



# Developing cassava production and marketing systems to enhance smallholder livelihoods in Cambodia and Laos

## Overview

Dryland farming systems in Southeast Asia have been developing rapidly due to growing regional market integration, increasing scarcity of farm labour, and government policies to encourage commercial alternatives to subsistence swidden agriculture. These external factors combine with a strong impetus from within rural communities for improved and diversified livelihoods. In particular, increasing demand for animal feed, starch products, and biofuel in Asia is encouraging both smallholders and large companies in Cambodia and Laos to invest in cassava production, supplying a range of value chains that stretch across Southeast Asia.

While adoption of commercial crops like cassava has typically seen smallholder cash incomes rise, the market outlook for cassava is strongly linked to supply and demand in global starch, grain, and energy markets, exposing smallholders to new risks and threats to their livelihoods, especially where they have borrowed heavily to embark on this enterprise. Hence it is not clear how an increase in average incomes translates into livelihood outcomes such as improved food security and poverty reduction, and how these benefits are distributed within communities.

There are opportunities to increase the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the cassava industry through better value-chain linkages between smallholders and industry actors. These linkages could deliver the dual objectives of industry development and economic growth, on the one hand, and livelihood security and poverty reduction, on the other. Understanding the incentives and constraints to adoption of improved production and marketing practices is critical to developing a sustainable smallholder sector. This requires a multi-scale appreciation of farming systems and livelihoods, value-chains, and policies and institutions.

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Location	Cambodia and Laos
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### Project leader(s) and Commissioned Organisation

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## Research

The overall aim of this project is to identify the socio-economic conditions under which improved technology and market booms in commercial crops such as cassava can be harnessed to increase the profitability and sustainability of smallholder farming systems in mainland Southeast Asia and thereby contribute to poverty reduction.

The specific objectives, focusing on the potential for smallholder cassava in Cambodia and Laos, are as follows:

- » Assess the current production, marketing, and institutional arrangements for cassava in major agroeconomic zones and value chains in Cambodia and Laos.
- » Increase the adoption of improved cassava production, resource management, and post-harvest practices (including coordination of harvesting and delivery) by strengthening linkages between farmers and research, extension, and industry actors.
- » Develop capacity for farming systems research and policy analysis and promote policy dialogue on the opportunities for industry development and livelihood enhancement through supported smallholder models.

## Achievements

Value chain assessments in Laos and Cambodia have revealed the many issues facing cassava farmers, traders and processors. Many of the problems require institutional innovations as, in the current context, demonstrations of agronomic improvements have failed to bring about adoption of sustainable cassava production practices.

