

Workshop report: “Collective labelling – shared vision and private sector engagement”, Hanoi,  
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## Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations

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EbA	Ecosystem-based adaptation
FFF	Forest and Farm Facility
FFPOs	Forest and farm producer organisations
PGS	Participatory Guarantee System
VOAA	Vietnamese Organic Agriculture Association

## 1. Discussion questions related to five FFPO product chains

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**Objective:** At least five discussions between forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) and potential buyers have been completed and at least five partnership opportunities identified around ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) market claims.

### **Discussion questions:**

- What EbA principles are connected to this value chain?
- What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for the objectives and goals for a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) label based on EbA principles for this value chain?
- What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS for this value chain?
- Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new label?
- How would you ensure transparency and trust around the new label for all stakeholders?
- How would you ensure horizontality (ie collective responsibility) in the new labelling initiative?

## 2. Discussion results

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The following sections present the results of discussions held during an FFPO workshop organised in the context of the project Scaling up Community-led EbA in Biodiverse Forest Landscapes in Viet Nam on 22 May 2024, in Hanoi, Viet Nam. The aim of the workshop was for FFPO/cooperative representatives from five northern provinces of Viet Nam to develop a shared vision for collective labelling approaches using EbA standards for five selected value chains. During the workshop, a dialogue with potential buyers of collectively labelled products offered further insights into the development of ideas for collective labelling.

## **2.1 Bamboo value chain in forested landscapes**

### **2.1.1. What are EbA principles connected to this value chain?**

The cooperatives participating in the workshop and engaged in the bamboo value chain will employ forest protection and natural ecosystem-management methods without overexploitation, ensuring sustainable bamboo-shoot harvesting.

In Thai Nguyen province, FFPOs have created contour lines to prevent erosion and cultivate a variety of crops (such as doi trees) alongside bamboo, paying attention to planting large timber trees (such as doi and lat trees on hilltops). Additionally, they enhance soil moisture by mulching around the bamboo roots and applying organic fertiliser. They leverage the local knowledge of the Hmong people to process bamboo shoots to be crisp and white without using harmful chemicals. Furthermore, they invest in machinery for drying and packaging bamboo shoots to maintain their quality.

### **2.1.2. What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

The cooperatives would like consumers to know about their high-quality bamboo shoot products that are produced and processed with the assurance of a PGS label.

### **2.1.3. What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

- Expand multilayered ecological and organic production.
- Avoid planting crops in parallel rows
- Refrain from using harmful chemicals
- Do not burn plant residues after harvest.

### **2.1.4. Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new label?**

Local authorities and production and business partners need to ensure product quality and clear origin, along with obtaining product certification.

### **2.1.5. How would you ensure transparency and trust around the new PGS label for all stakeholders?**

The solution is to establish an internal inspection team to regularly monitor and supervise each other, ensuring comprehensive logging in the planted forest. Additionally, implementing source traceability labels is essential.

### **2.1.6. How would you ensure horizontality (collective responsibility) in the new PGS labelling initiative?**

- Adhere to the cooperative's regulations and production processes.
- Rigorously implement the terms of contracts signed with partners.

## **2.2 Honey value chain in forested landscapes**

### **2.2.1. What are EbA principles connected to this value chain?**

Bees assist in pollinating fruit trees and forestry trees. Naturally raised bees from the forest produce high-quality honey. However, honey production depends on the amount of forest flowers. Locals utilise Indigenous knowledge to attract bees from natural forests. They preserve and cultivate native plants to increase the source of flowers for bees.

### **2.2.2. What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

The aspiration is for effective integration and business operations. There is a desire for high-quality products to be certified under an ecological PGS label and to sell them at high prices.

### **2.2.3. What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

The cooperative aims for sustainable production, avoiding deforestation and preserving ecological diversity. They will refrain from employing child labour and ensure the participation of women and youth. Additionally, they will incorporate information and communications technologies (ICTs) to promote and develop their products.

#### **2.2.4. Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new PGS label?**

- Involved parties such as production households need management by the FFPO to become part of the PGS system and create products. Businesses and cooperatives need to collaborate to collectively market their PGS-labelled products.
- Scientists are needed to provide technical support and enhance product quality for honey.
- Government and departments need to participate in supervising the management and promotion of PGS and EbA-labelled products.

#### **2.2.5. How would you ensure transparency and trust around the new PGS label for all stakeholders?**

Transparency and trustworthiness are ensured through product labelling with a QR code and source traceability.

#### **2.2.6. How would you ensure horizontality (collective responsibility) in the new PGS labelling initiative?**

Sharing learning among members of the cooperatives to create quality products.

### **2.3 Herbal value chain in forested landscapes**

#### **2.3.1. What are EbA principles connected to this value chain?**

Planting medicinal plants and utilising organic fertiliser sources beneath the forest canopy.

Avoiding the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides with harmful chemical ingredients.

#### **2.3.2. What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

Having commitment to quality, sustainability and market expectations. The shared vision of all FFPOs participating in the workshop and working under this value chain is that:

*We share the desire for products to be certified PGS and EbA. We aim to enhance product quality and ensure standards for export. We also hope for continuous improvements in packaging according to market demands.*

### **2.3.3. What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

- Protecting the health of the soil and the ecosystem.
- Not using non-organic fertiliser and ensuring the safety of soil and water, as well as human health.
- Aspiring to improve product quality.

### **2.3.4. Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new PGS label?**

Stakeholders such as scientists, businesses and local authorities.

### **2.3.5. How would you ensure horizontality (collective responsibility) in the new PGS labelling initiative?**

The cooperative aims for centralised production, with all members adhering to the production process geared towards enhancing product quality. The cooperative needs to establish regulations to require members to comply with these guidelines. There should be a strong linkage between members, businesses and other partners, ensuring product quality and adherence to contractual agreements.

## **2.4 Fruit value chain in forested landscapes**

### **2.4.1. What are EbA principles connected to this value chain?**

Cooperatives hope to increase the organic production area and the number of members. Members need to commit to producing according to the cooperative's regulations to ensure products are brought to the market.

### **2.4.2. What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

We aim to enhance product quality and ensure standards for export. We also hope for continuous improvements in packaging according to market demands.

#### **2.4.3. What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

The cooperatives recognise the need to reduce waste in the production process by refraining from using non-biodegradable chemicals, avoiding parallel planting, and implementing an organic farming process within a specific area.

#### **2.4.4. Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new PGS label?**

The participation of four key stakeholders is necessary: farmers, businesses, scientists and government.

#### **2.4.5. How would you ensure transparency and trust around the new PGS label for all stakeholders?**

To ensure transparency, monitoring and supervision are necessary, along with the implementation of source traceability labels for the products.

#### **2.4.6. How would you ensure horizontality (collective responsibility) in the new PGS labelling initiative?**

Establishing regulations for equality in the production process and in commerce.

### **2.5 Vegetable value chain in forested landscapes**

#### **2.5.1. What are EbA principles connected to this value chain?**

- Protecting land and water sources.
- Planting companion flowers to protect beneficial predators for conservation purposes and cultivating large trees to establish natural ecosystems.
- Using Indigenous seeds/plants and high-quality, high-yield seeds.

### **2.5.2. What could be a shared vision and guiding principles for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

Members aspire to enhance the value and quality of products to increase product consumption and competitiveness in the market.

### **2.5.3. What could be the standards for an EbA-based PGS label for this value chain?**

FFPO members use organic fertilisers and composted manure instead of chemical fertilisers. Excess crop residues after harvesting are converted into organic compost. Members avoid using synthetic pesticides and incorporate biological products such as ginger, garlic, chili and alcohol for pest and disease control. Members will not intercrop two types of vegetables in the same area that are certified under the Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices (VietGAP) system and organic standards. Soil and water samples should be regularly monitored for timely treatment.

### **2.5.4. Who are the stakeholders and how would you organise their participation around this new label?**

It is necessary to involve local government and sociopolitical organisations along with business partners to enhance product quality and ensure clear origin. Additionally, obtaining product certification is crucial for market entry.

### **2.5.5. How would you ensure transparency and trust around the new PGS label for all stakeholders?**

Establishing an internal monitoring inspection team to regularly inspect each other and keep field notes. Having traceability labels on products to ensure consumer trust.

### **2.5.6. How would you ensure horizontality (collective responsibility) in the new PGS labelling initiative?**

Frequently exchanging guidance for members to collectively follow the common production process.

### 3. Opinions of businesses and organisations supporting farmers

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The following are the opinions of business representatives who were present at the plenary session.

#### 3.1 Comments from BigGreen Enterprise

BigGreen is a well-known ‘clean’ food retailer in Hanoi, Vietnam, known for its ethical business practices and focus on clean food sourcing. The representative’s comments included:

- We have been cooperating with the Safe Vegetable Cooperative for 13 years, trading their vegetables.<sup>1</sup> We have found the quality of the vegetables to be consistently good.
- Mr Hung, leader of BigGreen Enterprise: “Although a small enterprise, we are committed and responsible in accompanying farmers throughout the process of value chain.”
- The products that the project is promoting are those that BigGreen is interested in, but there is a need for product refinement. Many products are still raw and may need packaging. However, the products need to have origins, safety standards and eye-catching packaging to show that the products have been produced humanely and sustainably under the forest canopy.
- In terms of quality and safety, I find them satisfactory. However, the appearance of these products and marketing them are crucial.
- As an agricultural engineer, I have traveled to many regions of Vietnam, but this is the first time I have seen some of the products in this workshop. Perhaps marketing for these agricultural products is lacking.
- I hope to establish connections between BigGreen and farms, cooperatives and localities with sustainably sourced products.
- We strive for over 90% of our retail products to be organic. If any product is organic or undergoing organic conversion, BigGreen requests to be connected with it for retail sale. If there is a large-enough quantity, BigGreen will sell the product wholesale.

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<sup>1</sup> BigGreen is a well-known ‘clean’ food retailer in Hanoi, Vietnam, known for its ethical business practices and focus on clean food sourcing.

- If the organising committee allows, BigGreen will provide marketing support through the BigGreen system to promote and introduce the products.

### 3.2 Comments from Bac Tom Enterprise

Bac Tom Enterprise is a retail chain of ‘clean’ food stores that promotes sustainable agriculture and aims to improve the livelihoods of farmers by providing a market for their products.

Representative Tran Manh Chien’s comments included:

- The most important thing when meeting someone is their name – a first impression.
- When developing products, ensure that the essence of the name is preserved, maintaining the sustainable nature of the forest or farm.
- I have also connected with some cooperatives, for example, Mr Sy’s chicken cooperative, which has many innovative ideas for product development, creating uniqueness for their products, linked to the forest and farm.
- As workshop participant Ms Xuan mentioned, we need to detail specific standards so that we can implement them effectively.
- We see a high market demand, but we have not met it yet. The purchasing power of the market is significant, even surprising to me. For example, industrial chickens at Big C [a leading hypermarket in Vietnam] cost 50,000 Vietnamese dong/kg. But people are willing to pay 150,000 Vietnamese dong per bird for the chickens sold by our [the retailer’s] cooperative. We sell them for 300,000 Vietnamese dong/kg. Some people even sell them for 500,000 Vietnamese dong per bird.
- We need to segment the market. If there is a unique selling point, then we can compete. Otherwise, competing based on price with our eyes closed will not be sustainable.
- You need to maintain the uniqueness of your products: natural, ecological, forest-derived products.
- If you are already producing products that meet EbA goals, contact us. If not, join hands with us for support. We select and find products for the market based on natural criteria. Then, we are ready to be cooperative partners and invest with you to upgrade your products to attract more customers.

### **3.3 Comments from Tu Tuyet Nhung**

Tu Tuyet Nhung has spent 40 years dedicated to agriculture and 15 years dedicated to the PGS organic label. Her comments included:

- Many organisations also use the PGS system as a tool to help farmers access markets.
- Third-party certification only provides assessment and certification and then leaves. However, PGS supports farmers throughout the production process and enhances their capacity during production.
- The policy of the Vietnamese Organic Agriculture Association (VOAA) is to establish a national PGS certification programme.
- The FFF programme is directing farmers to produce using new approaches to EbA.
- We have assessment tools for PGS and wish to coordinate implementation with FFF in the future.
- There is a need to train source instructors to deploy this PGS tool.
- We emphasise organic PGS. After today, we will report to the VOAA association chairman to help farmers accompany the PGS system according to standards for sustainable ecosystems.

### **3.4 Comments from Nguyen Thi Hai Xuan, Vietnam Certification Centre (QuaCert)**

Ms Nguyen Thi Hai Xuan's comments included:

- Some cooperatives of FFF currently have organic certification. There are organic vegetables still receiving Japanese Agricultural Standards (JAS) certification, as well as Vietnamese organic certification.
- Regarding certification, compliance with standards is necessary. When developing standards, general principles need to be outlined, and specific requirements should be detailed in the standard set. Each product may have different specific regulations.
- We need to consider whether implementation is feasible. Some standards are strict, difficult to implement, and may not align with reality. Additionally, if implemented, how do we demonstrate compliance?

## 4. Closing thoughts

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Participants discussed relevant issues and confirmed enthusiastic collaboration from the two businesses participating in the workshop. Discussions are to be continued to search for and support cooperatives in connecting with businesses to bring forest landscape products to more distant markets.





Workshop discussions around shared visions for collective labelling of five forest and farm value chains © Tran Thi Thanh Binh