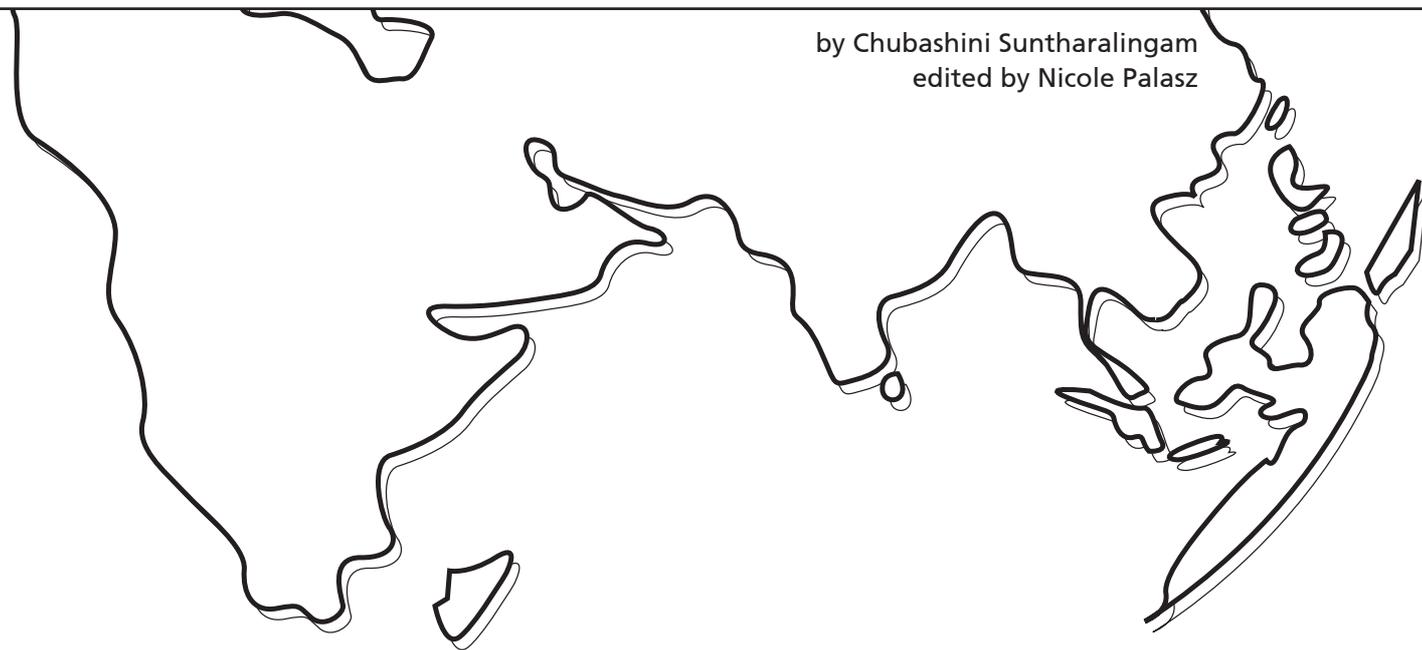


Research for Action:

A region-wide participatory research process to build participation, awareness and advocacy on trade policies

by Chubashini Suntharalingam
edited by Nicole Palasz



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About the author

Chubashini Suntharalingam has been the research manager at the Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (SEACON) since 2003. She plays the roles of a fund raiser and an administrator who supports SEACON's network members in carrying out SEACON's activities and programs in relation to food security and food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture and trade related issues. She is also actively involved in transferring knowledge to the grassroots via participatory approaches. She coordinated the participatory research on the "The Impact of ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) on Small Scale Farmers and Fisher Folks in the South East Asian Region", a research project undertaken by SEACON covering 8 countries in this region.

Chuba earned her undergraduate degree in Agribusiness and postgraduate degree in Management from Universiti Putra Malaysia. She also has a Diploma in Computer Programming from Saint Paul College in Minnesota, United States.

Prior to being involved in the social science scene, Chuba embarked on various professions. She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate students in Malaysia's private and public colleges and universities covering various Management subjects. Chuba was a Computer Specialist and Financial Coordinator for a promising food testing laboratory in the United States. She assisted with the set up and maintenance of all financial issues of the business, and maintenance of a customized database of this lab.

Chuba is a knowledge seeker. She craves to learn new things and in the process discovers herself. She can be contacted at chubashini@yahoo.com.

tural development with trade concerns at the Southeast Asian level. In each of our member countries, we support people-centered national-based food security councils that enable government, private sector and civil society representatives to meet and dialogue on agriculture and trade issues. The establishment of the national food council is to ensure that whatever analysis or positions taken on at the regional level, would have the secure backing from the grassroots and vice versa

Our role is thus to:

- Monitor and keep in check the adverse effects of free trade on peasant farmers
- Monitor the development of relevant economic and social domestic policies in the region ecologically that promote economically and sustainable production.
- Offer alternative agro-trade strategies based on the principles of fair trade and food sovereignty
- Improve and lobby for policies related to food, agriculture and trade at regional and international levels.

For a list of SEACON network members, please refer to the back cover.

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About the Organization

SEACON was established in February 1996. The idea of such an organization was conceived at the Southeast Asian conference on food security and trade liberalization held in the same year as run-up to the world food summit in Rome. SEACON provided a critique of the summit, which was accepted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). From this emerged the Balay Declaration, a document containing the collective aspirations and vision of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for food security in this region. Our organization is the mechanism to translate the spirit and objectives of this declaration into reality.

SEACON provides a coordinated approach to food security, agriculture and trade issues, using advocacy, participatory research and networking activities. We integrate local initiatives of agrarian reforms and agricul-

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I would like to express my gratitude to the following: Nicole Palasz for being such a great coach and friend in assisting me with this notebook; My husband, Siva Kumar Balasundram for inspiring me to finish this notebook; Aurora Regalado and her co-workers (Supanee Taneewut, Belinda Formanes, Thongdam Phongphichith, Khantong Intachak, Prak Sereyvath, Arif Rahman Hidayat, Dr Bui Quang Toan, Nguyen Huu Nhuan, Kyaw Nyunt and Kyaw Moe) for completing this research; Yoga Mithran Balakrishnan and Amardip Kaur Soni for their moral support; SEACON for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this project; CVT for providing me the avenue to share my experience on this project and for funding the printing of this notebook; and to the wonderful editorial team for investing untiring efforts on the publication of this notebook.



October 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series! In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic that was used successfully in advancing human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement including non-government and government perspectives, educators, law enforcement personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, women's rights and mental health advocates. They have both adapted and pioneered tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have utilized tactics that when adapted can be applied in other countries and other situations to address a variety of issues.

Each notebook contains detailed information on how the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think tactically – and to broaden the realm of tactics considered to effectively advance human rights.

This notebook will discuss how Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (SEACON) utilized a participatory research process in Southeast Asia not only to document and understand how free trade was affecting small scale food producers in Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia and Laos but also as an effective means to inform and engage producers themselves in the process and issue. Finally, the participatory research process provided informed and concrete evidence to back their policy advocacy on trade policies in the ASEAN region.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at www.newtactics.org. Additional notebooks are already available and others will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners and information about our workshops and symposium. To subscribe to the New Tactics newsletter, please send an e-mail to: newtactics@cvt.org

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and grew out of our experiences as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that you will find these notebooks informational and thought provoking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. L. Pearson".

Nancy L. Pearson
New Tactics Training Manager



Introduction

In December 2005, trade delegates from around the world met in Hong Kong to further trade negotiations for the World Trade Organization (WTO). Hong Kong was also the destination for thousands of protesters around the world concerned about the impacts of free trade on the environment and on local communities. As they had in Cancun and Seattle during previous WTO meetings, civil society sought to express their concerns about the impact of trade liberalization on their livelihood, environment, democracy and poverty.

I went to Hong Kong on behalf of my organization, the Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (SEACON), to advocate for and defend the rights of small scale food producers in Southeast Asia. SEACON was well-positioned to advocate for the right to livelihood of small scale producers in relation to trade. For the past two years, my colleagues and I had carried out a large scale, participatory research process in Southeast Asia to document and understand how free trade was affecting small scale food producers in Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia and Laos. This research demonstrated the decline in livelihood among farmers and fisherfolks, often politically disempowered groups in countries throughout Asia. In many cases, positive developments in macro economic indicators such as higher foreign exchange earnings, expanded markets, and more product choices actually hide a parallel trend towards the social and economic dislocation and exclusion of millions of small scale farmers and fisherfolks, rural workers and their families. Our research demonstrated that the liberalization process in Southeast Asia has been one of the factors that has contributed to the worsening condition of many small scale food producers. They are losing their lands, jobs, and other means of production, control over their meagre resources and becoming even more indebted.

Our research process was carried out with important components including the participation of small scale producers themselves and credible research methodology and analysis making it possible for SEACON to utilize the research results at the national and regional levels to advocate for trade policies that address the right to livelihood of many small scale food producers. With thorough, credible documentation to support us, we are increasing our efforts to lobby governments in the region. SEACON hoped to come out with an ASEAN Food and Water Charter that would be advocated and lobbied at various national, regional and international arenas in the effort of it being adopted by the ASEAN governments. The Charter sought to include amongst others, a rights perspective on food and water, the importance of the role of women in agriculture and the focus of sustainable farming and fishing livelihoods.

In this tactical notebook, I will share the process we undertook to build this credible documentation of the impacts of one free trade agreement on a critical segment of our societies in Southeast Asia. This unique effort involved organizations in eight countries, working together to understand how the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agreement affects our farmers and fisherfolks. Through the participatory processes I will describe, such as interviews with producers and government officials, focus group discussions, observations and secondary research means (i.e., print and media publications), we created a comprehensive picture of the current situation of food producers at the grassroots level.

In addition to describing the steps we undertook and the challenges we encountered, I will also share the empowering effect the tactic had on our network, how the process of gathering this information led to self-realizations among small producers, and how our national partner organizations and SEACON are using the results of the research to advocate for trade policies that address the needs of small scale food producers. Recent efforts include developing indicators to monitor government commitments, and lobbying for an ASEAN Food Charter that would enshrine the rights to food, water and development.

Participatory research can be used for a wide variety of human rights issues to document abuses and empower victims. I hope this tactical notebook will be useful to you in considering whether adapting this tactic would work for your organization as well.

Background Information

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is comprised of ten nations: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The original signatories are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, also known as ASEAN-6. The new member-countries are Vietnam (joined in 1995), Laos and Myanmar (joined in 1997) and Cambodia (joined in 1999). ASEAN is intended to promote peace and security in Southeast Asia, as well as encourage partnerships in the region for economic, social and cultural development.

At the Fourth ASEAN Summit in 1992, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agreement was initiated. The Singapore Declaration of 1992, Framework Agreement on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation and Agreement on the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT), released during the Summit, laid the groundwork for the creation of AFTA. A free trade area—the removal of obstacles to freer trade among member countries by reducing tariffs to 0-5% on traded manufactured goods and processed agricultural products and the removal of non-tariffs barriers and quantitative restrictions that limit the entry of imports—in Southeast Asia was to be achieved in

Understanding Free Trade

What is trade?

The commercial exchange (buying and selling in domestic or international markets) of goods and services, intended to result in lower prices for consumers and higher profits for producers.

What is a free trade agreement?

An agreement between two countries or amongst groups of countries aimed at a policy of non-intervention by the state in trade between their nations, usually resulting in reductions in tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers.

What are tariffs and non-tariff barriers?

A tariff is a charge levied upon an imported product, essentially to make the product more expensive in the foreign market, which will discourage consumers from buying it. Non-tariff barriers (NTB) are restrictions to imports but are not in the usual form of a tariff. NTB can include subsidies, quotas, dumping, intellectual property laws, or other means.

fifteen years (1993-2008). The completion target was accelerated to 1 January 2003, then 1 January 2002.

The purpose of AFTA is to increase ASEAN's competitiveness in regional and world markets by removing trade barriers between member nations. AFTA would remove intra-ASEAN tariffs and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and bring more foreign direct investment to Southeast Asia.

The main mechanism is the CEPT. The original CEPT scheme covered all manufactured (capital goods and processed agricultural products) and excluded unprocessed agricultural products (UAPs). In 1994, ASEAN decided to phase in UAPs into the CEPT scheme.

Changes in trade agreements can significantly impact the lives of both local producers and consumers. In our region, the majority of people are poor, live in rural areas, and are dependent on agriculture and fisheries for their livelihoods and food supply. AFTA removed barriers to trade in areas that directly affect their livelihoods. All manufactured and processed agricultural products as well as some unprocessed agricultural products faced tariff reductions in the ASEAN Free Trade Area agreement.

By 2003, when we began planning for implementation of this tactic, almost all of the tariffs on products included in the 2003 Inclusion List of the ASEAN-6

had been reduced to the 0-5 percent tariff range. Products in the Inclusion List, which still have tariffs above 5 percent, are those that have been transferred from the Sensitive List (SL) and General Exception List (GEL) in 2003. There has been significant reduction of tariff levels, from an average tariff for ASEAN-6 under the CEPT Scheme of 12.76 percent in 1993 to 2.39 percent in 2003.

The new members of ASEAN were given more time to reach the 0-5 percent tariff for intra-ASEAN trade (Vietnam in 2006, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 2008, and Cambodia in 2010)

Trade liberalization has changed, and is continuously changing the dynamics of domestic, regional and international markets. It is imposing new demands and pressures on all producers, but small producers are more negatively affected as they often cannot compete in the global market due to their relatively small production levels. They also have limited capital to make improvements in the quantity and quality of their products. Lack of government support in terms of the needed investments in rural infrastructures (i.e. farm-to-market roads, post-harvest facilities) and appropriate agricultural research and development that could have helped increase productivity, further aggravates the situation.

The rapid increasing of markets, brought about by trade agreements, resulted in liberalized agricultural markets characterized by lowered tariffs and trade

Four categories of products under the AFTA CEPT Scheme are:

Inclusion List (IL)

Products for tariff reduction/elimination, and are essentially all manufactured and processed agricultural products and some unprocessed agricultural products.

Temporary Exclusion List (TEL)

List of products for which member countries seek temporary exclusion.

Sensitive and Highly Sensitive List (SL/HSL)

List of products given a longer time frame for transfer into the Inclusion List and for tariff reduction/elimination and includes unprocessed agricultural products

General Exception List (GEL)

Products that are permanently exempted from tariff reduction/eliminations for reasons of national security, human, animal and plant life and health, artistic, historic and archeological value.

barriers, which made the entry of imports easier and faster.

With the markets widely open to products of other countries, we feared the human rights of resource poor farmers would be gravely affected. We were concerned they would be displaced from their lands and dislocated from their traditional sources of liveli-

hood due to shifts in production patterns. A number of human rights laws protect the rights to food and to subsistence. For example, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security

Case Study Example:

A NEVER ENDING CYCLE OF POVERTY AND INDEBTEDNESS:

The Life of Marginal Fisherfolks in the Tuna Capital of the Philippines

General Santos City is the tuna capital of the Philippines. The fishing industry is the prime mover of the city's economy. The second largest fish port in the country was built to cater magnanimous sea bounties. As per a report from a local newspaper with Mindanao-wide circulation, General Santos City's fish port is one of the three ports in Mindanao which passed the international standard. Nine (9) out of twenty-six *barangays* (the smallest municipal level of government) of the city are foreshore communities, mostly urban, where concentrations of the city's urban population dwell.

Mang George is one of the thousand subsistent fisherfolk of the city who lives in *Barangay Calumpang* and solely dependent on fishing to meet the basic needs of his family. He has four children—one in elementary school, two in secondary school and the eldest (Joanne) now out of school.

Mang George is operating a boat with *tres kabalyos* (three horsepower) briggs machine owned by Mr. A.A.—a Chinoy (Chinese and Filipino mestizo). Mang George is the lone worker of the boat. The boat, popularly called a *pakura* or *serisan*, will carry two passengers at most. They are deep-sea fishers that catch tuna outside the *Sarangani Bay* and the economic maritime zone. They even carry out operations as far as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea—entailing four to five days of unabated travel.

The Ambak Pare Problem of the Fisherfolks. Fisherfolks used to cover only the territory around Philippine waters. But there came a time when they were pushed further out. Environmental degradation as well as the dominance of foreign commercial fishing vessels spelled doom to the marginal and small scale fisherfolks. Later on, pirates and other armed groups such as the *Abu Sanyaf* (an armed group based around the area of *Basilan*) became notorious with the *Ambak Pare*, or “Mister, jump off the boat or die!” These predicaments pushed the small scale fisherfolks to collaborate with mother boats in scouring the waters outside Philippine territories, and oftentimes, being caught and jailed in very harsh prison conditions in other countries.

The Small Boat and the Mother Boat. Regularly, a *pakura* will be carted in a big mother boat, popularly termed as *fuso* or “pump boat” usually owned by affluent families in the industry (mostly financiers). Usually, a *fuso* can carry 2-4 *pakura*. The *fuso* will carry the *pakura* along with them wherever they operate. The owner of a *pakura* will pay 20% (from gross income) to the *fuso* owner for such conveyance.

The *pakura* owner gives 40% (from gross income) to Mang George for his work as the fisherfolk thus giving the owner the remaining 40% of the gross income.

In between fishing operations, Mang George will borrow money from the owner or financier to buy groceries for his family and for his start-up capital. His start-up capital includes the purchase of hooks, line and other fishing gear, as well as food supply for his subsistence in the days of operation (from twenty days to one month). The time period is subject to the discretion of the mother boat operator. While Mang George is away, his wife will continue borrowing money from the owner or financier for the family's subsistence. When they have achieved a sufficient catch, the mother boat will go directly to the fish port to unload and sell the catch. Habitually, it is directly sold in wholesale to the buyer—this is also the financier of the operation. The price of tuna will depend upon the classification of its meat, determined by the classifier. Generally, a classifier works for the financier/buyer.

According to Mang George, fraud in classification of fish meats is prevalent in the fish port. Mang George can tell with expertise that some of his tuna are first class sashimi quality but the classifier's decision will prevail. First class sashimi prices in the port ranges from P200-250 (around US\$5). Class B is P120-180 (around US\$3) and Class C is P80-100 (Around US\$2).

Mang George will get his share dubbed as ‘*balanse*’ (the balance) from Mrs A.A. (the *pakura* owner) the next day or when Mr. A.A. calls for him. There were times when Mang George falls short of his share because Mr. A.A. and the financier will automatically deduct the loans made during the previous operation by Mang George and his wife. He will again borrow some amount from the owner to treat himself and his family for his return home and the rest will be for their food and the children's schooling expenses. According to Mang George, this has become the cycle. He does not know when the cycle will ever end.

in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. " Similarly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) defends the right to one's livelihood. Article 1 asserts " In no case may a people be deprived of its own mean of subsistence," while Article 11:1 recognizes "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."

SEACON wished to advocate for appropriate policy and institutional reforms that protect the human rights of farmers and fisherfolks. We feel that such reforms are vital nationally, regionally and internationally in order to move towards the goal of achieving food security and sovereignty especially in South East Asia through an ASEAN Food and Water Charter. It is essential to review critically and challenge trade agreements such as AFTA to ensure that they are consistent with food security and sovereignty, and fair trade principles of the least developed and developing countries, and especially their low-income producers and consumers.

The Development of the Tactic

Over the previous 6 years, SEACON had conducted research on a variety of issues that studies the impact on the lives of small scale producers and consumers. These resulted in numerous reports including *The Fact Finding Mission to the Food Crisis in Indonesia*, *Women and Food Security and, Rice Markets and Food Security in South East Asia*. The findings of these studies have been used to lobby specific policy and institutional reforms on rice mar-



Rice paddy farmers in Laos hard at work (top) and Fisherfolks in Malaysia unloading their catch at the market dock (lower)

keting, the betterment of women and addressing food security in a crisis situation.

With the experience and background that we possessed on issues related to food security and trade, we decided to embark on a participatory research tactic to determine how the AFTA agreement is being implemented and how it affects the marginalized sectors such as fisherfolks and farmers in the region. We felt that this tactic seemed the most logical way to understand the problems associated with AFTA and identify appropriate solutions to those problem, thus enabling us to advocate for farmer and fisherfolk- friendly trade policies. Moreover, SEACON believed that advocacy plans with the governments should be supported with ground realities, such as credible research that SEACON's members carried out, rather than relying on facts and figures gathered from the media. Most of the prior research that had been carried out on food security and trade issues was based on secondary data that was gathered from various secondary sources, including print and electronic publications.

Through the AFTA research, we sought to carry out the following:

- Assess the impacts of AFTA at the national level (focusing on trade and investments) and on small scale producers (capacity to compete in a liberalized market)
- Provide recommendations to address and mitigate its negative impact and enhance its positive impact, especially on rice and priority commodities such as corn, fisheries and sugar
- Promote fair trade in the region

In order to effectively utilize the results of the research, we agreed the research process needed to strongly reflect our values and organizational strengths. As we planned for the tactic, we thoughtfully attempted to ensure that the process was:

1. Participatory
2. Regional in Scope
3. Credible
4. Gender Sensitive

1. PARTICIPATORY: We believed that the small scale food producers participating in this tactic needed to have ownership of the process. The voices of people at the grassroots level are important and in SEACON's judgment, the concerns of this group of people have gone neglected far too long. Moreover, many of them are facing significant life challenges directly related to trade liberalization. Governments often neglect the impacts of trade liberalization on the most vulnerable segments of the population, arguing that the trade agreements allow them to compete efficiently in the market overall.

By carrying out participatory research, SEACON wished to push forward the voices of these marginalized groups to the attention of policy makers. More often than not, research that is carried out on trade liberalization does not gather input from the grassroots. This affects the choices made by policy makers and other decision-makers because they are formulating policies based on their own perceptions of what is needed, rather than concrete evidence. Without understanding the needs of people at the grassroots level, effective policies cannot be formulated.

The participatory process would also empower small scale food producers to become informed and engaged in the trade-related issues that affect their lives. In order to accomplish this, SEACON needed to involve them in every step of the process, and return the results of the research to the communities that were involved so they could also use the research to become advocates on their own behalf.

In addition to empowering local people, participatory research would strengthen the SEACON network members' capacity in research work as they were directly involved in the conceptualization, planning and implementation of the project. The project enabled the member partners to work together based on common objectives - the improvement of small scale food producers' livelihoods and welfare in the region. The follow up meetings and constant exchanges in communications to come out with better research design and methodologies enabled SEACON members (i.e. the regional research team members, the national lead researchers and SEACON national members) to sharpen their research and analytical capacities.

2. REGIONAL IN SCOPE: AFTA transcends national boundaries, so it was necessary to conceive a tactic that would illustrate the results of trade liberalization as they were experienced by small scale farmers and fisherfolks throughout the region. As a regional organization, SEACON was well placed to carry out this work. We carried out research throughout the region, with network members participating in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Philippines, Vietnam and Burma.

It was also important to carry out this tactic collectively in the ASEAN countries as our voices carry more weight collectively than as individual countries. By carrying out this research in numerous countries, SEACON would be able to depict the actual situation of a wider range of small scale farmers and fisherfolk in these countries. This would enhance our efforts to lobby

What distinguishes SEACON's research from others is that this research was supported with ground realities with direct participation from small scale farmers and fisherfolks who are involved in farming and fishing activities. We, the member partners of SEACON were directly involved in the conceptualization, planning and implementation of the research.

— SEACON member partner

national governments in Southeast Asia to adopt policies and promote institutional reforms aimed at increasing food security in the region.

Our efforts to develop a regional tactic were aided by our experiences working collaboratively across the region. To begin with, SEACON members have a shared commitment to food security in the region. Participating organizations were in concurrence that food security policies that have been developed by Southeast Asian governments need to be amended, revised and updated to take into account the true picture of the small scale food producers who are poor and marginalized. We agreed that one way to revise and update these policies would be to carry out this tactic successfully to demonstrate the impacts of trade liberalization on small scale food producers. After participating in this process, these members are even more determined now to ensure that marginalized communities are protected and not displaced due to trade agreements ratified and signed by their respective governments. The data that came out of this process provided them with a new lever to advocate for changes in national and regional policies.

In addition to our experiences working on food security issues in our respective countries, we had enough of a history working together that network members



Fish catch of the day

were able to understand and willing to extend a helping hand to other network organizations that needed assistance. This was found to be very helpful because due to language difficulties, some members whose languages are similar were able to communicate effectively to members who were not familiar with some parts of the tactic.

Finally, SEACON members who were involved in this tactic had long been strong activists on trade related food issues, championing the rights of small scale food producers. Their strong local networks were critical to the implementation of the AFTA research project. Support services provided by local organizations and networks in chosen research areas included help in contacting people in the villages, offering initial information about the villages, as well as connecting us with households that could provide accommodations and security for the local field researchers.

3. CREDIBLE: In order to effectively use the information gathered from the research to advocate for specific policies in the region, we needed to ensure the integrity of the research process. The design, methodology, and research instruments were carefully selected and implemented to guarantee that the resulting data would provide accurate information about the situation of small scale food producers. Moreover, the respondents interviewed are small scale food producers who are very much affected by the trade liberalization process. This research carries their voices on how the trade liberalization process has affected them. For the research to be most powerful, however, attention to detail was necessary across all participating countries. As we took the research to our respective governments and other influential groups, we needed to be able to defend our research methods.

4. GENDER SENSITIVE: Both women and men participate actively in small scale food production throughout the region. In order to understand the diverse impacts of AFTA on men and women, we designed a research process that would bring forth the voices of all. Gender equality and empowerment is a major development issue, to which SEACON contributes. As a starting point, the research took into account gender



Discussion with Thai women farmers

issues in trade and agriculture. We also made sure women producers were represented as respondents and participants of focus group discussions and as key informants. Gender awareness orientation was also incorporated in the lead researchers' meetings and discussions. Information and analytical papers on gender, trade and agriculture were shared with our lead researchers to complement the orientation that was given to them.

Implementing the Tactic

I will now explain the steps we undertook to carry out the research on AFTA's effects on small scale food producers. These can broadly be placed in four categories: Preparations and Design, Implementation, Data Processing and Reporting, and Advocacy.

PREPARATIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN: FEBRUARY- JULY 2003

At the beginning of the process, SEACON council members from the seven Southeast Asian countries had a meeting to plan for the research process. The project research was divided into two groups whereby the main countries such as Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia would carry out primary and secondary data gathering on AFTA and its impact while countries such as Burma, Cambodia and Laos would exclusively focus on secondary data (i.e., print and electronic information sources).

Laos, Cambodia and Burma only conducted secondary research because they joined ASEAN at a later stage compared to other countries such as Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. Thus, the implementation of AFTA on agricultural products (lowering of tariff barriers) naturally began at a later stage too. SEACON felt that insufficient data would be gathered from these countries for the usage of this study using primary data collection as the impact of AFTA could not yet be experienced by the small scale food producers of these countries. While I will focus on the primary research work that was conducted, I want to also note that the secondary research enriched our findings, as well as provided us with information regarding national key figures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), economic growth and national policies. The secondary research information was gathered from reports, journals, periodicals, government publications, conference proceedings, books, and the Internet.

Defining Roles and Commodities

Our first task was to decide which commodities would be the focus of the research. Through our consultations, we determined that two commodities per country would be explored. Rice would be investigated in all countries, as it is the staple food for Southeast Asian people. The other commodity was decided by the council member coming from their respective countries, based on the importance of that commodity to them.

For example, other commodities included sugarcane, fish, and coffee.

Our next challenge was to clarify roles that SEACON and partner organizations would play in carrying out the tactic. The number of countries and organizations involved in this tactic added a layer of complexity to the process. As a result, it was critical that all participating organizations, including SEACON, have a shared understanding of their roles and how they would work together. A "Terms of Reference" document was drawn up with the supervisory organizations to ensure that the research was undertaken in a coordinated manner. The resulting memorandum of agreement reflected the clear roles for SEACON and network partner organizations.

SEACON's role as the regional coordinating body included:

- Supervising the work of each National Lead Researcher and ensuring that research work/activities are carried out on time and that outputs are submitted as scheduled. The task as the regional project coordinator was to ensure that this research was well coordinated since this research involved eight ASEAN countries covering Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines
- Providing the National Lead Researchers with logistical and technical support
- Financing the research and advocacy process
- Leading regional advocacy efforts.

The job responsibilities of SEACON's member partners involved:

- Supervising and providing support to the work of a National Lead Researcher who would implement the research work, and ensuring research activities were carried out on time and outputs were submitted as scheduled.
- Making available all relevant documents of past or related work their organizations had done on AFTA.
- Writing and editing the research outputs and reports, and leading in the presentation of progress reports and research results to SEACON.
- Coordinating regularly with the supervising organization regarding administrative and management concerns related to the conduct of the AFTA project and its activities.

With the roles clarified, a work plan was drawn up for all the countries incorporating overall objectives, results projected, outputs, and activities to be carried out based on a time line.

After the roles and logistics were defined, a research team was finalized. It was comprised:



AFTA research planning meeting

- A regional coordinator to coordinate the entire research
- A Research Manager from SEACON to assist in planning, implementing, carrying out and coordinating the entire research
- Eight country lead researchers to carry out and report on the research.

The regional team members and lead researchers were equipped with the academic and work experiences to implement the AFTA research project.

Training Lead Researchers

With the team finalized, a training session for lead researchers was held to discuss the research design, methodologies, key instruments and gender framework. Upon completion of the training session, the lead researchers were asked to field test the questionnaire with small scale farmers to obtain feedback on whether the questions in the questionnaire would be relevant for the respective countries conducting the primary survey.

The initial questionnaire was developed based on previous studies carried out on trade liberalization by other researchers as well as SEACON's own findings from our previous work, through our research coordinator, lead researchers, resource persons and print and electronic materials related to trade liberalization.

When the training was completed, field tests were carried out. Feedback provided from the lead researchers from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia indicated that the questionnaire had to be revised as it was taking too long to be accomplished with the farmers. Some questions were eliminated while others were revised to better capture the responses provided by the respondents. Lead researchers from the respective countries were also asked to add the secondary data areas which the regional coordinator felt were missing in their initial report to the SEACON Secretariat.

Prior to starting the implementation phase, SEACON's members also felt that a validation of the secondary



Meeting with Farmers in Vietnam (top) and Indonesia (lower)

data information gathered by the national lead researchers would be invaluable. A meeting was held January 9-12, 2004. Farmer leader representatives were invited to this meeting to discuss on-the-ground realities of small scale farmers in their respective ASEAN countries. A total of eight farmers from Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos participated in this follow up meeting in Kuala Lumpur for the first two days. These farmers shared their agricultural situation in the respective countries as well as talked about initiatives taken by farmers, government and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on supporting the agricultural landscape in their respective countries. The national lead researchers continued the meeting another two days to revise the research documents based on lead researchers' input as well as the farmers' input. Mock interviews were held during the session to determine the appropriateness of the questions and time period involved in completing the questionnaire. Work plans were revisited and revised based on a new time line.

JANUARY – MAY 2004: IMPLEMENTATION

The lead researchers along with their supervisory organizations carried out the research for countries that were conducting primary research. Field officers were employed to assist the lead researchers to implement the research *via* interviews, observations, focus group discussions, price gathering and case studies. The regional team visited these countries to monitor the progress of the research, clarify doubts, build capacities of member partners, provide support and assistance, and to ensure research objectives were met.

Field interviewers selected to administer the questionnaires were provided training in their respective countries by the National Lead Researchers. For example, short trainings for field interviewers were conducted in three branch offices of CAEV (SEACON member partner in Vietnam): Hanoi, Nha Trang and Ho Chi Minh cities. A total of fifteen CAEV staff members and collaborators were trained in research skills, as well as communication and observation skills to gather information about an object or event (i.e., availability and conditions of support infrastructure, such as farm to market roads).

In Malaysia, field interviewers or field officers were selected mainly based on their experience and knowledge related to conducting field interviews. The field officers were provided a one-day training session to understand the questions in the questionnaire, conduct a mock interview, and probe for information that is not easily obtained such as income and expenses of respondents. The field interviewers were also informed on the importance of good etiquette

National level data gathering on AFTA and its impact

Primary and secondary research—including interviews, observations, focus group discussions, price gathering and case studies:

- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Philippines
- Thailand
- Vietnam

Secondary research only—information gathered from reports, journals, periodicals, government publications, conference proceedings, books, and the Internet:

- Burma
- Cambodia
- Laos

during the interview process as not to jeopardize the image of ERA Consumer (SEACON partner organization in Malaysia).

As this process of participatory research is the heart of the tactic, I will describe how we accomplished each component of the research: interviews with producers and government officials, observations, focus group discussions, price gathering and case studies.

Interviews with Producers

The interview process in each country began with selecting participants. The local organizations chose communities based on previous work carried out with them. The primary target for interviews was small scale food producers, including farmers and fisherfolks. To offer an example of how we decided whom to interview, I'll share the criteria we outlined for interviews with farmers:

1. The farmer should have at least ten years of farming experience and be over the age of 30.
2. The total farm size is 3 hectares or below. (This includes the farm size of primary crop plus the farm size of other crops, as well as owned and leased land.)
3. The farmer receives 60% or more of his or her income from a major crop. If not, the farmer would be asked what they would consider their primary crop (For example, the farmer grows 42% rice and 51% sugarcane, thus the interviewer must ask the farmer which of the two, or more, crops is his or her primary crop?)
4. Researchers also needed to ensure that both men and women were represented in the AFTA study.

The task of identifying participants was accomplished in a number of ways. For example, in Vietnam, lead researchers sought the participation of a sufficient number of farmer leaders. 250 farmers were selected from Mekong River Delta, Red River Delta, Central Highland and North East South through the Systematic Random Sampling method. This would ensure the reliability of data.

Systematic Random Sampling is a method of selecting samples from a population for research purposes. It is a formula for determining who will make up the research respondents. The steps of a Systematic Random Sampling method include:

- Step I: Prepare a list of criteria for sample selection: gender, farm scale, source of income, age, and years of experience.
- Step II: Take the list of farmers in a research area (village, commune).
- Step III: Remove from the list all farmers who do not fit the criteria for selection.
- Step IV: Determine the number of cases in the population (N), such as the total number of potential respondents. Decide on the desired sample size (n). For this research, our desired number of respondents was 50 per place.
- Step V: Compute for the sampling interval (K) with the following formula:

$$K = \frac{N-O}{n} ; 20 = \frac{2000 - 1000}{50}$$

K: interval

N: Total numbers of cases in the population of research area.

O: Total cases who do not fit criteria for selection
n: desired sample size

For example, if the total number of farmers in the village is 2000, and 1000 do not fit with our criteria, our desired sample size (n) is 50, then the sampling interval (K) is equal to 20. [(2000 - 1000)/50]

Step VI: Determine the starting number—from 1 to K—randomly, that is through drawing of lots.

Step VII: Go back to the list of farmers. Begin with the randomly selected starting number. For instance if the starting number is 5, then start with the fifth name in the list. The fifth name shall be a respondent. Then select the other respondents by adding K to the fifth name. For example, if K is 20, then this means that the next respondent is the 25th name in the list. Again, add 20 to 25; hence, the third respondent is the 45th name in the list, and so on until the desired number of respondents is reached.

This random sampling process was not the only one used to identify participants for research interviews. In Malaysia, respondents were selected using a non-random sampling method. Representatives from ERA Consumer approached the farmer leaders of the respective villages and they identified potential respondents based on the criteria laid out in the questionnaire. The farmer and fisherfolk leaders then arranged the interviews. The leaders were approached because it is common practice in Malaysia to seek the permission of the farmers' and fisherfolks' leader when one seeks to carry out a survey or research in a village. This person is typically also the head of the village or has great influence over the villagers. With the assistance of the leaders, the rice farmers as well as the fisherfolks provided the field interviewers with good cooperation and feedback. The administered interviews were carried out in numerous places, including the farmers' paddy fields, fisherfolks' boats, along the shore or at their respective homes, depending on the convenience of the respondents.

Once respondents were selected, field researchers utilized the interview questionnaire to assist them in gathering the information or data needed for the AFTA study. Interviewers were urged to ask the questions as formulated to make sure there was consistency. Furthermore, to avoid leading the interviewees to answer in a particular way, they were asked to refrain from showing the coded answers that were in the questionnaire. This way, participants could answer the questions in their own way. Interviewers were allowed to ask for clarifications from respondents but refrained from asking leading questions.

| COUNTRY | TOTAL SAMPLE | TYPE OF RESPONDENTS | NO OF RESPONDENTS |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Indonesia | 233 | Rice farmers | 125 |
| | | Sugarcane farmers | 58 |
| | | Potato farmers | 50 |
| Malaysia | 256 | Rice farmers | 147 |
| | | Fisherfolks | 109 |
| Philippines | 297 | Rice farmers | 125 |
| | | Corn farmers | 119 |
| | | Fisherfolks | 53 |
| Thailand | 250 | Rice farmers | 175 |
| | | Soya bean farmers | 75 |
| Vietnam | 235 | Rice farmers | 97 |
| | | Coffee farmers | 48 |
| | | Corn farmers | 44 |
| | | Chashew farmers | 46 |
| TOTAL | 1271 | | |

The questionnaire covered a wide range of issues affecting small scale food producers, including demographic data, farm ownership information, scale and type of crop production, and use of pesticides, herbicides or new seed varieties including genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Producers were also asked about prices they receive for their crops, and how they are marketed. Critically, we also took time to allow producers to share the challenges they face as well as their suggestions for how these might be solved by government policies or other means. We also sought information regarding their knowledge of AFTA and its effects on their livelihoods. Over 60 questions long, the questionnaire provided key snapshots of who our region's small scale food producers are, and how they are dealing with the effects of economic globalization. In each respective country where the primary data was gathered, the number of respondents involved was 250 or more for a total of 1,271 for all five countries conducting primary research.

Interviews with Government Officials

Interviews were also carried out with government officials. We felt it was important to understand the government perspective on AFTA's impacts in the region. The identification of the number of government officials to be interviewed was left to the respective countries. For example, there were about 4 or 5 government officials interviewed in Malaysia. The targeted officials included (but were not limited to) trade and industry and agriculture officials, those from tariff commissions and economic and development planning who had been involved in trade negotiations, especially AFTA and WTO or who focused on AFTA or WTO. The information gathered in these interviews included:

- **The impact of AFTA on trade in manufactured goods and unprocessed agricultural products**

We sought information regarding which countries and industries benefited most or least from trade, and impacts on prices and demand for services such as shipping, financing and other areas.

- **Impact on agriculture and domestic support**

We requested information on how governments were taking action to help producers become more competitive or mitigate the adverse impacts of trade. We also asked about any changes in government subsidies resulting from AFTA.

- **Impact on investments and production structures**

We sought documentation on the government's investment policies and data on amounts and areas of

investments, including foreign direct investment, and any dislocation of workers resulting from restructuring. Foreign Direct Investment means direct investment in business operations in a foreign country. We also asked how ASEAN relates to other trading blocs and China.

- **Their views on the proposed ASEAN Food and Water Charter**

These questions were aimed at discerning government support for incorporating the Charter into national policies.

This series of interviews added to the richness of the research, by offering a national perspective on AFTA's differing impacts on various segments of society and the economy.

Focus Group Discussions

We decided to embark on various approaches to gather the data for this study as we wanted the data collection to be comprehensive in nature. One additional approach we used was the focus group discussion. Focus group discussions are directed conversations with a group of people on the research topic. While the subjects of these conversations were similar to the interviews, including access to credit, agricultural policies, and knowledge about AFTA, they allowed for the creation of more qualitative information regarding producers' opinions and analysis. The focus group discussions also allowed us to have separate discussions with men and women about gender and trade, including division of labor between sexes, access



Focus Group Discussions in Vietnam (above) and Indonesia (below)

to, and control of resources and markets, perceptions on trade and agricultural development policies, and consumption information.

By adopting these methods, we were able to gather a great deal of data which might have been lost if only one approach was adopted. Through these discussions, we learned that small scale farmers need support in adapting to new processing techniques and technologies as well as training in marketing. We also came to understand that water is a serious problem affecting farmers. Water is being privatized in some countries, hence further increasing the cost of production. Discussions with women farmers in Malaysia and the Philippines also revealed that they are engaging in cottage industries such as food processing to supplement their families' incomes and maintain sufficient food supplies.

Case Study

The purpose of the case studies was to gather qualitative data in relation to cost of production. It was difficult to gather this data from the interviews *per se* as it involved a lot of figures and respondents did not have much time to spare to go in depth on their production cost. Case studies were created for each primary crop in a village. One case study would be of an owner of the farm and another case study would

focus on a leaseholder or tenant. Areas addressed in the case study include:

- Seeds, fertilizers and chemicals- what do these inputs cost and how much are used?
- Hired labour- what tasks do they perform, and how much are they paid?
- Expenses – what costs are incurred for land preparation, taxes, tractor rentals, transportation, etc.?

EXAMPLE

| FINANCIAL CASE STUDY: FILIPINO RICE FARMER | |
|--|-----------------|
| <i>Expense Details</i> | <i>Cost</i> |
| Seeds and planting materials | \$27.27 |
| Fertilizers | \$37.81 |
| Chemicals (pesticides, fungicides, herbicides) | \$5.90 |
| Hired labor for planting and threshing | \$40.72 |
| Loan payments | \$14.54 |
| GROSS INCOME | \$189.05 |
| GROSS EXPENSES | \$126.24 |
| NET INCOME | \$62.81 |

Observations

In order to get a sense of what amenities were available in our research areas, lead researchers also observed and documented a number of key infrastructure needs that could improve or limit economic competitiveness:

- Number and type of primary and secondary roads
- Availability and distance of health clinics
- Number and type of schools
- Availability and type of electricity
- Availability of water

This provides a picture of differences across countries in potential obstacles to improving economic viability and market access by farmers and fisherfolks.

Price Monitoring

Finally, lead researchers gathered current price information on a wide range of food products (meat and fish, coffee and tea, noodles, rice, sugar, cooking oil, and fruits and vegetables) for 2004. Researchers also

Case Study in Observation: Thailand

| | Primary Roads | Secondary Roads | Clinics | Schools | Water | Electricity |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| Phoethong District, Anghong Province | Main roads are all paved with asphalt and run along an irrigation canal | Most secondary roads are concrete with a few laterite roads. | Every sub-district has a health station | | | All households use electricity supplied by the Provincial Electricity Authority |
| Bungnarang, Pichit Province | Main roads are concrete or paved with asphalt | Most secondary roads are concrete, but roads from the community to farmland are laterite. | There is a health station in a nearby village, about 4 kilometers away, and a private clinic | School in the community provides educational opportunities, teaching kindergarten to grade 3 of secondary education. There is a non-formal education school | In the community there is a large pond and irrigation system for agriculture and tap water for all households. However, some households keep rainwater for drinking | All households use electricity supplied by the Provincial Electricity Authority |
| Village Three, Supanburi Province | Main roads are all paved with asphalt | Most secondary roads are laterite with a few concrete roads | There is a health station in a nearby village, about 1 kilometer away | Schools are about 4 kilometers from the community, offering kindergarten through grade 6 of secondary education | There are several irrigation canals for agriculture and village tap water system for all households | All households use electricity supplied by the Provincial Electricity Authority |

gathered information on prices of listed food products from 1999 to 2003 to enable us to establish whether prices of listed food products had decreased, increased or remained stable. This data was also gathered from the federal marketing authority for agricultural produce and products of the respective countries. We were able to use this information to calculate the rate of increase (or decrease) in listed food products. For prices of fruits and vegetables, farmers were asked which three were most commonly consumed in their villages. This was the basis for choosing the specific fruits and vegetables to be included in our price monitoring.

MAY – DECEMBER 2004: DATA PROCESSING AND REPORTING

Lead researchers edited the completed questionnaires and performed quality checks to ensure that the questionnaires were answered correctly and logically. A database entry form in the format of MS Access software was provided by the SEACON Secretariat to

Data Processing Steps:

1. *Editing and Coding:* Ensuring all the questions are answered and all the skipping instructions are followed. It is then passed back to interviewers to recheck their work and fill in the missing answers by calling or visiting the farmers again. This is also where we standardized the answers so that the analysis could be done accordingly.
2. *Data Entry:* Using software to compile all the data.
3. *Data Cleaning:* After data is keyed in the MS Access form, the data is cleaned. Then the data is rechecked to ensure there are no errors. At this stage key-in errors will be rectified and if any serious errors remain then the data is deleted or rejected.
4. *Data Tabulation:* Data is tabulated based on the report format by the project coordinator. It can be in various chart forms, including pie charts, bar charts or tables, which can be used to illustrate research findings.

lead researchers for data entry purpose. The form was provided to ensure that data encoding is carried out uniformly across five countries. A code list was also provided to cater for questions in the questionnaires that had "other" as an optional answer as well as for open-ended questions. The purpose of the code list was to ensure that all the five countries conducting the primary research adhered to a common code list to avoid confusion and to be uniform. Once the data were encoded, the database was sent to the SEACON Secretariat and the data processing team for cleaning and processing. The data was cleaned and processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a statistical software program. The processed data were then sent back to the lead researchers for analysis and reporting. The lead researchers were provided with a detailed outline for the final research report in a narrative form.

At this stage, lead researchers presented their countries' research findings and the project coordinator presented on the regional findings. Discussion was

held to provide a platform for everyone to share their thoughts, insights, comments, suggestions and experiences in regards to the research findings and process. With this input, researchers finalized their reports for review by SEACON. The regional report was compiled based on the findings of the national reports. As a result of this process, we produced eight national reports and one regional report on the impact of AFTA on small scale food producers.

Results

Once we had processed all the data, we began to see a better picture of who our small scale food producers are, and how they are affected by AFTA.²

The various country experiences of regional integration under AFTA show that regional integration has both positive and negative impacts, winners and losers. Trade liberalization through AFTA and other trade agreements has created trade openings and expanded the market of goods and services. However, economic globalization did not automatically result in

Case Study Example:

Struggling to Adapt to Changing Times

I am 43 years old, married with four children who are all girls. I was in third year Agricultural Engineering in MV Gallego Foundation Colleges in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija in Northern Luzon, Philippines when I got married in 1984. Our family lives in Palayan, Nueva Ecija. The eldest of our children is 21 years old and is already married. The second, 19, is a high school graduate and presently works as a cashier in a nearby mall, the third, 17, completed a vocational course in electronics but works as a saleslady in a grocery store. Our youngest is 11 years old and will be in grade five this coming school year.

My grandfather greatly influenced my life. When I was still a young girl, he instilled in me a great love for the land. He used to tell me about the value of labor and the dignity of farming. He was invited to teach in a nearby school but to his words, he opted to continue farming. He got an award as "Best Farmer of the Year in the 1980s". I grew up with early memories of my grandfather so that I persevered in farming amidst all the challenges and difficulties.

My husband, now forty five years old, and I have been engaged in farming since we were married. Through the years, we have been tilling a three-hectare slopping and hilly land which is rain-fed. After years of campaigning together with our fellow farmers in our locality, the land was awarded to us through the government's Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) in 2000. I was then the president of a farmers' organization called United League of Farmers for Agriculture and Development (ULFAD). Aside from my organizational responsibilities, I am involved in the whole process of farming- from clearing and cleaning to digging, planting, watering, harvesting and marketing. Our farming style is very laborious. Once cleared, we dig the land manually with a hoe and plant the seeds.

Prior to 2003, we planted only onions, a commercial crop. Our farm production was capital intensive. During the planting season, we borrowed money either from the landbank or from middlemen who came to our place. Businessmen and women lent us money without interest with the agreement that they were to buy our produce at the prices dictated by them. Since transportation was very expensive, it was easier for us to sell our products to middlemen. Due to the great distance between the farm and market, we could not even transport our fruits to the town, thus those that we could not consume were left to rot. We bought our rice from the lower sitio. They could plant rice because they are near the river. They are able to utilize the river water for irrigation purposes.

Farmers do not usually compute their expenses as we are only interested to sell our produce during the harvest period in order to obtain the cash. However, when we started to compute our production expenses such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, labor and others, we were in a rude shock to discover that vegetable farming is a losing endeavor. It is even worse when prices became very low because of the entry of imported vegetables. Since our produce could not be sold, we had nothing to pay our debts.

We tried many approaches in an effort to improve our situation. For instance, instead of buying seeds, we planted the seeds of our products only to find out that our succeeding crops were very different from those yielded by the imported seeds. We lessened the fertilizer and pesticides but our plants were dwarfed and the pests multiplied. Some of us even observed that the more we used pesticides, the more the pests multiplied, hence making us think that commercial seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and pests must have been packaged together.

By participating in this study, we learned to compute our operation expenses and we were saddened by the findings that our high production expenses such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, labor and other costs have led to expensive produce. Consumers no longer want to buy our produce in our market as they prefer to buy cheaper imported produce.

—Small scale farmer

benefits as promised by the advocates of free trade.

In many cases, positive developments in macro economic indicators (e.g. higher foreign exchange earnings, expanded markets, more product choices) hide a parallel trend towards the social and economic dislocation and exclusion of millions of small scale farmers and fisherfolks, rural workers and their families.

The capacity to maximize the opportunities of expanded trade and investments brought about by AFTA and other trade liberalization measures depends on the level of development of ASEAN member countries. The reality is, among ASEAN countries, there is a huge development gap. Benefits of trade will accrue more to economies in the region (Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) with higher levels of industrialization and technological development. They already have widespread production and export linkages. For the poorer members (Laos, Cambodia and Burma), they have to undergo a process of adjustments that could be painful and long drawn out.

The results of the survey of small scale food producers in Southeast Asia showed how vulnerable this sector is when faced with stiffer competition with bigger sized farmers or agribusinesses located in or outside their countries. They are an ageing group with low educational attainment, few other skills, meager assets (small lands, few savings) and indebted as well as being largely unorganized, and therefore politically and economically able to wield little influence.

Our research found that small scale food producers are losing their land, jobs, and other means of production or control over their meagre resources. Many small scale food producers are becoming even more indebted. Many workers were forced to take on jobs under inhuman conditions and iniquitous terms (contractualization). All combined, the SEACON research demonstrated that the trade liberalization process in Southeast Asia has been one of the factors that has contributed to the worsening condition of many small scale food producers.

Returning Results to the Community

Given the participatory nature of this tactic, we felt it was critical to share the results of the research to the communities whom participated in this research. Different countries carried this out in a variety of

ways. Most SEACON partners organized meetings to share results with a variety of stakeholders, including farmers, fisherfolk, government officials and other non-governmental organizations. For example:

- Laos: The Sustainable Agriculture Forum (SAF) translated key materials on AFTA and shared the research results with influential government officials from the ASEAN Economic Cooperation of Foreign Trade Department of Ministry of Trade and, Planning and Investment Division of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.
- Malaysia: ERA Consumer carried out a popular educational materials workshop to share the findings of this research along with other World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements with the farmer respondents who participated in this study. WTO agreements were also shared during this workshop as other trade agreements were also affecting small scale farmers and fisherfolk. Once the workshop was done, we created a comic book describing WTO and three agreements associated with it.
- Indonesia: People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (KRKP) shared the findings regarding



Education workshop (above) and comic book (below), Malaysia

the impact of AFTA on small scale farmers in Indonesia with Parliament, key governmental Ministries, media groups, farmers and fisherfolk as well as civil society.

Prior to this sharing process, many farmers and fisherfolks were unaware of the implications of trade agreements on their livelihood and rights as producers but this tactic assisted them in realizing the adverse effects of their governments' decision to sign trade agreements on their behalf without consulting them first.

The sharing of the AFTA research findings from the lead researchers also enlightened them about other aspects of their production approaches. For example, many of them were not aware that they were facing a loss due to the high production cost. They never plan for the new season and are continuously in debt. The cost of production has increased due to increases in the cost of external inputs (i.e. fertilizer, pesticide) which the majority of farmers in Southeast Asia apply to their crops. They believe that the more they apply, the higher the crop yield will be, leading to a bigger harvest and thus, more money for them. Many have learned through this process that higher usage of external inputs onto the soil degrades the quality of the soil and hence reduces the quality of the crop as nutrients from the soil cannot be absorbed by the crops.

DECEMBER 2004 –DECEMBER 2005: ADVOCACY

With the research results in hand, embarked on the advocacy stage of our process. An AFTA advocacy meeting was held. Network members learned new approaches, and formulated general advocacy plans for national and regional levels. The meeting was also an opportunity to share the regional report with members, and gather recommendations and suggestions to enrich the national and regional reports and formulation of the ASEAN Food and Water Charter. Subsequently, revisions to the Charter as well as to reports were made.

Advocacy approaches have been used by SEACON at the regional level, but also by partner organizations at the national level.

Regional Advocacy

SEACON's early priority has been to share the AFTA research findings in various regional and international fora. The voices of grassroots are largely ignored when national agricultural policies are formulated. Hence, this research provided SEACON with an avenue to voice their concerns and that we can share with various stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental.



National Consultation in Vietnam – sharing of findings with various stakeholders

A Regional Conference entitled the “ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in a Changing Regional and Global Economy: Impacts and Prospects” was held in October 2005 in Kuala Lumpur. The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for the rural people, activists, policy makers, members of the academic community and other stakeholders to deliberate and discuss issues pertaining to AFTA and other trade agreements, food security and livelihood of small scale producers in the SEA region. Specifically the conference aimed to share and disseminate SEACON's AFTA research findings and to obtain inputs from various stakeholders in order to enrich the findings.

The findings of this research also strengthened SEACON's ability to work with like-minded groups to push for Right to Livelihood and Right to Food policies in the region. The ASEAN Food and Water Charter which promotes the principles of Food Sovereignty and Fair Trade in the SEA region is one tool that has been adjusted to reflect what we learned from small scale food producers in the region. This Charter embodies the principles of food sovereignty and security and fair trade in which SEACON hopes governments from the ASEAN region will adopt into their respective national agricultural policies in order for them to fulfill their commitments to the United Nations Millennium Goal One of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The ASEAN Food and Water Charter at its core would demand that governments adhere to the following principles:

- Food and Water are basic human rights

- Every citizen in South East Asia (SEA) should have access to an adequate supply of nutritious, safe, affordable and culturally acceptable food

The findings of this research have provided recommendations that are practical and applicable in the Vietnam rural agricultural situation.

—Government official, Vietnam



- Food should be produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable, safe for consumption and socially just
- The attainment of the right to food should not in any way compromise other human rights principles.

With thorough, credible documentation to support us, we are heightening our efforts to lobby governments to adopt this important ASEAN Food and Water Charter.

The ASEAN Food and Water Charter encompasses the rights based perspectives, i.e. right to sustainable livelihood, right to food, right of the people of Southeast Asia to determine their own food policies in order to increase food security. Additionally, this Charter highlights the importance of women in agriculture, the use and impact of agricultural chemicals and the focus of sustainable farming and fishing livelihoods. We are using the ASEAN Food and Water Charter as our lobbying tool at national, regional and international meetings, assemblies, conferences and other fora.

National Advocacy

National partner organizations have been utilizing the AFTA research to carry out a wide range of advocacy tactics to ensure the right to livelihoods among small scale food producers. The one advocacy approach that was carried out and would be carried out in all the countries was national consultations. Additional approaches vary by country. For example:

- **Vietnam:** The Center for Agriculture Extension (CAEV) and Vietnam Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (VIETHARRA) is working with banks, foreign and domestic investors, grassroots organizations and private and public entities to simplify efforts by local farmers to access credit to improve their viability.
- **Laos:** SAF and SEACON member Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED) in Laos organized a workshop with farmers, non-governmental and governmental organizations to strategize about how local seeds may be saved to counter the negative impacts decreasing genetic diversity in their crops.
- **Thailand:** Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) of Thailand is bringing the recommendations of farmers to key government officials and encouraging the sharing of experiences among farmers to develop production and marketing alternatives that support small scale farmers.
- **Philippines:** The Philippine Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (KAISAMPALAD) is engaging civil society and government agencies to enact more farmer-friendly policies such as encouraging citizens to support local products. In addition, Kaisampalad is developing indica-



Varieties of rice seeds in Laos

tors on the rights to food and health to monitor government compliance to its human rights obligations. As a direct result of their efforts, the Philippine legislature has decided to adopt some of the organization's agricultural policy proposals.

TACTICAL IMPACT

This tactic has had many impacts, both anticipated and unexpected. We are particularly proud of the empowering effect it has had on our network members and small scale food producers throughout the region. The small scale food producers who participated in this tactic possess a sense of ownership of this tactic. This is because the documentation process was carried out based on their inputs. These producers provided feedback and suggestions *via* interviews, focus group discussions and in return reports were written based on these inputs. The tactic also increased awareness and built community capacity to participate in the empowerment process to advocate for food security and sovereignty. The process of gathering information from small scale food producers inevitably led to self-realization among them on their existing situation.

Second, the tactic strengthened network members capacity in research and writing. SEACON members are now able to take what they learned through this tactical process to document other issues faced by the communities with which they work.



Rally for Trade Justice, Indonesia

Third, there is now a more comprehensive understanding of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agreement - both the regional team members and lead researchers have been able to gather a wealth of information and secondary data on the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agreement, especially on its implementation at the national level. Some of this data is already incorporated in the country reports. The challenge at this juncture is coming up with analytical papers and packaged in a popular manner for the use of the small scale food producers and civil society groups, not only to gain more knowledge on AFTA but to utilize these materials in moving forward our advocacy goals on policy reforms for the betterment of small scale food producers at the national and regional levels.

Finally, this tactic deepened existing working relationships within our network and fostered new partnerships with other regional networks and alliances that work on issues related to food security and sovereignty, and trade.

Replicating the Tactic: Challenges and Lessons Learned

We faced a number of challenges in carrying out this tactic. Hopefully, our process of learning will help others who would like to use a similar tactic at a regional scale.

CONSENSUS

With so many countries and individuals involved, it was very difficult to bring SEACON members to a consensus on the research design, methodology, key instruments, and so on. When working across countries and organizations, a lot of patience is required to ensure all participants are satisfied with the process.

LANGUAGE

English is not the first language in the countries from the Southeast Asia region. Communication has to be basic in nature and easily understood. If I were to repeat this tactic, I would probably station a bilingual personnel to carry out the tactic in countries where

English is not widely spoken such as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma. This would reduce the barriers to communication, allow the transfer of ideas and avoid confusion.

A job well done. Research of this scale should be carried out in other parts of the world (especially countries in the South) to collectively show the detrimental effects of trade liberalization on small scale farmers and fisherfolk.

— NGO respondent

Language differences also created difficulties for us in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was first developed in the English language and then translated into the respective countries languages. The process of translating the questionnaire into various other languages was very tedious because the structure of the questions needed to be understood well so that there would not be a variation in the meaning between the English set of questions with the translated ones.

IDENTIFYING CAUSE AND EFFECT

While our study raised many concerns about trade liberalization resulting from the AFTA agreement, Southeast Asian governments are also involved with other bilateral and international trade agreements. With so many different arrangements in play, we cannot be certain that AFTA was the unique cause of the impacts on small scale producers, or if the effects actually resulted from multiple trade agreements. However, we tried to focus our primary research in those countries with the most likely impacts from AFTA.

ADHERING TO THE TIME SCHEDULE

SEACON network members have to prioritize the work in their respective organizations. The researchers who were carrying out SEACON's research were typically also involved in various other programs for their organizations. It was difficult for them to prioritize the research work given all the other demands on their time. Adding to these difficulties, e-mail was the primary medium of communication used, resulting in a lack of face-to-face communication. Not knowing what the other party was thinking or doing was often a problem as we were not able to gauge whether network members and lead researchers understood what had been written and whether there was an action that followed suit. Sometimes e-mail messages were distorted and faulty, creating a delay in responses from network members, affecting work schedules and activities.

In replicating this tactic, I suggest follow up action with the respective network members' lead researchers *via* biweekly telephone calls to have a better sense of their progress in furthering the tactic.

ADAPTABLE LEAD RESEARCHERS AND FIELD OFFICERS

Hiring field officers to carry out the field work was tedious as the process of interviewing respondents involved someone who is able to adapt well to their respondents in order to receive an accurate picture of their respondents' situation. The field officers need to be provided with training on how to approach and talk to the target respondents.

COOPERATION

We needed to receive cooperation from respondents (small scale food producers). Small scale food producers from this region generally follow a tight schedule with regard to their work. The questionnaire that was developed by SEACON was very in depth. It took approximately an hour to complete each interview. Hence, some respondents were agitated and some thought this process was a waste of their time as hours away from their fields meant no income for the day!

VARIATION

It was very difficult to carry out a standardized research project among eight countries with limited or no variation. SEACON required standardization in order to carry out a comparison study among all countries involved in this research. In replicating this as a regional tactic, the project coordinator should make periodic visits to all countries to jump start the research in each country so as to provide a guideline on how to carry out the tactic uniformly across all eight countries.

The updating of the code list was strenuous as the respective countries had to provide the options to the Secretariat and the Secretariat developed a code for it. Some countries however did not adhere to this plan and this disrupted the process.

WRITING OF REPORTS

SEACON members had never been exposed to writing a comprehensive research report. As a result, SEACON Secretariat developed a common guideline to assist them. This guideline was also very useful because it provided report standardization and uniformity among all countries. Dummy graphs, charts and tables were also created by the Secretariat to further assist the writers in reporting. The lead researchers only needed to plug in the figures into the charts and provide an analysis of it.

DEVIATIONS IN WORK PLAN

Due to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak in 2003, work plans had to be revised and the completion of the tactic was delayed. SEACON's member partners across the region were also busy with their other organizational work and commitment that affected the running of this research. The data processing stage took a little longer to be completed because it involved crucial and tedious stages such

as performing logical checks to ensure that answers provided by the respondents were in relevant to the questions asked, developing a standardized code list and carrying out data entry which required focused attention in order to minimize errors.

Conclusion

Although ASEAN has been in existence since 1967, it is only over the last twelve years that Southeast Asian markets have been deeply integrated with the dismantling of trade barriers through regional, multilateral and bilateral trade agreements. Our findings have shown that small scale food producers in Southeast Asia are subsequently vulnerable as they face stiffer competition with large-scale farming or agribusinesses located in or outside their countries. While the impacts we saw in our study could have resulted from trade liberalization efforts unconnected to AFTA, it is clear that trade agreements in their current form have led to deteriorating conditions for many of our poorest farmers and fisherfolks who are increasingly indebted and politically marginalized.

Our tactic was implemented on a very large scale, coordinated across eight different countries. However, the tactic of participatory research could be used by any human rights organization engaged in advocacy work. It has important benefits for advocacy, bringing persuasive, credible information to bear on human rights issues. It also empowers local communities, connecting victims of human rights violations to the information they need to become active defenders of their rights and to develop creative solutions to human rights challenges. From our experience adapting this tactic in different societies and cultures throughout our region, participatory research has proven to be a widely transferable and powerful tool for change.

The SEACON Network

SEACON is governed by Regional Council with partners currently from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. These are drawn from large networks of organizations working on food security and trade matters. By being selected through a national process, they are accountable not only to their own organizations but also to a wider network in their respective countries.

The day-to-day activities are coordinated by an Executive Director with a lean secretariat currently based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The secretariat is scrutinized by the Executive Council. Evaluations of policies and activities are conducted every six months during council meetings.

Additionally, there are regional and international organizations who act as expert advisors on the council. At present the positions are filled by the following organizations:

- Focus on the Global South, Thailand
- Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific, Malaysia

THE NATIONAL NETWORKS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA ARE:

Vietnam

Vietnam Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas. (VIETHRRA)

- Vietnam Gardening Association (VACVINA)
- Center for Agriculture Extension (CAEV)

Philippines

Philippines NGO Liaison Committee for Food Security and Fair Trade

- Philippine Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (KAISAMPALAD)
- Partnership for Agrarian Reform And Rural Development Services

Indonesia

- Pesticide Action Network – Indonesia (PAN – I)
- Koalisi Rakyat Untuk Kedaulatan Pangan (KRKP)

Malaysia

Development of Human Resources in Rural Area Network Malaysia (DHRRRA Network, Malaysia)

- A-P Secretariat for Consumerism, Advocacy, Research and Education (APS-CARE)
- Education and Research Association for Consumers (ERA CONSUMER)

Laos

Sustainable Agriculture Forum (SAF)

- Deutcher Entwicklungsdienst (DED)
- Coordinator of SAF

Thailand

Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN)

- Foundation of Reclaiming Rural Agricultural and Food Sovereignty Action. (RRAFA)
- Coordinator of AAN

Cambodia

NGO forum on Cambodia

- Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC)
- Farmer Livelihood Development (FLD)

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