



Collaborative efforts lead to increased peppercorn exports and improved quality

Peppercorn is a key agricultural crop contributing significantly to the economies of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. However, non-compliance with Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards on smallholder farms has threatened exports to high-value international markets due to food safety concerns.

The **‘Safer Spices: Boosting Food Safety and Market Access for the Peppercorn Value Chain in South East Asia’** project, funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and implemented by CABI in collaboration with local organizations and private companies, aimed to support the adoption of a Code of Practice (CoP) developed by the project. This initiative developed a collaborative public-private sector approach, inspired by IFOAM – Organics International’s Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), later named “Grassroots Public Private Partnerships”, or G-PPP.

Targeting village-level activities through collaborative partnerships

Smallholder farmers encounter numerous obstacles in adopting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standards – compliance criteria are often generic and sometimes may contradict local knowledge and practices. This project aimed to address these challenges by helping smallholder farmers adopt GAP standards, changing perspectives to view standards as a tool to reduce risk and improve efficiencies, and creating an enabling environment to motivate farmers to enhance their practices.

Inspired by the replicability of the PGS for direct sourcing of organic products in local markets, the project co-created a collaborative public-private partnership model applicable to a wide range of supply chains and

situations. CABI, with support from international market system experts, collaborated with ministry departments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The project also worked with various private companies including Simexco Co Ltd and Viet Pepper Co Ltd in Vietnam, Sela Pepper Co Ltd in Cambodia, Etu Green Garden in Laos, and four different farmer groups.

The collaboration resulted in a five-step approach that built trust, forged relationships and empowered participants to localize the implementation, monitoring, and accountability of a CoP. This approach specifically addressed local quality and safety risks while ensuring compliance with market SPS requirements.



Farmer group in Laos

Significant improvements in quality and export volumes

Thanks to the project, Thy Keb, Operations Manager at Sela Pepper, in Cambodia, reported a decrease in the rejection rate of peppercorn bought from farmers from 7–10% in 2022 to just 1.5–2% in 2023. Keb has also seen improvements in technical knowledge among farmers, gained through the adoption of the CoP, helped by the increased collaboration and understanding between him and his farmer group. The G-PPP farmer group has begun producing high-quality peppercorn that meets international market standards. This has contributed to Cambodia successfully exporting the first 30 tonnes of black peppercorn from the country to China, demonstrating the capability of Cambodian farmers to produce peppercorn that fulfils international market requirements. Moreover, Sela Pepper has also increased its exports to the EU, due to its sourcing of higher-quality produce from G-PPP farmers in Memot.

The Deputy Director of the Plant Protection Sanitary and Phytosanitary Department, General Directorate of Agriculture in Cambodia, Chhun Hy Heng, commented that the farmers are now producing better quality peppercorn that is translating into increased exports to the EU.

Taim Roset, a 59-year-old Cambodian farmer with nine years of experience in peppercorn, highlighted the project's role in fostering collaboration and building relationships. *"This project helped me build good relationships with other farmers, with Sela Pepper and other stakeholders, and assisted me to increase my income"*, Roset stated.

The power of the G-PPP

Soumaly Phommahuk, Etu Green Garden's Director, in Laos, highlighted the company's role in understanding market demand and translating it into on-the-ground production by building farmers' capacity in peppercorn processing. *"The G-PPP brings farmers together to teach and learn from one another, to share good practices and to learn lessons from each other's experiences,"* Soumaly said. *"Initially, I did not expect many farmers to join this project. We aimed for five to 10 farmers but were pleasantly surprised when 19 decided to join us."*

Souliya Souvandouane and Phoumee Kanya both from Lao PDR's Department of Agriculture praised the G-PPP model as *"an excellent way to connect buyers and sellers"*, while also teaching farmers to self-monitor peppercorn production and quality. They emphasize the collaborative work between farmers and Etu Green Garden in sharing experiences and challenges related to peppercorn farming.

Sipachanh Sengpathip, a farmer from Laos, whose farm was chosen as the model for the project, expressed her appreciation for the project's demonstration of teamwork among farmers. *"Through collective teamwork, farmers can produce peppercorn according to market demand. This translates into higher volume, which in turn leads to higher income"*, Sipachanh stated. She also values the opportunity to share information on peppercorn production and management with other farmers.

Lao PDR's Department of Agriculture and Etu Green Garden aim to sell Champasak peppercorn under the 'One District One Product' brand, showcasing the positive impact of the project. Additionally, the project has supported Etu Green Garden in establishing an international presence by facilitating connections with regional and international buyers and promoting Laotian peppercorn on the global stage.

Empowering farmers and promoting local products

The successful pilot of the G-PPP approach marks a significant step towards empowering small-scale peppercorn farmers, enabling them to meet quality standards, access new markets, and improve their livelihoods through collaborative efforts. The project demonstrated the potential of public-private partnerships to foster a more inclusive, sustainable, and quality-driven peppercorn industry. By empowering communities to collaborate, the initiative supports small-scale farmers and promotes local products on the global stage.

Project partners

The project was funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF). To deliver the project, CABI worked in partnership with:



**Western Highlands Agriculture
& Forestry Science Institute
(WASI), Vietnam**



**Department of Agriculture,
Lao PDR**



**General Directorate of
Agriculture, Cambodia**

Contact

Dr Muhammad Faheem, Project Manager and Integrated Crop Management Advisor, CABI ✉ m.faheem@cabi.org

www.cabi.org/peppercorn-in-south-east-asia