliance, the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), began in 2002 as a coming together of farmers' organizations (FOs) that are partners of AsiaDHRRA (Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia), a regional NGO network.¹ Leaders of these FOs participated in the five farmers' exchange visits AsiaDHRRA organized in 1998-2002 with funding support from MISEREOR and the ASEAN Foundation. In these visits, we learned of our common aspirations, experiences, and struggles. We, therefore, decided to forge an alliance in order to effectively and efficiently address our common issues, and fight for a better quality of life for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

From an informal gathering of five national FOs from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea and Philippines in 2002, under the facilitation of AsiaDHRRA, we have grown into a fully registered, autonomous alliance of ten FOs from eight Asian countries by December 2010. Our five additional members are one from Cambodia, one from Japan, two from Taiwan, and another one from South Korea.

In our initial years, we went through the usual process of establishing a new organization. This process included shaping and clarifying our vision, mission, goals, strategies; formulating our peasant agenda, our basis of unity; establishing our constitution and by-laws; identifying and selecting our leaders; getting a legal identity; formulating our five – year strategic plan; and setting up the secretariat. Also included in the process were finding ways and means to get funds for our operations and projects, and developing our organizational systems such as operations manual, finance management, and membership guidelines. We began to introduce ourselves to the international community by participating actively in regional and international conferences and consultations - with ASEAN in 2005, and with FAO, IFAD, WB, UN, and other NGOs working on food sovereignty in the region in 2006.

¹ (AsiaDHRRA has 10 NGO members from 10 different countries).



In 2006, we crafted our first five-year strategic plan. This plan guided our work till 2010. In April 2010, we held another strategic assessment and planning in order to review our past five years of work, and come up with another five-year plan. We used the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) framework to facilitate our assessment and planning. Our discussions and deliberations were not altogether smooth. Nevertheless, they were quite open, candid, and cordial. We did not hesitate to express our views and opinions on matters under discussion and deliberation. Also, we did not find difficulty in arriving at a consensus in making decisions for the good of the entire organization.

We wish therefore to share with you, our partners, the results of our exercise and our plan. In so doing, we may be able to find concrete areas for cooperation, including possible and feasible projects to implement together, towards the realization of our common vision for the small scale women and men farmers in Asia.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN - 2011-2015

An Assessment of Our Internal Environment

Our Strengths

Association as a whole

- Our member organizations have leaders and members composed of small scale women and men farmers. They have a clear membership base, have legal and functional structures, and implement their own programs.
- Our regional and national governance and management structures are independent and functional. AFA has the following documents and systems: a constitution and by-laws; certificate of registration with the Philippines Securities and Exchange Commission; Strategy Plan 2006-2010 and operations plan; strategies for membership recruitment and resource mobilization; operations manual; finance management systems; program and project management systems; plans for staff-staff exchange and farmer-to-farmer fellowship program; FO Growth Monitoring Tool; and regular General Assemblies (a total of four to date) and executive committee meetings (a total of 32 meetings to date).
- Our association is recognized and given space by regional and international civil society organizations (CSOs) and inter-governmental bodies. AFA has participated in 32 meetings organized by inter-governmental agencies, and given presentations to 18 of these meetings (59%). It has joined 38 meetings organized by NGOs, and given presentations to 23 of these meetings (61%). Our advocacy work has resulted in greater space for and recognition of FOs in regional and international fora that made sure opinions and interests of small farmers were included in decision making processes by government and inter-government bodies, and allowed our farmer leaders to directly take part in these processes as active development partners.



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- We have carried out projects with and services to our members. We have conducted several national consultations, regional consultations, farmers' visits cum study tour, four researches (e.g., trade agenda, gender dimension on food security amidst climate change, agri-business corporations in Asia, and ASEAN-ACFTA in Philippines); several issue papers; implemented 10 direct actions including protest actions, mobilizations, and support to hunger strikes staged by farmer members; two video productions; and maintained a website containing articles related to AFA and Asian farmers sector. Our projects and services have focused mainly on ASEAN regional integration; free trade agreements; climate change; regional integration; sustainable agriculture; and access to markets. Our capacity building activities have helped develop farmer leaders in leading and managing their organizations effectively; farmers' organizations with strong influence in the formulation and implementation of national policies on agriculture; and a regional organization serving as the voice of small women and men farmers in international and regional venues. We have been able to carry out many of these activities with the support of our main partner, Agriterra.

Leadership

- Our leaders are committed. We can call on them whenever the need arises. They carry out their duties and responsibilities with dedication and commitment.

Membership

- Our members are organized based on issues and commodities.
- They are in solidarity and actively cooperate with one another.

Secretariat

- Our personnel are highly committed, skilled, and resourceful.
- They have competencies in organizing, issue advocacy, documentation, project management, information sharing, and networking.
- They are able to work under pressure and produce quality outputs in spite of limited material and human resources including three full-time and one part-time staff.

Our Weaknesses

Association as a whole

- Our organization is centralized. Such centralized operations make our operations less effective and efficient.
- We are yet to fully become a learning organization.
- Some members feel that we are NGO-oriented and secretariat-dominated, and such perception is not properly addressed.
- Other members feel that we should be more transparent and more involved in the allocation of funds and drafting of proposals.



Leadership

- Our leaders need to improve their skills in time management and facilitating meetings, which normally last beyond the allotted time.
- Our Chairperson and other Executive Committee members need to level off with one another, the secretariat, and other members on representation, role expectations, responsibilities, and decision-making. Most often, because of lack of understanding of matters in question, conflict between and among our leaders, members, and secretariat staff arises.

Membership

- We need to map out in more detail our members' expertise and needs. We have inadequate baseline data on our members' fields of expertise and needs in relation to their work as small-scale women and men farmers.
- We need to further explore possibilities of encouraging FOs from bigger countries in Asia such as China and India to join us. It is quite difficult to find and establish links with FOs in these countries.

Secretariat

- We need to deliver adequate capacity building and marketing services to our members.
- We need to install and improve mechanisms, such as face to face meetings, for information sharing between and among members, and between members and secretariat. Countries in Asia do not have a common language unlike in Europe (e.g., French, German, Spanish or Italian), North America (English), or Latin America (Spanish). We often need interpreters to understand each other. Language problem is therefore a big setback.

Financial Resources

- Our dependency on one donor makes us highly vulnerable to sudden budget cuts.
- Our lack of resources hampers the implementation of many of our plans.

An Assessment of our External Environment

Our Opportunities

Call to contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger in the region and intensify advocacy work for pro-farmer policies and programs.

Latest available statistics show that over 900 million people are suffering from hunger all over the world (IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2010), much of them in the Asian region. Another 50-100 million more people must have been further pushed to extreme poverty and hunger owing to the 2007-09 food, fuel, and financial crises. This dire situation, therefore, affords us in AFA to continue working towards our vision—prosperous Asian farming communities that are free from poverty and hunger.



Related to the call to contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger is the call to intensify advocacy work against the marginalization of small scale farmers in national and international public policies. Policies on agricultural and rural development do not always address the problems and concerns of our farmers. On the other hand, FOs lack the capacity and strength to influence policies and negotiate with policy makers. Governments and inter-governmental bodies provide little space for a participatory approach. The poor are often excluded from relevant institutions and partnerships that enable them to share in and control the decisions affecting their lives.

Favorable National, Regional, and International Political Climates.

Existing peace and stability in most Asian countries is an encouraging development. Friendlier and more democratic national governments provide an enabling environment for us to advocate for the integration of our peasant agenda in national government policies. For instance, the Cambodian government highly supports SRI and other related activities. Another instance, organic law already exists in Japan.

Intensifying regional development processes, including the ASEAN and SAARC regional integration, and FAO regionalization, are also encouraging. We can take advantage of such processes to push our agenda forward. Though the regionalization process of FAO has yet to happen in the next two years, we, in AFA, as a key member in the broader CSO regional formation, can take the key role in ensuring that such processes put FOs at the center, and focus on issues that matter most to small scale farmers in the region. Broad, multi-sectoral CSO formations being established for advocacy for food sovereignty issues is a great opportunity for us to get involved, as our farmers are among the biggest stakeholders in the matter.

Renewed interest in sustainable agriculture and food security and sovereignty.

Agriculture is back in the international agenda. Also, there is growing consensus to focus investments on smallholder agriculture to reduce poverty and hunger. The various international and regional conferences on the issue we attended the past two years clearly indicate this development. Given thus, we can maximize the interest and attention of the international community (governments, donors, and CSOs), give concrete proposals, and present success stories in order for this international community to identify which projects or policies to support. We can endeavor to establish financial and technical partnership agreements with international and regional institutions such as IFAD, FAO, ASEAN, and other partner CSOs such as WOCAN, TWN, and AsiaDHRRA.

Interest and willingness of key institutions to partner with FOs.

Various international institutions, such as IFAD, FAO, Agriterra, and WOCAN, have expressed willingness to partner with AFA in programs such as on food security, sustainable agriculture, and linking small farmers to market using the value chain approach. We can study carefully their Grant Strategy Programs, and come up with medium and long term proposals. International, regional, and national research institutions are likewise open to provide grants to researches on issues confronting our farmers.



Our Threats

Crises on food, fuel, water, and climate change, and inadequate government response and support to address these crises.

Our farmers are highly vulnerable to changing weather patterns, onslaught of *La Nina* and *El Nino*, and other natural calamities, as their lives and livelihoods are closely connected to and are highly dependent upon the workings of nature. The global financial and energy crises have further deteriorated incomes and increased the costs of production, thereby making farming less viable source of livelihood.

Growing competition for land, insecure land rights, and pressures on land.

More and more farmers are being displaced by intensifying investments on agricultural lands by both foreign governments, companies and local elites. National laws that secure farmers' rights over their lands are inadequate and poorly implemented. Many agricultural lands are being converted into export processing zones, other industrial uses, or commercial plantations mainly for bio-fuel production or export crops, forcing farmers to hire themselves out as seasonal agricultural laborers without adequate protection and opportunity to exercise their labor rights.

Unfavorable international and regional free trade agreements.

Our governments are continuously entering into free trade agreements with other countries. Many of our farmers have been negatively affected by these FTAs, making them unable to compete with the cheaper products of other importing countries. Therefore, these farmers lose their incomes and livelihoods.

Competition with NGOs in terms of funding, and "use" of FOs to get projects.

In some countries, partnerships among NGOs and FOs are weak, and NGOs are seen to compete with FOs in resource mobilization. Some NGOs work with FOs not as partners but mere beneficiaries of their projects, thereby weakening any prospects of building the capacities of farmers and their organizations for self-management.

Our Long Term Plan

Our Vision:

We envision Asian rural farming communities where we, small-scale women and men farmers and producers with our families:

- Are free from hunger and poverty, happy and in good health, and live in peace and prosperity;
- Own or have access to and control over the lands we till and other basic productive resources, goods and services; nurture our farmlands through appropriate, integrated,



and environment-friendly agricultural practices and technologies; get fair market for our product; and

- Are self-reliant, educated, and able to participate in development processes through politically strong, socially responsive, culturally sensitive, and economically viable FOs.

Our Mission:

We aim to be a strong and influential voice of small-scale women and men farmers in Asia. We endeavor to be a strong lobby and advocacy group for farmers' rights and development, genuine agrarian reform, and mainstreaming of sustainable agriculture in regional and national policies and programs. We aim to be a facilitator in our members' trading and marketing of sustainable agricultural products. We aspire to serve as a venue for solidarity and exchange of information on agriculture and farmers' development among our members.

Our Tagline:

Empowering small scale women and men farmers in Asia.

Our Peasant Agenda

The following is our nine-point Peasant Agenda--the basis of our unity:

1. Promote sustainable agricultural policies and practices in family farms.
2. Study and promote alternatives to economic globalization.
3. Promote agriculture towards the young and build their interests towards farming.
4. Promote fair and just treatment of small-scale women and men farmers in developing countries.
5. Promote food sovereignty measures for small-scale women and men farmers.
6. Promote farmer-to-farmer market exchanges.
7. Push for provisions on access to farm resources and rural development and protection of small-scale women and men farmers' rights.
8. Support environmentally-friendly mitigation and adaptation measures for small-scale women and men farmers in response to climate change.
9. Strengthen AFA at the national and regional levels so it becomes able to participate in international development processes.

Our Mid-Term Plan (2011-2015)

By 2015, we will be:

The largest, most credible, most transparent, most trustworthy, and most active organization of small scale women and men farmers in Asia working happily and



harmoniously together towards the realization of our vision, mission, and peace agenda; working in partnership with other FOs and CSOs in pushing for and implementing sustainable, environment-friendly, pro-small scale women and men farmer policies and programs at the national, regional and international levels; at the same time maintaining feelings of warmth and solidarity between and among our members and partners.

Our Performance indicators:

- We have new members in Timor Leste, Laos, Myanmar, China, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Mongolia, and Bhutan.
- Our members are key FOs in their countries, and are sought after by their respective national governments and CSOs.
- All our members and Secretariat office have functional organizational structures and systems; our staff have capacities for advocacy, negotiating with governments, program and project management, financial management, networking, communication, knowledge management, and sustainable agriculture.
- Our members have concrete people-based programs (e.g., seeds selection, certification of the seeds, provision of support in land dispute of peasants, commodity cluster formation for production, value addition, and marketing activities).
- We are able to finance our regional secretariat's core operations, and support regional programs through various constant sources; similarly, our members are able to finance their national operations. Our secretariat has at least \$150,000 annual receipts—eighty percent (80%) from grants, fifteen percent (15%) from membership and service fees, and five percent (5%) from other sources.
- The finance management systems and practices of our secretariat and members conform to internationally-accepted auditing and accounting principles; and our Finance Reports are accepted by donors.
- National governments and inter-governmental bodies have the following:
 - Very restrictive policies against GMOs.
 - Very supportive policies on sustainable, environment-friendly agriculture and agro-based enterprises by small-scale farmers.
 - Institutionalized mechanisms for participation of FOs in agriculture-related decision-making processes.
 - Eighty percent (80%) of governments' agricultural budget is dedicated to small scale women and men farmers.
 - United Nations has declared an International Year for Family Farming.
 - Secured land rights for small scale women and men farmers.
 - Climate financing that supports adaptation and mitigation measures for agriculture using sustainable, agro-ecological approaches.
- We have established our women and youth wing, with activities implemented at regional and national levels.
- We have developed a concept paper and conducted a feasibility study of our own enterprise complementing and synergizing the enterprises our members .



- We are regularly invited, consulted, and given seats and speaking slots in conferences and mechanisms for consultation and decision-making by target institutions and agencies at national, regional and international levels.

Our Main Strategies to Achieve our Medium-Term Plan

Strategy 1:

Network and forge concrete partnerships with various institutions and organizations in advocacy and other services to our members (e.g. land tenure, agro-ecology systems, marketing, women, and youth).

Over the years, we have been able to gain a considerable number of partners and supporters from CSOs, government and inter-government bodies, academe, business, and other FOs at the regional and international levels. We have been active in various regional and international networks and coalitions that have served as venues for our advocacy activities since our initial years.

Our engagement with these networks and coalitions, however, needs to be further translated into something concrete for us. For instance, we can explore the possibility of identifying potential members from the partner farmers' groups of these networks and coalitions. Another instance, we can tap these networks and coalitions to gain access to resources and capacity building opportunities.

Corollarily, we need to develop concrete programs and projects our partners and supporters can help fund. We need to start building closer ties with national and regional agricultural and academic institutions to help us technically in our advocacy and on-ground work on agricultural research for development.

Strategy 2:

Make AFA an effective Knowledge and Learning Hub--capturing and sharing knowledge and lessons among FOs through online and offline activities.

We will optimize the use of our knowledge management strategies and practices by ensuring that knowledge is captured and shared, and learning occurs within the organization. We will strengthen our knowledge and learning hub; we will have online and offline activities at the national and regional levels to ensure a dynamic sharing of knowledge and inspire faster and easier learning.

We will capture and share knowledge and lessons learned by: 1. establishing and maintaining our website; 2. creating knowledge products such as manuals, video demonstrations, best practice catalogues, comics, and programming guides for radio or TV programs-- all this should include acknowledgment of innovators, adapters, and funding support; 3. conducting regional experience sharing, farmers' exchange visits, study tours, cliniquing sessions, member-to-member assistance, knowledge fairs, farmer-to-farmer extension, and search for best practices; and 4. monitoring and documenting results of



technology adopters (farmers) and various organizational systems and processes to cull out learning and new innovations.

Strategy 3:

Diversify our funding sources through internal and external resource generation and effective secretariat management.

We will tap new donors with whom our members will liaise; we will explore possibilities for partnership and ensure smooth working relationships. We will hold secretariat meetings at least once a month to continuously generate ideas that can facilitate development of concept notes and proposals. We will use the knowledge generated from sharing activities in conceptualizing and implementing our projects.

To increase internal resource generation, we will explore a regional business enterprise that complements our members' marketing initiatives, and conduct a feasibility study on available options. Also, we will explore other fund-raising activities such as "Adopt-a-farming-community or Adopt-an-FO-project."

Our Key Programs

Advocacy

Our advocacy program focuses on pushing for international, regional and national legislations promoting and protecting our rights, as well as establishing and sustaining an enabling environment for us to live and work in our farms with freedom, security, safety, and peace. We have lined up the following activities under this program:

- Consultations among members.
- Policy information, analysis and formulation.
- Lobbies and dialogues with decision-makers and influential persons and organizations.
- Campaigns and direct actions.

Knowledge Management and Sharing.

Our advocacy will be without "teeth" or strength if it is not based on or supported by our actual knowledge and experiences on the ground. We will therefore develop our knowledge management for this purpose. Also, this program is in response to the expressed need of our leaders and members to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills in various areas.

The following will be our activities, as mentioned in our strategies above:

- Capturing the knowledge generated from on-ground experiences of our members.



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- Sharing these experiences through online and offline activities.

Enterprise Development.

Our enterprise development program will concern itself in assisting our members to increase their production and income, and to have alternative sources of livelihood related to farming. We will therefore do the following:

- Provide technical and managerial support to our members' initiatives in agricultural production, marketing, and enterprise development. Our members are organizing their respective members along commodity lines using a value-chain approach, and fostering the principles of organizing cooperatives or cooperative endeavors.
- Development of an enterprise at the regional level.

Governance

Effective and efficient management of our organization is important for us to achieve success. Our governance program will focus on the maintenance and upgrading of our organizational systems and processes so that AFA becomes more and more transparent, democratic, effective, efficient and able to sustain our core operations.

CONCLUSION

We can say that we have gone a long way since our informal establishment in 2002. But, we are aware, so much has yet to be done as far as improving our plight as small scale women and men farmers and producers is concerned. We are still far from attaining our dream. Nevertheless, we are eager to see the day when all national governments in Asia enact and implement laws genuinely favoring us and our fellow farmers; when international and regional free trade agreements are geared more towards providing genuine opportunities for the economically weak, including us, to gain and benefit more from such agreements; when all of us farmers already feel secure in our land, free from the fear of being pushed away from the very source of our life, and live in prosperity and peace; and when we are able to collectively market our own produce, or manage our own processing plants, or manage our value-addition enterprises.

We know we cannot do it alone. We need sincere and willing partners from all sectors to assist and support us to make our dream a reality. We need concerned groups and organizations to partner with us in exploring and implementing possible projects to respond to the needs of our farmers. We need technical, financial, and material assistance to carry out our projects.



On this note, we wish to close with a quote from our former Chairperson (2006-08), Seo, Jung Eui:

There is a saying, 'The dream of one person will quickly die but the dream of many persons will someday come true.' It is our dream in AFA to make farmers' groups in Asia to cooperate tightly together and help each other, and make our collective voices stronger. AFA can be the core of all Asian farmers fighting for survival, for better quality of lives. We hope you share our dreams, and together, we hope to spread this dream to as many farmers' groups in Asia as possible.