

How to play

Wake Up – The Lao Coffee Game

Intro

We are on the Bolaven Plateau in southern Laos, one of the country's main coffee-growing regions. The Lao government wants to stimulate sustainable rural development by promoting the export of agricultural commodities, such as coffee. It hopes that doing so will generate higher incomes and better livelihoods for the local population, as well as increase tax revenues and foreign currency reserves for the government. To support the regional coffee sector in a sustainable and integrative way, the government has set up a district council to steer and promote coffee production in the region. The council comprises up to 10 members, each representing a key actor of the coffee value chain, such as farmers, corporate actors, policymakers, or international development workers.

Over several rounds of play, the council members must negotiate and make decisions about actions to shape the coffee sector. Should you rent the land to an international company? Should the government stipulate a minimum wage for workers on coffee plantations? In these negotiations and decision-making processes, the council members must pursue their own interests or those of the organization they are representing – all the while considering the impacts of their actions on the whole of the coffee sector. In other words, they will have to keep the coffee sector in balance while also seeking advantages for themselves/their organizations.

Basic settings

Disclaimer

This is a game based on empirical findings. The stories and characters, although based on these findings, are fictional and have been created especially for the game. They are therefore not an exact reflection of reality. Playing the game is expected to lead to three main learning outcomes:

Students will have an increased understanding of

- the complexity of sustainability interactions and related dynamics
- the trade-offs that may occur between stakeholders
- different perspectives on the same issues, and taking these into account while finding solutions

Target groups

Students aged 17–23 (secondary/high school and Bachelor's level)

Language

English and Lao

Number of players

- The game requires a minimum of 7 participants (6 players + 1 narrator)
- Groups of over 10 have two options:

- Students form two groups and play in parallel. After the game, they compare experiences.
- Students form several small groups and each group takes on the role of one character. This will make the game slightly longer, as you will require time for discussion within the group.
- If you play the game with fewer than 10 players, we suggest excluding the following roles (in this order): philanthropist, CAL, NGO, cooperative.

Basic procedure

1. Optional: Familiarizing yourself with the topic (i.e. the Lao coffee sector and its stakeholders)
2. Introduction to the game and the roles
3. Short introduction round of the council members
4. Playing the game
5. Debriefing and reflection

Duration

- Preparation for students: approx. 2 hours (optional)
- Introduction to the game and familiarizing yourself with the roles: 30 minutes
- Playing the game: 1–1.5 hours. However, the game can be ended at any time.
- Debriefing and reflection: 30 minutes–1h

Location

The game can be played face-to-face as well as online, via an online communication tool that allows you to hold group video meetings (e.g. Zoom, Teams or Skype). You can play the game on a smartphone or a computer – you just need a standard internet browser and a stable internet connection. We recommend playing the Lao version with the Google Chrome browser.

Equipment needed for playing face to face

- One computer (operated by the narrator) and screen on which the game is displayed (preferably large enough for the whole group to see comfortably)
- A set of instructions (“How to play”)
- The role descriptions (each player should receive the description of their role only)
- The parameter descriptions: a copy for each player
- Name tags
- A timer
- Optional: the background documentation provided (Lao Coffee Sector - Background Information)

Equipment needed for playing the game online

- An online communication tool that allows you to hold group video meetings (e.g. Zoom, Teams or Skype)
- A computer (the game app is operated by the narrator, who will share her/his screen)

- A set of instructions (“How to play”)
- The role descriptions (each player should receive the description of their own role only)
- The parameter descriptions: a copy for each player
- A timer
- A group chat through which to share information (we used Zoom and Whatsapp)
Optional: the background documentation provided (Lao Coffee Sector - Background Information)

Preparing to play

Background Information

We recommend allocating some time for the students to familiarize themselves with the context of the game, i.e. the Lao coffee sector and its stakeholders. This preparation can support the students in playing their respective roles and making informed decisions in the game, strengthening the learning outcomes.

You will find extensive teaching material and background documentation on the website. Depending on educational level, the students can study the background documentation independently or the material can be taught/presented by the teacher/lecturer. We recommend doing this preparatory work before starting the game.

Roles and parameters

Allocate some time for the students to read their respective role descriptions and to familiarize themselves with the role they will be playing. Everyone should read only their own role description. The players should remain in the dark regarding other’s interests, so as not to be influenced in their strategy or voting behaviour. It may be helpful to assign the roles in advance, before the students read the background documentation. This will allow them to relate the subject matter to the role they will be playing. Further, depending on what educational level the students are at, it may be helpful for the teacher to discuss the respective roles with each student, to help answer any open questions.

Playing the game

Setting and overall aim

To promote sustainable development in the regional coffee sector, the Lao Government has set up a district council to steer coffee production. The council comprises up to ten members, each representing a key actor of the coffee value chain. Each player takes on a different fictional role, negotiating and making decisions about the coffee sector in southern Laos.



Parameters and interests

During the game, you must find a balance between various dimensions – the five parameters listed below – of the Lao coffee sector:

	Health of Environment
	Livelihood Outcomes
	Economic Attractivity
	Interconnectedness
	Governance Capacities

Each member is assigned three of these parameters, the combination of which represents the “interests” that each member must pursue throughout the game. Each member has one main interest and two side interests (these are found in the “Role descriptions” document). In the final ranking, the main interest counts double. While its members pursue their own interests, the council must consider the impacts of its actions on the whole of the coffee sector to keep the different dimensions in balance. Throughout the game, the global score indicates how well the council is managing to keep this balance. Details of this feature are explained below.



Players familiarize themselves with their role

At this point, all players should read their respective role descriptions and ask any questions they may have, if they didn't already do so in preparation for the game. The players can create name tags with the name of their characters (if you are playing online, the name of the character can be the player name). Once the players are familiar with their respective roles, start with a short introduction round. Depending on the time available, you can either have the players introduce themselves, or you can assign this task to the narrator. (Having the narrator introduce each role in one or two sentences may be the more time-efficient option). As each player has read only their own role description, they know only their own character's interests but not those of the other players.

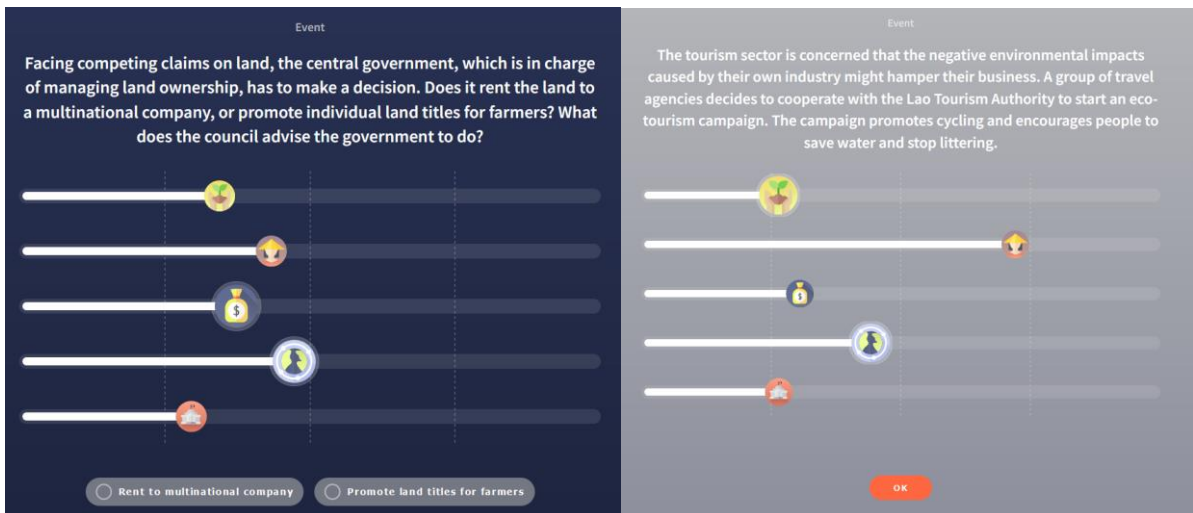
Playing the game

The game starts after the introduction round.

Events and decisions

In each round of the game, the council faces an event. There are two types of event:

1. An event that requires you to make a decision
2. An event that occurs without a decision being made



Events that require a decision (left):

For these events, the council has the power to deliberate and to decide on actions to shape and regulate the coffee sector. The decision will affect some or all of the five parameters in some way (by increasing or decreasing them). The council can discuss this situation and negotiate what to do. The decision that is made may end up benefiting or hampering individual interests. At the same time, the council must be aware that an overall minimum sustainability standard must be upheld, which is represented by the global score. This will be explained in more detail below.

Events without a decision (right):

Some events are beyond the council's control. Sometimes, these events are a consequence of earlier decisions; sometimes they occur independently of the council's actions. Such an event will have consequences. These events are marked in grey, while events requiring a decision are marked in blue.

Discussions and voting:

When a decision is required, the council can debate and negotiate. During these deliberations, the players have various options. They can argue their case in an attempt to convince others; they can abstain from voting if they think the event does not affect them; or they can vote for someone else's proposal or try to further their interests in other ways (e.g. by bargaining bilaterally and in secret). If you are playing online, such bilateral discussions may take place via private chats (if these are available to you).

In connection with certain events, a character may receive a notification that they are excluded from voting, or they have one voice together with other actors, or their vote may carry more weight. Players who are excluded from voting may not argue their case during that discussion.

Due to bad weather, Markus Zumsteg is unable to travel to Laos. Due to poor internet connectivity, attempts to connect via Zoom fail, so he is unable to participate in the meeting.

After the players have formed their opinions, a vote will be held. Everyone who is eligible to vote in this particular round may do so. Not all events are of equal relevance to all members, and players are allowed to abstain from voting at any time. Decisions are made by majority

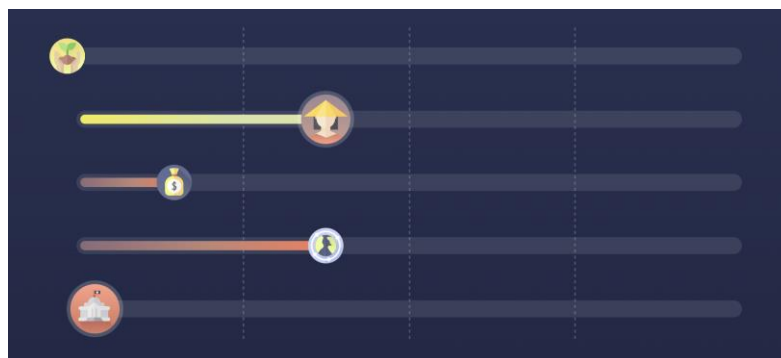
vote. In the case of a tie, Somvang Phethsamone, representative of the District Government Office, has the casting vote.

It is recommended to set a timer to limit the discussion for each event to a maximum of 5 minutes and then hold the vote.

Keep in mind that the “right” choice (i.e. the one that advances your parameters) will not always be obvious. This uncertainty is part of the game and part of sustainability decision-making in general.

Impacts

After each vote, the narrator enters the council’s decision into the app. As the slide bar moves, you will see the impact of the decision on the various parameters. The colours indicate whether a parameter has increased (=green) or decreased (=red). Sometimes, an event affects all five parameters; sometimes only a selection of parameters. The points received or lost by these fluctuations are reflected in the players’ individual scores.



Receiving bonus points or negative points:

On some occasions, the players face events that are beyond their control. Each event affects players differently: some may experience a negative effect, while others may benefit. The bonus points or negative points are added or subtracted to the scores of the players affected.



Global score

The global score indicates how well the council is managing the coffee sector as a whole. Every time the value of a parameter falls below 10%, the global score drops. If, at the end of the game, the coffee beans are used up and the score is below 0, the council has failed to keep the coffee sector in balance.



The end of the game

The game ends either through a decision by the narrator or the collective council, or as defined by the app. The latter will be after approximately 90 minutes. To have a full experience, we recommend playing for at least one hour.

Ranking

If the council has managed to keep the coffee sector in balance, i.e. to keep the global score above 0, the person who has obtained the highest individual score wins. The main interest counts double, but this doesn't mean the other interests should be neglected. In the ranking, the scores are displayed as coffee beans, the number of which indicates how well a player has advocated for his or her interests. The ranking and the scores are always in relation to other players and their performances. The ranking is therefore only informative after a few rounds of play.

You can always check the ranking by pressing the trophy button in the top right corner, to get an idea of how well the different characters are doing.

Debriefing: Reflection round

It is important to hold a debriefing round after the game. This will allow the students to reflect on their experience of playing the game and on what they have learned. Ideally, the debriefing takes place directly after the game. If this is not possible, students should at least take some notes straight after the game, to refer to later.

The debriefing offers an opportunity to reflect on discussions and uncertainties that occurred during the game. It is also a good time to address questions about the subject matter that may arise.

Please remember that this is a fictional game. Processes are much more complex in reality, and the game is not able to address every aspect of the Lao coffee sector.

The following questions may help to structure the reflection round:

- How did you experience the game? What was difficult? What did you like?
- Was anything unclear? Were there things you did not understand?
- What was new or surprising to you?
- What was the main thing you learnt?
- How did you experience the game from the perspective of your role? What were the difficulties for your role? What are potential solutions?
- How were your interests related with other actors' interests and with the community's interests in general?
- What aspects of the game are linked to sustainable development? What were the difficulties in taking into account sustainable development issues? What are potential solutions?
- How is the game related to the United Nations 2030 Agenda? What links do you see to the SDGs?
- Are the findings transferable to other contexts, and if so, how?
- How is the experience of playing this game related to other learnings/subjects from class/course?