

TAP NEWSLETTER

TAP SECRETARIAT & FAO-LED INITIATIVES

Field Testing FAO's Self-MEL Toolkit for Grassroots Agricultural Extension in Viet Nam

From 2 to 9 June 2025, a team from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) convened in Hanoi, Viet Nam, with officers from the National Agricultural Extension Center (NAEC) to pilot the newly developed Self-Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (Self-MEL) Toolkit for grassroots public agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS).

Public Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) are critical to sustainable agriculture and smallholder livelihoods worldwide. Yet, grassroots EAS systems often lack tools for self-assessment. In response, FAO and CABI co-developed the Self-MEL Toolkit, designed to help EAS providers independently evaluate service quality, identify gaps, and drive improvements. Built on FAO's 5A framework—Accessibility, Accountability, Affordability, Adaptability, and Achievements—the toolkit was refined through expert consultations and ethics reviews. It consists of two modules:

- Module A – for EAS managers to assess the performance of the entire extension system.
- Module B – for grassroots EAS agents to evaluate service quality and impact from the perspective of farmers and value chain actors.



Field testing of FAO's Self-MEL Toolkit with grassroots extension agents in Vinh Phuc province, Viet Nam ©CABI

During the intensive eight-day mission, the research teams pursued three objectives: co-developing the two-module toolkit, validating it in Viet Nam's grassroots context, and developing a user guide for global adoption. Puyun Yang, Agricultural Extension Officer from FAO, led the testing and interview process for both modules.

Following scientific piloting and a series of interviews with local officers, toolkit users, and grassroots extension agents, the team refined the toolkit by clarifying definitions, streamlining questions, and tailoring content to the local context. The mission concluded with a consultation meeting in Hanoi on 7 June, involving one FAO officer, two CABI scientists, and four data enumerators to agree on next steps—data entry and analysis, reporting, further toolkit adjustments, and the development of an end-user guide based on the pilot results.

This pilot marked an important milestone in equipping grassroots EAS systems with practical, user-friendly tools for self-assessment, ultimately aiming to strengthen service delivery and improve smallholder farmers' access to agricultural innovations and support services.

Strengthening Capacity of Higher Education Institutions through FAO eLearning Academy – Partnership with Haramaya University, Ethiopia

From 14 to 18 July 2025, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) conducted a mission to Haramaya University (HU) in Ethiopia to advance collaboration on agricultural education, research, and extension through the FAO eLearning Academy. The mission, led by Samson Eshetu Lemma, Agricultural Extension Officer, Office of Innovation, focused on deploying digital learning solutions, including the TAP-AIS eLearning module, to strengthen higher education and national extension systems.

The highlight was a joint hybrid seminar on “Strengthening University Capacity through FAO eLearning Academy Courses”, co-hosted by FAO and HU on 17 July 2025. The event brought together representatives from FAO Headquarters, FAO Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), and university leaders, faculty, and students from across Ethiopia.

Opening remarks were delivered by Jemal Yousuf, HU President, and Farayi Zimudzi, FAO Representative in Ethiopia. Selvaraju Ramasamy, Head of TAP Secretariat, Office of Innovation, FAO, highlighted FAO’s role in supporting higher education institutions in adopting innovative and inclusive learning approaches. The FAO eLearning Academy, represented by Cristina Petracchi, presented its free, multilingual, certified courses and how they can be embedded into postgraduate curricula, while Manuela Bucciarelli, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Expert with the Office of Innovation, FAO, demonstrated the TAP-AIS eLearning module and its potential for curriculum integration.



Participants of the joint seminar “Strengthening University Capacity through FAO eLearning Academy” held on 17 July 2025 at Haramaya University, Ethiopia ©Haramaya University

Following the seminar, FAO and HU agreed on priority actions, including formalizing collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), organizing recurring joint seminars, supporting pluralistic advisory services, and developing customized eLearning resources for grassroots extension workers. HU also expressed interest in joining TAP membership.

This strengthened partnership will enhance curriculum delivery, improve extension services, and foster an inclusive, digitally enabled agricultural innovation system in Ethiopia.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS – TAP PARTNERS IN ACTION

Near East & North Africa

AARINENA

Regional Research Leaders Gather in Turkey for AARINENA Executive Committee Meeting

The Executive Committee of the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) convened its annual meeting on May 15, 2025, at the GAP Agricultural Research Institute in Şanlıurfa, Turkey. Hosted with the generous support of General Directorate of Agricultural Research and Policies (TAGEM), the meeting brought together representatives from key regional and international partners—including International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), Jordan's National Agricultural Research Center (NARC Jordan), Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Sudan's Agricultural Research Corporation (Sudan ARC), and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAiR)—to review progress, set strategic priorities, and advance collaborative efforts to transform agri-food systems in the region. Discussions focused on AARINENA's 2024 achievements, preparations for the upcoming 16th General Conference, and steps toward launching the Global NARS Consortium. The event concluded with an official visit to the Governor of Şanlıurfa and a cultural evening, reflecting the strong spirit of regional solidarity and partnership.



Participants of the AARINENA Executive Committee Meeting at GAP Agricultural Research Institute, Şanlıurfa, Turkey ©AARINENA

For more information, please click [here](#).

Africa

GFRAS

GFRAS Champions Peer-to-Peer Learning in Madagascar

Morondava, Madagascar | 21 March 2025

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) convened a vibrant National Sharing Workshop under the Accelerating Agroecological Transformation via Rural Advisory Services (AERAS) programme, bringing together practitioners, farmers, and regional partners for a full day of learning, dialogue, and field immersion.

In the Spotlight

Opening the session, Dr. Hlami Ngwenya, GFRAS Expert on Professionalisation, emphasized the importance of farmer-centred advisory services. Through Cluster Learning Groups and field-based demonstrations, the workshop showcased how agroecological principles can move from theory to practice—quickly and with impact.

Why It Matters

◆ Tangible Resilience Gains

Farmer Field Schools are already reporting higher yields, lower input costs, and reduced post-harvest losses, motivating smallholders to replicate agroecological methods.

◆ South–South Exchange in Action

Partners from Uganda shared successful practices, sparking cross-border collaboration and peer learning on climate-smart innovations.

◆ Learning on the Ground

Participants toured local plots to witness how collective experimentation is enabling farmers to co-create context-specific solutions.



Country Fora in Madagascar_Field Engagement ©GFRAS

Take-home for TAP Readers

This workshop exemplifies GFRAS's unique approach to systemic change:

- Professionalising advisory services
- Connecting practitioners across countries
- Fostering experiential learning
- Supporting agroecological transitions from the grassroots up

All of which aligns closely with TAP's vision of inclusive capacity development for resilient agrifood systems.

Discover more [here](#).

Latin America & Caribbean

RELASER

Strengthening Agroecology, Inclusivity, and Innovation in Rural Extension – Highlights from RELASER

• Agroecology Community of Practice Launched Under AERAS

In May 2025, Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services (RELASER) launched the Agroecology Community of Practice as part of the Accelerating Agroecological Transformation via Rural Advisory Services (AERAS) project. This initiative aims to connect national forums and experts across Latin America to share innovations, lessons learned, and address common challenges in agroecological transitions. The platform also seeks to internationalize knowledge generated through AERAS pilot projects in Costa Rica and Ecuador. The first meeting convened on 22 May, and the next session is scheduled for 4 September 2025.

• Promoting Gender-Inclusive Extension Services

RELASER hosted the first webinar in a new participatory series focused on gender-inclusive rural extension. The event addressed structural challenges and practical strategies to promote inclusive advisory services, recognizing the essential role of women and marginalized groups in agricultural production. The webinar outputs will feed into a series of technical briefs to guide policy and practice in the region.

• Engaging in Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Dialogues

RELASER's Executive Secretary María Auxiliadora Briones participated in the Second Regional Dialogue on Science, Technology, and Innovation organized under FORAGRO 2.0 in Costa Rica. In parallel, RELASER contributed to an FAO-led ATIO consultation on grassroots innovation and knowledge integration, highlighting the importance of participatory approaches in rural extension. RELASER also joined the Regional Working Group on Technology Foresight, working to identify emerging technologies and promote virtual exchanges among stakeholders.

RELASER Promotes Rural Extension with a Gender Approach




Participants engage in the first gender-inclusive extension webinar organized by RELASER under the AERAS project. © RELASER

- **Exchanging Experiences Across Country Forums**

RELASER supported several knowledge-sharing events, including a national seminar on rural extension foresight hosted by the Paraguay forum, with speakers from Costa Rica, Colombia, and Chile. Additionally, the Costa Rica and Colombia country forums jointly presented key takeaways from the Last Mile Project during an exchange facilitated by RELASER. A new technical guide was also introduced, capturing lessons learned from the AERAS project and related initiatives.

- **Bridging Family Farming and Markets Through Digitalization**

On 29 July, RELASER co-hosted a regional webinar with Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) on digitalization of technical assistance to link family farming with value chains. The event featured experiences from Argentina, El Salvador, and Colombia, showcasing tools and innovations that enhance market access for smallholders. More than 150 participants from eight countries engaged in lively discussions on regional collaboration and practical applications of digital solutions.



Poster for the virtual event held on 29 July 2025 to share results from the “Last Mile” project and AERAS capitalization guide. © RELASER

Asia-Pacific

SOUTH ASIA BIOSAFETY PROGRAMME

■ Gene-Edited Rice Boosts Phosphate Uptake and Yield in India

A team of scientists from the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council – National Institute of Plant Genome Research (BRIC-NIPGR) in New Delhi has developed gene-edited rice lines with enhanced phosphate uptake and grain yield, even under low-phosphate soil conditions. This innovation, led by Dr. Vibha Ahuja of Biotech Consortium India Limited, offers a breakthrough for sustainable rice farming in India.

Using CRISPR/Cas9 technology, researchers removed the repressor binding site from the OsPHO1;2 gene promoter, resulting in significantly increased phosphate absorption and a rise in grain yield under phosphate-deficient conditions. The improved rice varieties are expected to reduce the country's reliance on imported phosphate fertilizers, cut input costs, and minimize nutrient runoff into water bodies.

This innovation provides a critical step toward improving phosphorus use efficiency across India's rice-growing regions.



Rice field in India © Efadul Haque Efad

[Access](#) the journal article in Plant Biotechnology.

Regional Experts Advance Genome Editing Dialogue in Asia-Pacific

On 8–9 July 2025, policymakers, researchers, and seed industry leaders from 14 countries convened in Kuala Lumpur for the Asia and Pacific Seed Association (APSA) 2025 Regional Plant Breeding Innovation Consultation, co-hosted by APSA, American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), CropLife Asia, Canada Grains Council, International Seed Federation (ISF), French Interprofessional Organisation for Seeds and Plants (SEMAE), National Seed Association of Malaysia, and Mekong-US Partnership Project.

The consultation focused on:

- Scaling science-based, predictable regulatory frameworks
- Sharing country updates on genome editing
- Promoting regional cooperation

India presented key developments, including the release of genome-edited rice varieties and progress on regulatory exemptions for SDN-1/SDN-2 plants, as highlighted by Dr. R.M. Sundaram (ICAR-IIRR) and Dr. Vibha Ahuja (SABP).

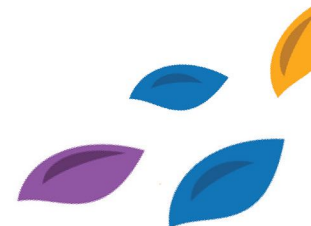
Bangladesh shared its new SOPs for gene-edited crops approved in 2023, presented by Dr. Mohammad Kamrul Hasan from Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI).

The event underscored the need for policy harmonization to unlock genome editing's full potential in crop improvement.



Group photo taken on 8 July 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, gathering experts and stakeholders from across the Asia-Pacific region. © APSA

CATAS



CATAS Hosts Regional Seminar on Natural Rubber Production for ASEAN Countries

On July 1st, the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS), with support from China's Ministry of Commerce, launched the "Seminar on Natural Rubber Production and Management for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Countries" in Haikou, Hainan Province. The 15-day training brought together 22 participants from Indonesia, Thailand, and Laos, aiming to strengthen regional cooperation and knowledge exchange in the rubber sector.

The program covers a range of topics including high-yield rubber cultivation techniques, innovations in latex tapping, and advancements in processing and value chain efficiency. In addition to classroom sessions, participants engaged in field visits, thematic discussions, and took part in the International Rubber Research and Development Board (IRRDB) conference.

By serving as a platform for technical exchange and collaboration, the seminar contributes to enhancing the competitiveness of the natural rubber industry in ASEAN countries and fostering greater regional synergy across the value chain.



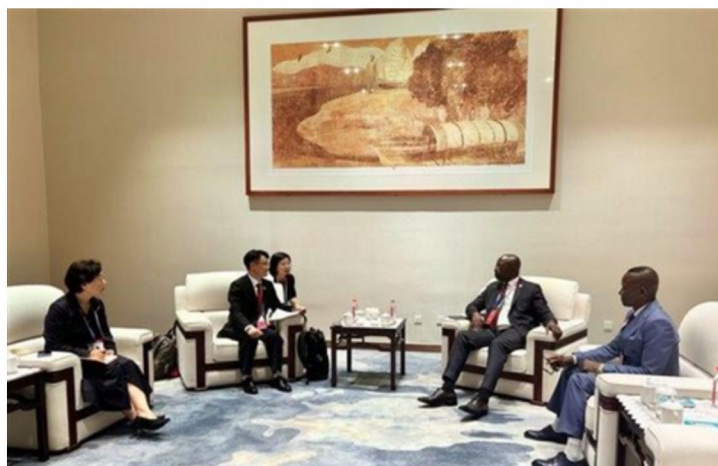


Group photo taken at the opening of the regional seminar on 1 July 2025 in Haikou, China. © CATAS

CATAS Explores Deeper Agricultural Cooperation with the Republic of Congo

On June 13th, on the sidelines of the Fourth China–Africa Economic and Trade Expo (CAETE) held in Changsha, Hunan Province, the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS) engaged in high-level discussions with a delegation from the Republic of Congo's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries.

At the invitation of H.E. Paul-Valentin Ngobo, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, CATAS Vice President Li Jihua met with the delegation to explore avenues for deepening tropical agricultural cooperation between China and the Republic of Congo. The exchange highlighted shared priorities and mutual interests in advancing South–South cooperation and promoting sustainable agricultural development aligned with broader China–Africa partnership goals.



Bilateral meeting held between CATAS and counterparts from the Republic of Congo during the Fourth China–Africa Economic and Trade Expo. © CATAS

CATAS Launches Overseas Training on Coconut Cultivation and Processing in Kiribati

On April 30th, the Overseas Training Course on Coconut Cultivation and Processing Technology for Kiribati officially commenced in Tarawa, co-hosted by the Ministry of Commerce of China and the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS). The training gathered 60 participants from Tarawa and surrounding islands.

Opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Tokaibure Rabaua, Minister of Environment, Land, and Agricultural Development (MELAD) of Kiribati, and Mr. Zhao Jian, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Chinese Embassy in Kiribati. The event was attended by Mr. Wang Bin of the Embassy's Economic and Commercial Office and Mr. Ritite Tekiau, Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Office (PSO), and was moderated by Mr. Routan Tongaiaba, Director of Agriculture and Livestock at MELAD.

Building on a strong history of collaboration—including three virtual technical exchanges and previous on-site missions—this three-week training program shared China's advanced techniques in coconut cultivation and processing. The initiative aims to enhance local production capacity and promote sustainable development in Kiribati's coconut sector.



Trainees and facilitators during the opening of the coconut training programme in Tarawa, Kiribati.

© CATAS

IICA

International Conference on Tropical Agriculture Highlights Pathways for Scaling Resilient Agrifood Systems

From July 29–31, 2025, the International Conference on Tropical Agriculture convened in Costa Rica, bringing together key stakeholders from across the Americas to explore how education, science, innovation, and finance can jointly support the scaling up of sustainable and resilient tropical agrifood systems.

Co-organized by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), and regional partners, the event contributed to strengthening the regional platform for tropical agriculture. Discussions focused on advancing a new generation of policies and financial mechanisms to support sustainable transformation, alongside capacity development through education and research.

A notable highlight of the conference was the official launch of the Dr. Manuel Otero Inter-American Chair on Tropical Agriculture, reinforcing IICA's commitment to leadership in sustainable agriculture in the region.

Watch the launch video on IICA's official [YouTube channel](#).



Europe & Global

AGRINATURA

Agrinatura Appoints Dr. Ioannis Dimitriou as New President

Agrinatura has announced the appointment of Dr. Ioannis Dimitriou as its new President. Dr. Dimitriou, an Associate Professor at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Senior Research Advisor in the Vice-Chancellor's Office, succeeds his previous role as Agrinatura Vice-President.

With extensive experience in EU- and nationally funded agriculture-for-development projects, Dr. Dimitriou has played leading roles in initiatives such as LEAP4FNSSA and CEA-FIRST (supporting the AU-EU FNSSA Roadmap), and co-led a work package under DeSIRA-LIFT (supporting the DeSIRA initiative). In 2024, he was appointed by Sweden to the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue Working Group on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA).



Dr. Ioannis Dimitriou, newly elected President of Agrinatura and Associate Professor at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). © Agrinatura

His research focuses on designing productive agricultural systems that integrate food and biomass crops with minimal environmental impact, particularly through innovative nutrient recycling strategies. Actively engaged in science-policy dialogue, Dr. Dimitriou promotes sustainable agricultural innovations and has authored over 90 peer-reviewed publications, served on numerous PhD committees, and led doctoral training at SLU and partner institutions.

Agrinatura looks forward to Dr. Dimitriou's leadership in advancing its mission of strengthening agricultural knowledge and innovation partnerships for sustainable development.

PUBLICATIONS



India BioEconomy Report 2025 Highlights Rapid Growth in Biotechnology Sector



The India BioEconomy Report 2025 presents an in-depth analysis of the country's biotechnology landscape.

The report outlines key developments across major biotech domains—BioPharma, BioIndustrial, BioAgri, and BioServices—and highlights the growth of biotech startups.

The report calls for increased investment, stronger private sector engagement, and enhanced biotech capacity through targeted policy efforts. These priorities aim to consolidate India's position as a leading innovation-driven bioeconomy.

To read the book, please download [here](#).

Report on FAO-CATAS Workshop for OCOP Implementation Released

The report of the FAO Technical Workshop on the Implementation of the One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) Initiative for Demonstration Countries, jointly prepared by FAO and CATAS, has been released. This publication reflects the strong collaboration between the two institutions since their 2021 MoU and summarizes experiences from 16 model countries in promoting the green development of specialty crops. It highlights China's technical solutions in crops like soybean and potato, and showcases successful models in processing and GI protection to support sustainable value chains.

As a key technical partner, CATAS has shared tropical agricultural technologies with over 80 countries, provided support to four model countries including Malawi, and submitted 17 research reports. This report marks a new stage for the OCOP initiative, offering valuable insights for advancing sustainable specialty agriculture globally.

Permanent link [here](#).

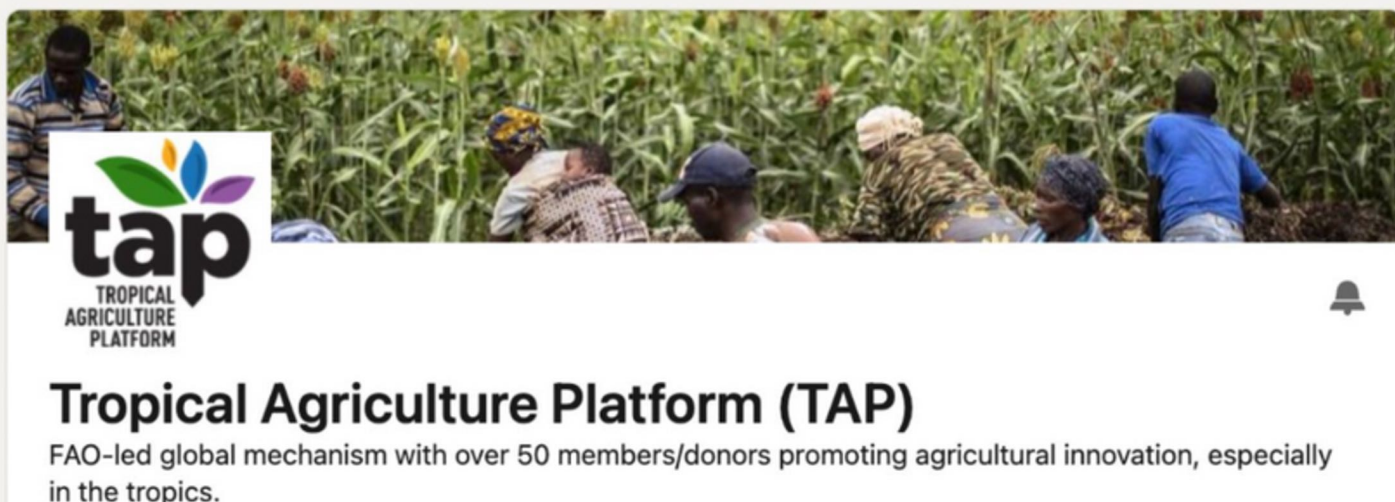


■ TAP has landed on LinkedIn

We're thrilled to announce that TAP has joined LinkedIn! This move represents our commitment to enhancing our online presence and fostering stronger connections. We invite you to follow our page and join us in this exciting journey. Your support in promoting our [LinkedIn page](#) among your network would be greatly appreciated, and we also welcome your contributions directly to our page.

Together, let's engage, network, and collaborate on LinkedIn to better promote agricultural innovation!

TAP on LinkedIn!



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/tropical-agriculture-platform-tap>

Contact the TAP Secretariat

TAP is a G-20 initiative launched in 2012 to promote agricultural innovation in the tropics. TAP has formed a coalition of more than 50 partners. Its main goal is to strengthen agricultural innovation systems (AIS) in developing countries through coordinated multi-stakeholder interventions.

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From August 2019 to December 2024, the European Commission (EU) supported TAP through the project "Developing capacities in agricultural innovation systems: scaling up the TAP Framework" (TAP-AIS), implemented by FAO.