Wake Up - the Lao Coffee Game

Learning Outcomes

Combining interactive, face-to-face role play with digital gaming trajectories, the Lao Coffee Game offers an integrative learning experience for the system dynamics of globalized, export-oriented agriculture, epitomized by coffee, and the implications for sustainable development. By playing the game, students:

- Dive into the coffee sector of Laos, a fascinating context, where the global scope of agricultural commodity and capital market dynamics are deeply interwoven with the living realities of local actors.
- Adopt various perspectives of key actors. In their roles, students relate to other players and face a number of events, in which they have to negotiate and defend their interests within a highly dynamic macroeconomic context. In doing so, the game requires prompt **decision-making in a sometimes-uncertain context, while giving its players the chance to experience the impacts of their actions in real-time.**

To be more elaborate, this gaming experience aims to support the following learnings and reflections on the part of the players:

- **General insights in the Lao coffee sector:** Students gain insights into the dynamics and developments of the Lao coffee sector as well as into different related sustainability dimensions. The Lao coffee sector is archetypal of globalized agricultural value chains that link local production systems in the global South with trading and consumption patterns in the global North.
- **Engagement with stakeholders from the coffee sector:** Students are introduced to different actors of the coffee value chain. They learn to assess the rationales, strategies and agency of different stakeholders, thereby engaging with different perspectives on sustainable development. Furthermore, the game aims to depict the power relations which define actor relationships and individual scope of actions.
- Exploration of **risks and opportunities of globalized agricultural value chains**: Students explore co-benefits and trade-offs arising from export-based commodity agriculture, gain a perspective on winners and losers, and discuss potential opportunities and alternative approaches to rural development in the context of agricultural transition.
- **Engagement with the complexity of pathways for sustainable development:** Negotiations, contradictions, and conflicts of interests are inherent to sustainable development processes. Transitions towards sustainability generate opportunities, but they also bear risks. In this sense, they produce trade-offs and co-benefits, winners and losers, such that all perspectives must be considered. In the game, students are confronted with the multi-dimensionality, contextuality and complexity of sustainable development goals. They explore interactions and interrelations between different sustainability dimensions and are confronted with **decision-making in a context of uncertainty that is typical for exploring transformation pathways.**

Illustration: Engagement with stakeholders from coffee sector - Some examples

- **Farmers** are relying on decisions taken by the companies that buy their products. They might opt for sustainable coffee production to increase their revenues. Furthermore, climate change has a strong impact on their livelihoods. However, they rely on the support from the government and NGOs for improving their livelihood. In short, their sustainable livelihood is based on good quantity and quality of coffee production, supportive government and NGOs as well as sustainable companies.
- **Wage workers**' incomes are dependent on multinational companies, large-scale farmers and on the performance of the agriculture sector as a whole. Furthermore, their livelihoods depend on governmental regulation and policies on working conditions and social security.
- **District middle buyers** depend on multinational companies and coffee farmers in order to collect and sell coffee. Climate change is another factor that impacts their activity, as it can lead to a lower production volume. Furthermore, middle buyers thrive if they have more information available than the local producers. Their autonomy in doing business depends to a large extent on governmental regulations and the government's capacity to enforce these regulations.
- **Multinational companies** produce their own coffee, but they also rely on local coffee farmers, who supply them with additional coffee. Being active in a global market, they need good domestic and global relationships to trade their product. Like the district middle buyers, their autonomy in doing business also depends largely on governmental regulations and its capabilities to enforce these regulations. Lower regulations in Laos with respect to other coffee producing countries are a positive factor for the multinational company.