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La'o Hamutuk commentaries on the draft Law on Pesticides

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La'o Hamutuk would like to thanks FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for the opportunities to comment on the draft of the Pesticides law.

La'o Hamutuk agree that Timor-Leste should strictly control the introduction and application of the chemical pesticides in the country, particularly in the agriculture sector.

We are not going to comment on the details on this law because we noted that this draft law are similar to the one used in many countries and has received suggestion to adopt FAO standards regulation on pesticides. In term of controlling and protection, this law should be sufficient. However, La'o Hamutuk as an organization that adopt the principle of food sovereignty, against the use of chemical pesticides in agriculture production because of its long term impacts on human, animal, environment, ecology and create dependency to pesticides producing companies.

We asked the Ministry and Agriculture and FAO to consider the following aspects when discussing about pesticides.

Pesticides provide more benefit to companies than farmers

Timor-Leste farmers today are considerably free from dependency to agro-technology companies. The majority the farms are still practicing organic farming, and very few using chemicals. However, this independency will change when the use of pesticides increases. They will depend on pesticides to control pests in their farms. The experiences in many countries, such as in Indonesia, Thailand, and Australia have shown that the dependency on chemicals inputs will become an extra burden for farmers' life.

The pesticides producing companies' principal objectives are to make profit by producing various types of pesticides. They make more profit when the pests problem increases. At the same time when farmers are suffering the loss, these companies make more profit. Many farmers in developed as well as developing countries have been trapped into dependencies to companies and spent a lot of money every year to maintain or to increase their production.

The negative effects of chemical pesticides are well recorded in many studies. The government from around the world acknowledges this and regulation such as pesticides law to prevent and minimize these negative impacts. The producing companies also recognize this and continue to improve their production to correspond to these regulations. But, what changes the companies make to their products are not essential. To adapt to these regulations what they do is to change the composition of their products as well as the ways of using their products, to limit the impact anticipated in these regulations. The long-term impacts remain the same: destruction to the natural system and create dependency toward agro-technology companies.

Agro technology companies are commanding the agriculture sector

The pesticides producing companies are powerful and influential all over the world, particularly in countries with high use of pesticides. In many cases, the better financial and human capital than many countries have and they can influence policies in many countries. In a powerful country like US, we can see that the influence of the lobbyist group from these companies can go as far as the congress. For that reason, even if countries have a strong law to regulate pesticides, the implementation of these laws will face many challenges, from the groups that benefit for the use of the pesticides.

We are glad that this draft law anticipated external influences in the pesticides registration process, and the creation of a pesticides council to minimize that will be important to prevent external influences. But this will not close the space for those with power and interest to try to intervene. I suggest this law to require the pesticides council to establish a transparent registration process which is open to public. A transparent process will minimize the chance of corruption during the registration process, because public can monitor and provide the views when necessary.

The best method to control pest is prevention

Many studies describe why pests occur in agriculture production. Pests grow in the environment that favors their survival. This environment is often created by humans as they manipulate soils, land, seed and plant, and other production factors to stimulate production increases. We are all aware how the introduction of a new plant species or variety can reduce pests and can create a pest problem, as the case of the introduction of some variety of GM cotton.

Unfortunately, even there have been many research and studies that explain the characters of pests and recommend non-chemical alternative control, laws on pesticides in many countries fail to recognize those alternatives. The government prefers easiest

way to control pest even with a long term impact to investment on more sustainable methods to control pests, which is better for farmers life, environment and ecology.

We encourage the government of Timor-Leste to adopt agriculture system the prevent the use of chemical pesticides. Systems like family farming, organic, small scale, diversified, and adapted to natural context not only reduce vulnerability to pest but make it easier to control with non-chemical methods. These methods include conservation agriculture, biological control, and natural control, and using the organic pesticides produce locally.

Conclusion – Recommendation

We recommend to include one more article to the law about the transparency in the registration process, so public can control and other parties can provide their views and experience of the types of the pesticides that will be registered.

In term of the agriculture development policy in Timor-Leste, we believe that provide more negatives compare to positive advantages to farmers. The government is reflect, evaluate and clearly define what is the best way to deal with pest issue in Timor-Leste. There many options that Timor-Leste can explore. Turning the chemical pesticide is the easiest option but its negative effects will not only affecting the current farmers and the futures as well. The best way to to control pest is prevention, by practicing farming methods that will not create favourable environment for pests, and easier to control with natural or biological methods, or the organic pesticides. This option require more investment and hard work, but the return will benefit the current and future farmers and community.

Thank you for you attention. We are open for further discussion.

Sincerely,

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Agriculture Team