Wake up - the Lao Coffee Game - The council members

Description of the roles represented in the game

Vanhmani Keovilay- Farmer

Female farmer from Southern Laos

Vanhmani Keovilay owns a coffee garden, where she grows coffee for the household's income. Being a member of the local cooperative, she sells it part of her production. The rest, she sells to village middle buyers and sometimes also to the buyers of multinational companies. Her income from the sales of the coffee beans fluctuates quite a bit, because the coffee price is not stable and middle buyers' willingness to negotiate depends on the market conditions. Vanhmani Keovilay relies strongly on this income, however, her position in price negotiations is weak, since it is often the buyer who dictates the price. In this context, Vanhmani depends on a strong government and on the support of NGOs to strengthen her bargaining power.

A lot of the work in the coffee garden is still done manually, which makes the workflow slow and difficult. During high season, Vanhmani Keovilay thus needs additional labour force, so she hires both male and female wage workers to handle the workload. Apart from growing coffee, Vanhmani also produces vegetables on her 3 hectares of land and owns a few chickens to have enough resources. With agricultural production being her main livelihood pillar, Vanhmani relies on fertile soils, intact water circulation and decent climate conditions. In addition to her work on the farm, Vanhmani is responsible for the household and takes care of the children. Besides a good education for her children, Vanhmani's prospects for her future are to have a higher and more stable income and to have more support in domestic work, easing her overall work burden.

Main Interest: Livelihood Outcomes
Further interests: Interconnectedness

Health of Environment

Bounchanh Nanhthavong - Wage Worker

Male worker from Southern Laos

Bounchanh Nanhthavong has migrated from the neighbouring province to a village in the coffee producing region of southern Laos. Here, he works for large coffee farmers and the multinational company in their coffee garden on a daily basis, whenever labour is needed. The payment varies amongst the employers: private coffee farmers provide food and they pay higher wages than companies. However, as the payment is often based on the weight of picked cherries, working for multinational companies is more profitable, since there is more coffee to pick and therefore more money to earn in total.

Along with other migrant workers, Bounchanh Nanhthavong lives in a small compound at the outskirts of the village. They stay in huts they have built themselves, albeit without sanitation nor clean water. The food they eat has to be cheap and is often not nutritious — when it's provided by the employers, it is almost never enough. The employers provide Bounchanh with neither social security, nor a pension scheme or decent working conditions, and the payment of a minimum wage depends heavily on existing and firm governmental regulations. However, these regulations lack in many areas and even where regulatory mechanisms exist, they are often not implemented properly.

Even though Bounchanh works very hard, his income fluctuates strongly because it depends on the situation of the coffee market. He is worried that with his unstable income, he cannot provide for his family, even though his wife also works as a wage worker in the coffee sector. He misses his children a lot, who are staying in the hometown with their grandparents, and he only gets to see them after the high season is over and he returns home.

Main Interest: Livelihood Outcomes
Further interests: Economic Attractivity
Governance Capacities

Khamsy Kanhyavong - District Middle Buyer

Female trader from Southern Laos

Khamsy Kanhyavong is a villager from the Bolaven Plateau, who collects and buys raw coffee beans from the local farmers for the lowest price possible. She then transports the beans to the regional centres and sells them to multinational companies, which process the coffee. She is dependent on their pricing, since the companies can reject her offer and buy some other middle buyers' coffee.

Besides some vegetable and livestock subsistence farming, the revenues from coffee trading constitute the family's main income. Khamsy Kanhyavong thus relies on stable prices and production, high margins, and good business relations. Compared to other villagers, she is considered rich, that way she can also lend money to local farmers - at her own conditions and interest rates. Lending money to local farmers not only provides Khamsy with additional income, it also helps her to reinforce the trading relations with the farmers. Khamsy wants to be as autonomous as possible in dealing with both sides, companies and farmers; thus, she rejects strict governmental regulations of the coffee sector. Nevertheless, she welcomes moderate initiatives targeting the health of the environment, in order to ensure stable coffee production. Khamsy has not received a high formal education, but she is very smart, talkative and knows how to negotiate. She is up to date on trading information and has a lot of contacts, due to her long experience and knowledge in the business of buying from farmers and selling to multinational companies.

Main Interest: Economic Attractivity
Further interests: Livelihood Outcomes

Health of Environment

Azwan Abdul - Multinational Company

Male agri-business entrepreneur from Vietnam

The company of Azwan Abdul has several subsidiaries all over South-East Asia. In the Bolaven Plateau, the company has its own coffee plantation. Furthermore, it buys raw coffee beans, especially lower quality coffee at a respectively low price, from middle buyers and sometimes from local farmers directly. Since it can choose from a diverse portfolio of sellers, the company has a powerful position in price negotiations. The company owns facilities, where it processes the coffee and from where it exports and trades the finished product on the global market. For the company to be more profitable, it relies on large areas of land, labour, and in the end coffee - these are some of the reasons it is a member of the Coffee Association of Lao PDR (CAL) and likes to do business in and with the Lao PDR.

Azwan Abdul is convinced of the long-term benefits of industrial farming over small-scale farming, in order to make the coffee sector of Laos more profitable and to stimulate economic development more generally. He argues that everyone profits from such a trajectory. To increase productivity, the company utilizes different technologies and chemical methods in its plantation. During harvesting season, the company recruits temporary wage workers from neighbouring provinces to pick coffee. It allows workers to build camps in front of their estate; however, it neither provides accommodation, clean water, nor sanitation.

Being a worldly person, Azwan Abdul maintains many relationships with international investors and supporters of Lao Coffee, the philanthropist Markus Zumsteg being one of them. Azwan is very restrained with regard to government regulations, because it would negatively affect their way of doing business. He is nevertheless in favour of a stable market, for which certain government capacities are necessary and which are therefore favoured by the company.

Main Interest: Economic Attractivity
Further interests: Interconnectedness

Governance Capacities

Pheang Souksavath- Coffee Association of Lao PDR (CAL)

Female representative from Southern Laos

Pheang Souksavath is a representative of the Coffee Association of Lao PDR (CAL), which is a non-profit organization that includes various members of the coffee sector, such as cooperatives, multinational companies, and traders. She has studied in the Champasak province and has worked on this job for five years. Her parents used to grow coffee, which has provided her with a lot of relevant and up-to-date knowledge of the sector. The Coffee Association of the Lao PDR, where she works, has its mandate from the Lao government the Ministry of Home Affair and Ministry of Industry and Commerce, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, with whom it closely collaborates. The association's goals are promoting Lao Coffee internationally and supporting farmers, cooperatives, and companies to produce large quantities of high-quality coffee. Furthermore, it seeks to protect the health of the environment while at the same time maintaining a sustainable economy.

For this purpose, CAL functions as a coordinator with related government agencies to facilitate investors in doing business in the coffee sector and it works on expanding economic and trade relations with foreign countries. In southern Laos, it aims to create facilitating conditions for domestic production to be able to compete with the international market, thereby gathering and guiding their members with best practices in doing business. Pheang tries to maintain good relations with larger companies to ensure the quality of the exported goods – and by that the reputation of the whole coffee sector in Laos. The larger companies are also important partners for CAL to provide farmers with training and equipment to increase the quality and quantity of their coffee.

Main Interest: Governance Capacities
Further interests: Economic Attractivity

Health of Environment

Somvang Phethsamone - District Government Office

Male representative from Southern Laos

The representative Somvang Phethsamone works for the District Government Office, where he is responsible for the promotion of the regional coffee sector. In this position, he encourages local farmers to increase quality and quantity of their coffee, coordinates large investments in the coffee sector, and oversees export and trade procedures as well as tax collection. As representative of the Lao government, he must preserve the interests of the Central Government, to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, and to stimulate regional economic development. Being an ambitious, young civil servant from the region, Somvang Phethsamone considers it his duty to contribute to the improvement of living standards of the local communities.

In his work, Somvang seeks close collaboration with the local communities as well as with the Coffee Association of Lao PDR (CAL) to implement and facilitate government work and regulations. Together with CAL, he tries to make sure that the quality and quantity of the coffee is good and the agricultural sector is stable. Additionally, his interest is to spread out these earnings, so not only multinational companies gain from the booming market. To achieve his ambitions, Somvang relies on a strong government, which has the power and the resources to enforce its policies and to implement its strategies. Since the government only has a limited budget to support coffee producers, Somvang seeks to mobilize financial capital from other sources. For this purpose, he works on building good relations with other stakeholders, such as international NGOs, foreign government agencies and companies.

Main Interest: Governance Capacities
Further interests: Livelihood Outcomes
Interconnectedness

Bounthong Phongchaleun - Local Cooperative

Male representative from Southern Laos

Bounthong Phongchaleun is the manager of the local cooperative, an association of local farmers, who produce and market their coffee – or at least a part of it – through the cooperative. Aiming to improve the situation of local farmers, the cooperative seeks to protect the environment as a basis for farmers' livelihoods and to provide the farmers with alternative and organic marketing channels. Bounthong Phongchaleun is an engaged and innovative person, who wants to improve the livelihood of the people in his village. For this purpose, he is always looking for new production methods to support farmers in organic coffee production.

The cooperative sets high standards for coffee production. Since it promotes organic processes, its members are not allowed to use chemicals, such as synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, in their coffee garden. Bounthong and other cooperative members, however, try to find suitable organic fertilizer, so as to guarantee good quantities of high-quality coffee. This is also important to maintain economic stability of the involved farmers. With the support of the NGO "Fairtrade4Sustainability" and other NGOs, Bounthong is able to supply access to organic, fair-trade niche markets in Europe, which can provide the farmers with a guaranteed price that is higher than for conventional coffee. However, it is difficult for the cooperative to continuously provide the farmers with the best prices possible and full payment for the harvest can only be made once or twice per year. At the government level, Bounthong represents the cooperative members within the coordinating bodies of the Lao coffee supply chain at domestic and international levels. The cooperative relies on the support of the government – for example in the form of market regulation – otherwise it would be difficult for the cooperative to coexist next to bigger players in the business. Most of the time, Bounthong loves his job; however, sometimes he is frustrated, because the interest on the farmers' side in the cooperative's work is not high and gaining new members is a timeconsuming task.

Main Interest: Health of Environment
Further interests: Livelihood Outcomes

Governance Capacities

Markus Zumsteg - Environmental Philanthropist

Male philanthropist from Switzerland

Markus Zumsteg is a successful businessman who has made a lot of money over the years that he now wants to direct towards a good cause. He is convinced that his business connections can help foster development and he is a strong proponent of the green economy approach. This approach promotes public and private investment into growth-stimulating economic activities, infrastructure, and assets that simultaneously lead to a reduction of carbon emissions and pollution, improve energy and resource efficiency, and mitigate the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Markus Zumsteg loves Southeast Asia and spends several months per year in the region, where he is engaged in various projects that promote environmental sustainability and regional economic development. He sees a lot of potential in eco-friendly coffee production for stable and sustainable economic growth in Laos and he believes that it can be fostered through transnational collaboration. Not least, because Markus views Switzerland as a possible market for environmentally-friendly coffee products. He works with the Lao government, the CAL, and the multinational company trying to convince them to follow the green economy approach. However, this is a difficult undertaking - the multinational company does not seem very interested in the implementation of new ecological technologies, unless they are immediately economically viable. In this respect, the cooperative, where Bounthong works, is a more rewarding partner.

Main Interest: Health of Environment
Further interests: Economic Attractivity
Interconnectedness

René Meier - Swiss NGO "Fairtrade4Sustainability"

Male NGO representative from Switzerland

René Meier is 50 years old and works for the Swiss NGO "Fairtrade4Sustainability". Growing up on a farm in Switzerland, he studied at the university and then went into the NGO business. He has long-standing experience in the field of sustainable agricultural value chains. René sees himself as an activist and pragmatist at the same time, who fights for the rights of small-holder farmers but who also considers it important to have big players on board for sustainable change. René has been coming to Laos for many years, he knows the market and its stakeholders, and is very keen on gaining more members in the fair-trade organizations. Ultimately, he wants producers and consumers to have good quality coffee and he is convinced of the importance of a healthy and stable coffee sector for this goal.

The Swiss NGO "Fairtrade4Sustainability", of which René is a founding member, dedicates itself to strengthen transnational cooperation in the areas of equality and economic development in the agricultural sectors of resource-rich developing countries. It is active in different South-East Asian countries. In Laos, the NGO supports the government and farmers in promoting local initiatives that aim to ameliorate local people's livelihoods while simultaneously improving the conditions for coffee production. Being a strong advocate of bottom-up approaches and collective organizing, the NGO supports the local cooperative on the ground in promoting and marketing their organic, fair-trade coffee.

René Meier sees his role in strengthening relations between transnational actors and is very engaged in this personal cooperation model. With his engagement, he wants to create fair trade relations on the ground, between Switzerland and Laos.

Main Interest: Interconnectedness
Further interests: Economic Attractivity

Livelihood Outcomes

Dora Schneider - Swiss Office for International Development in Laos

Female representative from Switzerland

For four years now, Dora Schneider is working for the Swiss Office for International Development (SOD). She studied international relations in Switzerland and moved to Laos a year ago. She likes living in Laos and really wants to make a difference in her position as a swiss representative. Part of the Swiss Government, the Swiss Office for International Development, where Dora works, aims to contribute to food security and economic self-reliance of small-holder farmers. It further seeks to address environmental problems, tackle biodiversity loss, and strives to improve access to education and basic healthcare services.

As SOD representative in Laos, Dora Schneider's primary mission is to strengthen the cooperation and connection between Laos and Switzerland and to foster the implementation of the Agenda 2030. In Laos, the SOD Office runs various programmes that support small-holder farmers to diversify their products, to improve the sustainable use of agrobiodiversity, and to gain better access to agricultural land, forests, and means of production, as well as to markets, where they can sell their products. Furthermore, SOD supports Lao-Swiss research collaborations to gain a better understanding of how to best support the rural population in making a sustainable living. For her mission, Dora works closely with Swiss and Lao government offices. However, she is also interested in what NGOs and investors in the region have to say and where they need support.

Main Interest: Interconnectedness
Further interests: Health of Environment

Governance Capacities