

Concept Note

WE LIVE FOOD in AVCS

(Women's Empowerment, Livelihood and Food in Agricultural Value Chains)

Background and Rationale

The COVID 19 pandemic has resulted to an unprecedented health, economic, and social crisis affecting the most vulnerable sectors of society. Women and men small scale producers in agricultural value chains, which include farmers, fishers, agricultural workers and indigenous people are among the most vulnerable sectors that have been affected by the pandemic. SMEs, corporate agribusinesses and social enterprises which engage these small producers in their supply chains have also experienced various levels of downturn, some more severely than others. Lockdowns and community quarantines affected production, processing, marketing channels and markets of various agricultural value chains. Seed to table social enterprise systems linking farmers and fishers with urban consumers of organic produce and healthy food were not spared as they experienced logistical nightmares.

The United Nations profoundly articulates the dire impact of the pandemic during the year that was intended to be groundbreaking for gender equality. 2020 is supposed to mark the 25th year of the Beijing Platform for Actionⁱ. But with the COVID 19 pandemic, even the limited gains made in the past decade are at risk of being rolled back. COVID19 is deepening pre-existing inequalities and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. With women in agriculture and agricultural value chains being largely invisible, unrecognized, underserved, undervalued and overburdened with unpaid care work even before the pandemic, their situation is even more dire today.

The UN concludes that “every COVID-19 response plan, and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, needs to address the gender impacts of this pandemic. This means: (1) including women and women’s organizations at the heart of the COVID-19 response; (2) transforming the inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone; and (3) designing socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls”.ⁱⁱ

The disruptions in agricultural value chains and global food systems profoundly exposed the vulnerability and overdependence of urban populations and rural communities to global markets. They demonstrated the importance of shorter food miles and local food systems that are founded on the resilience and sustainability of farming, fishing and small producer communities.

In Southeast Asia, governments are deeply concerned with the impacts of COVID-19 on ASEAN cooperation in food, agriculture and forestry and the disruption of the food (and non-food)



supply chain in the region. The ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry urged the ASEAN Member States (AMS) to implement necessary measures, projects and programs at the national level to meet the immediate food needs of the ASEAN population, particularly the vulnerable groups in society. Further, they highlighted the need to boost AMS' social protection programs for smallholder farmers, and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.ⁱⁱⁱ

The BTP WEE in AVCs as Inspiration to WE LIVE FOOD

Since 2015, the Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (ISEA), in partnership with Oxfam and the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok have been implementing a project entitled Gender transformative and Responsible Agricultural Investments in Southeast Asia (GRAISEA). From 2015-2017, and under the GRAISEA Project, ISEA led a study of best practices and inclusive businesses that had made a significant impact on the lives of women and men small scale producers in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand.^{iv} The agricultural value chains covered by the study were muscovado sugar and coffee in the Philippines; organic coconut sap sugar and green mussel in Indonesia; tea, ginger and gac in Vietnam; and organic fish and formalin-free sea food in Thailand. The study was conducted in partnership with the Center for Social Initiatives Promotion (CSIP) in Vietnam, Trubus Bina Swadaya and Yayasan Dompot Dhuafa in Indonesia and Change Fusion in Thailand. The study resulted to a set of Benchmarks for Transformational Partnerships and Women's Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains or BTP WEE in AVCs^v

These benchmarks are aspirational standards related to 8 elements shown in Figure 1. These 8 elements were synthesized as the critical success factors of agricultural value chain interventions that have created substantial impact on the lives and position of women and men small scale producers. Hence, these benchmarks raise the bar on how enterprises and other stakeholders in agricultural value chains (AVCs) could sustainably impact on the lives of small-scale producers, especially women, their households and their communities. They are, collectively, a pathway to sustainability as these benchmarks are meant to provide guideposts among enterprises and other stakeholders in AVCs who aspire to make a meaningful contribution to the achievement of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.^{vi}

From 2018-2019, under the GRAISEA Project and with additional assistance from the Japan Foundation Asia Center (JFAC), ISEA and its partners developed Scorecards that could be used by Agricultural Value Chain Interventions, SMEs and Social Enterprises as well as Corporate Agribusinesses as learning, evaluation and planning tools to improve their practice in relation to the 8 elements of the benchmarks.

In 2019, ISEA also used the benchmarks as framework for assisting the subsector action research and strategic planning process of stakeholders for scaling up the impact of a selected biodiversity-friendly enterprise (BDFE) initiative in the abaca subsector in Eastern Samar, Philippines^{vii} with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Global Environment Facility (GEF) SGP5 and the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. This collaborative project also resulted to a Handbook

on Strategic Planning for Scaling Up Biodiversity Friendly Enterprise (BDFE) Initiatives that is in the process of being published by the UNDP GEF.

Figure 1:

BENCHMARKS for TRANSFORMATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS and WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE) in AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS (AVCs)



In November 2019, a seminar-workshop was convened by ISEA in Jakarta, Indonesia to engage and orient a pool of experts from selected countries (Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia) on the benchmarks as well as the tools and modules for assisting social enterprises, small and medium enterprises and corporate agribusinesses to improve their practice in AVCs. The tools and modules were integrated into a set of services dubbed WEE TRAIN^{viii} Package of Services. Seven SMEs, social enterprises and corporate agribusinesses were in the process of being identified in the countries covered to serve as partners in piloting the delivery of the WEE TRAIN Package of Services. By early 2020, the scorecards were also in the process of being finalized, with the Scorecard for AVC Interventions and the Scorecard for SMEs being translated into 2 languages each (Bahasa and Vietnamese for the SME Scorecard; Filipino and Thai for the SAVC Intervention Scorecard) for wider promotion.

ISEA also started a process of engaging government stakeholders on the BTP WEE in AVCs as a set of guidelines for AVC programs supported by or implemented by governments to more substantively contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. One track that was being developed was engaging ASEAN to enshrine a set of Guidelines for Transformational Partnerships and Women's Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains. ISEA was all set and was preparing to co-convene with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) a pre-event to the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable

Development. Here, a Multi Stakeholder Platform on Sustainable Livelihoods and WEE that would promote the BTP WEE in AVCs to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs among AVC stakeholders was to be launched.

The COVID19 pandemic disrupted all these. As the COVID19 pandemic unfolded, plans for piloting the scorecards were temporarily put aside as partner organizations adjusted their operations and got engaged in various initiatives to respond to its dire effects. Plans for undertaking the policy research and ASEAN engagements to explore the pursuit of a set of ASEAN Guidelines on Transformational Partnerships and Women's Economic Empowerment also took a back seat.

It was in June-July 2020 that ISEA and its partners were able to craft and start implementation of a re-entry strategy. Here, necessary adjustments in plans were made to be more responsive in engaging SMEs, corporate agribusinesses and social enterprises as well as governments in ASEAN and beyond in the promotion of the BTP WEE in AVCs.

The BTP WEE in AVCs gives importance to food security, resilience, sustainability and empowerment of women and men small scale producers, themes that have emerged as more critical than ever in agricultural value chain interventions in the aftermath of COVID19. ISEA considers the benchmarks as especially relevant in introducing a framework towards leaving no one behind in recovery efforts and building back fairer. But adjustments are being made to ensure that these themes are more adequately reflected in the Scorecards, the WEE TRAIN package of services and the evolving ASEAN Guidelines for Transformational Partnerships and Women's Economic Empowerment. At the same time, operational adjustment towards assisting AVC stakeholders in inclusive recovery planning have been put in place.

With these as backdrop, the WE LIVE FOOD, a Multi Stakeholder Platform on Women's Empowerment, Livelihood and Food in Agricultural Value Chains is being advanced as the new face of the initiative. This shall be launched during the Social Enterprise Advocacy and Leveraging (SEAL) Conference on September 16-17, 2020. The platform hopes to engage AVC stakeholders in inclusive recovery initiatives and promote the BTP WEE in AVCs as framework for building back fairer in ASEAN and beyond.

WE LIVE FOOD Concept and Objectives

WE LIVE FOOD, the Multi Stakeholder Platform on Women's Empowerment, Livelihoods and Food in AVCs shall consolidate and build on the gains of the initiative in Southeast Asia towards creating a movement to promote and enable inclusive recovery and the practice of the BTP WEE in AVCs. This is geared towards optimizing the contributions of AVC stakeholders in ensuring that no one is left behind in building back fairer and achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific. The platform has a direct contribution to promoting partnerships among stakeholders of agricultural value chains to contribute to the 9 SDGs relevant to pandemic recovery: no poverty; zero hunger; health and well-being; decent work and inclusive economic growth; reduced inequality specially addressing the rich-poor gap and gender equality; responsible

consumption and production; climate action; peace justice and strong institutions; and partnership for the goals.

WE LIVE FOOD shall have the following objectives:

- To serve as a platform for learning exchange and building a community of practice around inclusive recovery and the BTP WEE in AVCs towards building back fairer.
- To serve as cooperation platform among AVC stakeholders to synergize and project their collaborative impact in achieving inclusive recovery and practicing the BTP WEE in AVCs towards building back fairer and contributing to the 9 SDGs relevant to pandemic recovery
- To serve as collaborative platform among AVC stakeholders to develop and advocate changes in government policy and programs that promote inclusive recovery and enable or incentivize the practice of the BTP WEE in AVCs in ASEAN, ASEAN Member States and beyond
- To serve as collaborative platform among AVC stakeholders to develop partnerships and generate resources and support from the business sector, financial institutions, social investors, national governments and multilateral agencies to sustain and broaden the outreach and impact of the platform as a means of implementation for the achievement of the 9 SDGs relevant to pandemic recovery.

WE LIVE FOOD Outputs and Initial Milestones

Alignment of Tools towards Inclusive Recovery and Building Back Fairer

The period from June-mid September 2020 shall mark the completion of the review of all the tools and communication materials developed prior to the COVID19 pandemic to ensure their alignment to the refocusing of the platform from a Social Entrepreneurship Platform Accelerating the SDGs to a Multi Stakeholder Platform promoting inclusive recovery and building back fairer towards contributing to the 9 SDG goals linked to pandemic recovery.

Launch of WE LIVE FOOD

WE LIVE FOOD shall be launched during the Third Social Enterprise Advocacy and Leveraging (SEAL) Conference co-convened by ISEA and the UNESCAP with the support of Japan Foundation Asia Center, Oxfam and the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok through the GRAISEA Project. WE LIVE FOOD is the first and the most advanced of the five Platforms to be presented at the SEAL Conference carrying the theme “Social Entrepreneurship and Cross Sectoral Collaboration: Ensuring the Recovery of Social Enterprises towards Leaving No One Behind in Building Back Better and Achieving Sustainable Development”. Other cooperating organizations are the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, Social Value Japan, the Asia South Pacific Bureau for Adult Education and the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism Social and Community Enterprise Constituency. Eco-business shall serve as media partner for the launch.

A highlight of the launch shall be the re-launch of the ISEA website with a webpage dedicated to WE LIVE FOOD. The tools and communication materials intended to generate interest and participation of AVC stakeholders in WE LIVE FOOD shall be uploaded publicly for the first time.

WE LIVE FOOD Initial Plan of Action

1. Inclusive Recovery in AVCs
 - 1.1. Assist selected social enterprises, SMEs and corporates in AVCs to evaluate the impact of COVID19 on the women and men small scale producers in their respective supply chains and provide assistance for inclusive recovery planning.
 - 1.2. Promote efforts towards inclusive recovery initiatives in agricultural value chains to ensure women and men small producers are not left behind with SMEs, corporate agribusinesses, governments and multilateral agencies.
 - 1.3. Co-create with the Decent Work for All in Sustainable Value Chains Platform a Social Enterprise Recovery Program and Fund that would assist social enterprises as critical stakeholders in the recovery of women and men small scale producers in agricultural value chains. Explore and build on the Made 51 Model of UNHCR as a potential starting point for a cross sectoral collaborative endeavor in pursuit of a Social Enterprise Recovery Program and Fund at the regional level, with a possible pilot at the country level in the Philippines.
 - 1.4. Document and promote best practices around inclusive recovery initiatives being undertaken by social enterprises, SMEs, corporate agribusinesses and governments in agricultural value chains, consistent with WE LIVE FOOD aspirations.

2. Learning exchange and building a Community of Practice (COP)
 - 2.1. Complete the piloting initiatives to test/refine the BTP WEE in AVCs Scorecards and the WEE TRAIN Package of Services with SMEs, SEs, corporate agribusinesses and multi-stakeholder AVC Interventions in ASEAN and beyond.
 - 2.2. Develop relevant learning and communication materials to introduce the BTP WEE in AVCs and WE LIVE FOOD to various audiences in ASEAN and beyond.
 - 2.3. Organize orientation and learning sessions on the BTP WEE in AVCs and WE LIVE FOOD in ASEAN and beyond.
 - 2.4. Optimize the WE LIVE FOOD webpage as a venue for learning exchange among AVC stakeholders.
 - 2.5. Co-develop with ISEA and IDEACORP the ICT infrastructure for learning exchange that is needed to effectively support WE LIVE FOOD.
 - 2.6. Organize the COP on the BTP WEE in AVCs in ASEAN and beyond.

3. M&E and projection of collective impact
 - 3.1. Develop a monitoring and evaluation system for measuring and reporting progress of WE LIVE FOOD initiatives using the Scorecards and the 9 SDGs related to pandemic recovery.

- 3.2. Co-create with ISEA and IDEACORP the ICT infrastructure for monitoring, evaluation and projection of collective impact of WE LIVE FOOD.
4. Engaging governments
 - 3.1. Asia-Pacific Level
 - 3.1.1. Engage UNESCAP and other multilateral agencies in efforts to develop a Social Enterprise Recovery Fund and Program for social enterprises and the women and men small scale producers they serve
 - 3.1.2. Work with relevant multilateral agencies to enable and capacitate governments to enshrine enabling policies incentivizing the practice of the BTP WEE in AVCs in Asia-Pacific.
 - 3.2. ASEAN Level:
 - 3.2.1. Lobby for the adoption of a set of ASEAN Guidelines for Transformational Partnerships and WEE (GTP WEE) in AVCs.
 - 3.2.2. Develop and launch the policy paper promoting the GTP WEE in AVCs during a learning event timed with the ASEAN Summit on November 11-15, 2020.
 - 3.2.3. Hold an ASEAN Multi-Stakeholder Conference on WE LIVE FOOD featuring the SMEs/SEs and corporate agribusinesses that piloted the use of the BTP WEE in AVCs and engagements with ASEAN and ASEAN Member States to incentivize or enable its practice
 - 3.3. At the Country Level:
 - 3.2.1. Engage with relevant National Government Agencies to promote inclusive recovery in AVCs in the short term and to mainstream the BTP WEE in AVCs and the GTP WEE in AVCs in the medium to long term.
 - 3.2.2. In the Philippines: Engage with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to support inclusive recovery initiatives in AVCs in partnership with social enterprises. Introduce the BTP WEE in AVCs in a course officially offered by the Agricultural Training Institute to orient and capacitate Department of Agriculture or DA stakeholders on the BTP WEE in AVCs framework and tools. Use the BTP WEE in AVCs as framework in collaborative programs with the DA in AVC development, with pilot initiatives in the coffee and abaca subsectors. Engage the UNDP GEF SGP7 to replicate the use of the BTP WEE in AVCs in assisting the scaling up of biodiversity-friendly enterprises in the Philippines and beyond.
 - 3.2.3. Identify potential initiatives for engaging the Indonesian and Vietnamese governments in promoting inclusive recovery in AVCs and in mainstreaming the BTP WEE in AVCs and the GTP WEE in AVCs.
 4. Cross-sectoral collaboration and mobilizing partnerships/resources
 - 4.1. Pursue collaboration with GROW Asia, OECD, UNESCAP and other relevant multilateral agencies, platforms and strategic organizations/initiatives to promote the BTP WEE in AVCs and WE LIVE FOOD in AVCs

4.2.Pursue resource mobilization and partnership building to sustain and broaden participation and support for WE LIVE FOOD in ASEAN and other sub-regions in Asia-Pacific (e.g. South Asia, Pacific).

WE LIVE FOOD Stakeholders and Organization

WE LIVE FOOD is open to all AVC stakeholders from various sectors who are interested to learn, practice, support, promote and enable the BTP WEE in AVCs as an operational framework for leaving no one behind towards building back better and contributing to the achievement of the 9 goals related to pandemic recovery.

AVC stakeholders who are looking for a systematic way of improving their practice and creating greater impact in transforming the lives and position of small-scale producers, especially women in AVCs shall form the core stakeholders of the MSP.

Stakeholders shall be classified into the following:

Partner-Practitioners: Enterprises operating in AVCs, whether they are SMEs, corporate agribusinesses and intermediary or small producer-based social enterprises including cooperatives, small producer and women's associations, who are willing to adopt and practice the BTP WEE in AVCs as a framework for improving their practice and increasing the depth and scale of their impact through cross sectoral collaboration

Partner-Enablers: Resource and policy-making institutions, whether government or non-government/private in nature who are willing and/or engaged in efforts to contribute to enabling the practice of the BTP WEE in AVCs; supporting the adoption by governments of the GTP WEE in AVCs; building an ecosystem or developing a program/project incentivizing the practice of the BTP WEE in AVCs

Partner-Advocates: Civil society, business or government organizations who believe and support the promotion of the BTP WEE in AVCs, who may not be practitioners or enablers in any AVC intervention, but would like to assist in networking, partnership building or advocacy

An Organizing Committee for the MSP is composed of a Convenor and 2 Co-Convenors and Key Stakeholders. The MSP Organizing Committee is mainly composed of the organizations that initiated the research and development of the benchmarks and the tools promoting the benchmarks; practitioner-champions who were the case subjects of the research that inspired the benchmarks; resource institutions that are facilitating piloting processes with SMEs/SEs and corporations; organizations engaging governments, social investors and civil society organizations to support WEW LIVE FOOD and its objectives; and partner-practitioners who have agreed to serve as pilot enterprises in adopting the BTP WEE in AVCs or are organizations committed to utilize the BTP WEE in AVCs as framework for their efforts to recover and build back fairer in specific agricultural value chains.

The Organizing Committee is composed of the following:

Convener: Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (regional organization)

Co-Convener: Trubus Bina Swadaya (Indonesia)

Co-Convener: Center for Social Initiatives Promotion (Vietnam)

Key Stakeholders:

- Yayasan Dompot Dhuafa (Indonesia)
- Bote Central / Philippine Coffee Alliance (Philippines)
- Alter Trade Foundation (Philippines)
- Negros Organic and Fair Trade Association (Philippines)
- Gandang Kalikasan/Human Nature (Philippines)
- Philippine Business for Social Progress (Philippines)
- Green Net (Thailand)
- Change Fusion (Thailand)
- Dhan Foundation (India)
- Oxfam (international organization)

In one year's time, the Organizing Committee shall pave the way to the setting up of a collaborative MSP Structure composed of a Multi-Stakeholder Convenor's Group representing AVC stakeholders from the following:

- National Government Agencies
- Multilateral Agencies
- Corporate Agribusiness
- SMEs
- Civil Society
- Social Investors
- 2 Intermediary Social Enterprises, with at least one woman-led
- 2 Community-based Social Enterprises, with at least one woman-led
- Farmers, Fishers Cooperatives or Small Producers' Organizations
- All-Women Agricultural Cooperatives or Small Producers Organizations
- Women-led Cooperatives or Small Producers Organizations

The aforementioned composition of the Multi-stakeholder Convenor's Group for WE LIVE FOOD intends to provide a strong voice to women and men small scale producers in the governance of the MSP and in dialogues on the BTP WEE in AVCs, the GTP WEE in AVCs and critical issues related to inclusive recovery, building back fairer and contributing to the achievement of the 9 SDGs linked to pandemic recovery.

A Community of Practice shall be established and Working Groups shall be set up to pursue specific projects or initiatives.

A joint structure that has been established in collaboration with the Decent Work for All in Sustainable Value Chains Platform is a Working Group on the Social Enterprise Recovery Fund (SERF), intended to assist social enterprises and the poor they serve in their recovery process. The Working Group for SERF is co-chaired by Alter Trade Foundation Inc (ATFI) and the World Fair Trade Organization-Asia.

The WE LIVE FOOD Organizing Committee shall convene every six months to plan, synergize efforts and make major decisions on the platform. The three Co-Conveners shall take turns presiding over the Organizing Committee. Implementation of initiatives shall be decentralized with ISEA providing secretariat services.

ⁱ Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women (United Nations, 2020)

ⁱⁱ Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women (United Nations, 2020)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://asean.org/asean-pledges-ensure-food-security-covid-19-outbreak/>

^{iv} The 8 cases studied were Alter Trade Foundation Inc/Negros Organic Fair Trade Association and Bote Central/Philippine Coffee Alliance in the Philippines; KSU Jatirogo and P.T. Karya Masyarakat Mandiri or KMM/ISM Sinar Abadi Cooperative in Indonesia; HITEACO and Dragon Vietnam Investment Company or DVIC in Vietnam; and Lemon Farm Cooperative/Fisherfolk Enterprise and GreenNet Cooperative/Earth Net Foundation in Thailand.

^v A Pathway to Sustainability: Benchmarks for Transformational Partnerships and Women's Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains (ISEA, 2019); Social Enterprises and Agricultural Value Chains in Southeast Asia (Dacanay, 2019)

^{vi} The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015)

^{vii} The biodiversity friendly enterprise (BDFE) initiative was led by the Eastern Visayas Partnership for Rural Development and the Central Farmers' Association, a federation of women and men abaca producer in Eastern Samar.

^{viii} WEE TRAIN stands for Women's Economic Empowerment Transformational Initiatives (WEE TRAIN). WEE TRAIN in AVCs is the sub-project that ISEA is implementing under GRAISEA2.