

# Trading Towards a Sustainable Future

Newsletter on the Project  
"Fostering the Development of "Green" Exports Through VSS"



## Project Update

### From Discussion to Action!

2019 has been an eventful and fruitful year for the project "Fostering green exports through VSS", implemented by UNCTAD in partnership with the Governments of Vanuatu, the Philippines and Lao PDR.

Each of the countries organized a stakeholder meeting of the selected green export sector:

- the 1<sup>st</sup> Vanuatu Coconut Summit (30-31 October 2019);
- the 1<sup>st</sup> Philippines Technical Working Group on Virgin Coconut Oil (25 November 2019); and
- the 7<sup>th</sup> Lao Organic Agriculture Forum (28-29 November 2019).

The multi-stakeholder meetings discussed policy options to help smallholders and MSMEs enter into lucrative green or organic markets. The outcome of these meetings was **the adoption of a national action plan** to be implemented by respective government agencies, the private-sector stakeholders and development partners.

## The 1st Vanuatu Coconut Summit



The first **Vanuatu Coconut Summit** was held in October 2019 at the Vanuatu Agricultural Research and Training Centre on the island of Santo, the country's capital for coconut export. The event brought together both officials from different government agencies and coconut stakeholders all along the value chain. The Summit confirmed resulted in the adoption of an action plan in support of the implementation of the Vanuatu National Coconut Strategy 2016-2025.

## The 7th Lao Organic Agriculture Forum (LOAF7)



*"UNCTAD has been catalytic to promote the commercialization of Lao organic agriculture, and make it contribute to the implementation of the National Green Growth Strategy."*

**Lao Organic Agriculture Forum (LOAF)** was originally initiated by the Lao Government and UNCTAD under the UN Inter Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity project "Enhancing sustainable tourism, clean production and export capacity in Lao PDR". LOAF is a platform that aims to facilitate information and experience sharing among stakeholders interested in organic agriculture development in Lao PDR.

At its 7th edition in November 2019, over 150 stakeholders of organic agriculture discussed the sustainable commercialization of Lao organic agriculture, with a particular focus on ways to enhance green exports.

Participants highlighted that successful commercialization is key to the future of organic agriculture in Lao PDR and agreed on measures that will be reflected in an action plan to upgrade Lao's organic agriculture strategy to the national development agenda.

## The Philippine Technical Working Group on Virgin Coconut Oil

*“We need to reform the current system of organic certification that does not favour small and vulnerable VCO producers that aspire to compete in international markets”, said the Executive Director of Virgin Coconut Oil Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines (VCOP).*

In November 2019, over 50 stakeholders of the virgin coconut oil industry, including government agencies, international organizations, farmer groups, and private companies, gathered in Manila at the **1st Technical Working Group (TWG)** on Organic Certification of Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO).



The TWG members highlighted the challenges in maximizing the benefits of organic certification for successful commercialization and economic sustainability in the VCO sector and discussed a draft National Action Plan on organic VCO to be adopted at the 2nd TWG in 2020.

### VSS can make a difference



From coffee to coconut, Sed always pursues new opportunities.

With his partner, Sed established his small coconut oil factory in Tafea Province – Vanuatu in 2014. He is keen on providing job opportunities to his community and using the natural resources of his country in the most sustainable way.

Sed currently thinks of expanding his business internationally and move to the world market. In partnership with a New Zealand organic certifying body, he intends to export his products to New-Zealand, Australia and many other countries, which offer potential market opportunities.

But Sed faces several challenges:

*“At the moment we don’t know what are the criteria that we must follow to export our product and certifying is a costly exercise for us”*

**UNCTAD has put forward policy options to address these challenges** by establishing local certifying bodies to reduce the cost of certification and setting up a multi-stakeholder platform to increase awareness among small local producers.



**The United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) looks forward to yet another eventful year this 2020, with heightened momentum particularly in its research cornerstone!**

In June, UNFSS will mark the official launch of its **‘Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) Academic Advisory Council (AAC)’** that will function as a think-tank to bring together academic experts from a wide variety of backgrounds around the world. This type of multidisciplinary approach offers researchers from different thematic and methodological schools a chance to collaborate with and learn from one another.

The AAC will provide inputs to the **4th Flagship Report on ‘Scaling Up VSS through Sustainable Public Procurement and Trade Policy’** which will be officially launched this fall. This flagship will investigate SPP through the use of VSS as governments are technically capable of promoting social and environmental responsibility, especially through their purchasing behavior.

Last but not least, UNFSS will be co-hosting its **3rd International Convention on Sustainable Trade and Standards (ICSTS)**, an annual by product of the demand-driven informed policy dialogue led by the National VSS Platforms. More information about the ICSTS will be shared in due course.

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