



**Global Organic Market Access**  
a project of **FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD**

**Report**  
**GOMA Asia Working Group Meeting**  
**26-27 September 2011**  
**Seoul, Korea**

Aiming to create a framework for cooperation on organic labeling and trade, the GOMA-Asia Working Group held its second meeting in Seoul, Korea. Participants from governments and civil society at this meeting numbered 33, and came from 15 countries in East, South-east and South Asia

**Opening Session**

After a welcome from the Steering Committee and introductions, the GOMA Project Manager reported on the general progress in the GOMA project since December, 2010, the time of the previous Working Group meeting in Seoul. The progress in the GOMA Asia initiative was reported in the context of the mapping for the framework, which was initially presented at the Mumbai meeting. Progress included the initiation of the Asia Regional Standards development and a second draft now in consultation after two meetings of the Drafting Group in March and June 2011. Progress on equivalence was also noted as a result of initiation of the pilot assessments between Philippine and Indonesian governments. Regarding supervision of certification, it was noted that a draft Terms of Reference from the Task Force is on the agenda of this meeting.

**Address from UNCTAD Director General**

Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi visited the Working Group, and noted that he was in Seoul at the same time to attend the Korean International Trade Association meeting. Dr. Supachai spoke about the threat of a global economic crisis, and also about the emergence of a green economy as a new dawn, similar to the industrial revolution. Organic agriculture is a key to reducing greenhouse emissions from agriculture and therefore part of the green economy, he observed. In his view, organic agriculture is a “must” for the future, and he expressed his support. Making these goods tradable is important, and he encouraged the work of GOMA.

**Asia Regional Organic Standard**

A progress report from the Standards Developer on the development of the Asia Regional Organic Standard (AROS) noted past decisions to a) follow a traditional organization e.g. IFOAM Basic Standards, b) limit the scope to crops, wild harvesting, processing and labeling, c) take into consideration the comparative studies of the Asian organic standards (presented in Mumbai), international standards/guidelines and the COROS. There was consistent and helpful feedback from the participating countries during the two consultation periods, noted the Standards Developer. Hosting of the two Drafting Group meetings by the Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Agriculture Products Standards and the Ministry of Agriculture, Laos was appreciated. Main discussions of both these meetings were summarized. It was noted that after the meetings and consultations, there were only three significant topics still in need of

reconciliation, these being hydroponic production, use of human excrements and the conversion period. The Working Group then reviewed these areas of the draft.

*Hydroponic Production:* The key concepts in the discussion were natural vs. artificial systems, soil vs. non-soil systems, and flexibility to accommodate innovation vs. adherence to traditional principles. It was agreed that the production of terrestrial crops should be soil-based. It was generally agreed to follow organic principles when deciding how to treat this topic, although the option to not mention it at all was raised. Consensus centered on staying close to the language in COROS, as it expresses the restriction in positive, principles-based terms.

*Human Waste:* It was noted by the standards developer that COROS and AROS currently have the same wording and also that two countries, Philippines and China, specifically allow it in their standards with restrictions. Discussion included adding more detailed language in the restrictions, the need to allow this substance due to the peaking and eventual decline of phosphorous sources, and whether there should be different language regarding of urine. It was decided to define and treat urine and solid human waste the same, and add some more explicit restrictions requiring further treatment, examples being composting and fermentation.

*Conversion:* The standards developer pointed out two issues, the period and the exceptions. In Draft Two, AROS is compatible with COROS although not the same language. Issues discussed included:

- the extent to which prior traditional practices can be considered to fulfill all the requirements of organic production,
- whether or not reliable verification of past practices is available,
- whether to fully recognize the past practice and thus have zero conversion time or alternatively to still require a shortened conversion period.
- Whether to align the conversion period with Codex.

Certification Alliance stated that their standard is 12 months for annuals and 18 months for perennials. It was suggested to include general language on shortening or lengthening the conversion period “for cause.” The group did not reach consensus on these matters. The standards developer will consider all the input and try to make a generally acceptable requirement on this topic.

### **Ownership of AROS**

The Steering Committee outlined three options for future ownership, which are: to ask Association of Southeast Asia Nations ASEAN (or ASEAN +3) to adopt it, to work with the Codex chair on the possibility for Codex to somehow take it up although it is not an international standard, and to leave it with the GOMA project for now. The ASEAN process and key meetings for the adoption process was explained, and these dates are noted in the schedule of steps for developing the Asia framework. It was suggested to explore with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in addition to ASEAN. There were no objections to keeping all of these options on the table.

### **Certification Alliance Report**

Certification Alliance is a consortium of Asian Certification Bodies working in ten countries, formed to assist organic producers to gain more than one certification and thus access multiple markets. Currently the group is working on harmonization projects for standards and inspection procedures. The harmonized standard is in a second draft and there are two consultation periods in the development process. The difference with the current draft of AROS is small, principally in the conversion topic, and the CertAll standard has more detail on many topics to enable it to be usable for

certification. The plan is to have one base standard for all, and then create add-on requirements for various export destinations, e.g. China, EU. Although the standard is in second draft, inputs criteria and an introductory section with principles needs to be drafted. CertAll will appreciate the finalization of AROS because then It will have a fixed reference point for the completion of their standard, and AROS can serve as a frame.

### **Equivalence of Standards and Certification Requirements**

This topic was introduced with a review of the main concept for the Framework for Cooperation, which is systems recognition in the case of the regulating countries and recognition of certification in countries not having organic regulations. A multilateral agreement is the formalization of this recognition. Such an agreement should include:

- scope of recognition
- equivalent standards
- equivalent conformity assessment
- equivalent supervision of certification and enforcement
- elements and mechanisms to maintain the agreement.

It was suggested that the scope of standards for the Asia framework be initially established as crop production, wild harvest, processing and label claims (taking into account the sovereign labeling authority in countries). For conformity assessment, group certification and input verification should be taken into account.

Equivalence of standards can be assessed either through meeting common international objectives (COROS) or meeting a common regional standard (AROS). The Working Group was reminded of the decision in Mumbai to establish recognition of conformity assessment through equivalence of certification performance requirements using IROCB as the reference, and supervision schemes and of the governments. Equivalence of supervision usually entails peer review, which in the case of multilateral recognition can be streamlined through paired team assessments that are reviewed and accepted by the other parties to the agreement.

Maintenance of the agreement can include the following elements:

- maintenance and updating of list of certification bodies
- information exchange on system modifications
- complaints handling
- verification of effective supervision (periodic peer review and right to on –site visits).

It was suggested that the maintenance system can be established through developing a website of certification bodies, appointment of contact persons for each country, and establishing a joint committee that meets at least annually to monitor the agreement.

Representative of the Philippines and Indonesia reported on the process and status of their pilot work on assessing equivalence of each other's organic regulatory systems. The assessments of standards is based on COROS. The process includes self-assessment, review of self-assessment by the other party, responses by the parties on an "as needed" bases, and the resolution of issues arising. A letter-of-intent between the two governments is in process. In-person meetings were held in late July in Indonesia and planned for September, in Korea. The aim is to conclude the agreement by February 2012, in time for the GOMA Conference.

Discussion: Participants commented that the Philippines-Indonesia appears to be a good exercise for learning how to do multi-lateral equivalence. It was commented that in reality, there is not so much trade flow between these two countries, and that it could be difficult to get approval for bilateral or multilateral agreements unless trade

flows are evident. The need for ministerial level approval for formal bilateral and multilateral exercises was also noted. This is a matter of political will in addition to a technical approach. The process for equivalence of requires review and buy-in from multiple ministries/agencies within a government. The Steering Committee proposed that Indonesia and Philippines share all the work and results within the Working Group. The work is then expanded to include the other systems. Each country prepares self-assessments of its standards, certification requirements, and also prepares information on its supervision and enforcement. Then the governments have an opportunity to read self-assessments of the others and convene to resolve issues. This could involve partner assessments rather than everyone reading everything. GOMA offered to support the self-assessments and convening. This could be conducted as technical exercise that could lead to a more formal and ministry-sanctioned multi-lateral equivalence process.

### **Terms of Reference for Task Force on Conformity Assessment**

A Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Task Force on Conformity Assessment was reviewed by the Working Group. The draft ToR presented two main objectives for the task force: refine the results of the comparative study on certification requirements for the regulating countries in the Working Group with reference to IROCB, and develop a protocol for addressing supervision and enforcement, including peer review. It was proposed to add a third objective for developing a protocol for maintaining equivalence. The Working Group accepted this proposal. It was further suggested that the GOMA undertake development of guidance on how to do peer review. It was further suggested that peer review systems for IOAS and IAF should be referenced. It was advised to attempt to reference international norms such as ISO 65 and 17011 in the work, for credibility.

The GOMA project manager will contact the heads of delegation from each of the regulating countries about their membership on the Task Force, the new ToR and meeting date.

### **Visioning for the Region**

Members of the Working Group were asked to share their vision for the organic trade in the Asia Region. Many commented on the need to support farmers and improve their lives. Several expressed using Asia work to build up a strong bloc, free flow of organic trade and state of trust in Asia that leads toward a common organic community and standard worldwide. A healthier environment and healthier people in Asia were also envisioned.

### **Multi-lateral Agreement**

CNCA noted that the motivation for these activities could be increased if Korea and Japan were included, and also noted that revised regulations in China may put some limits on equivalence, for example, requiring full transition periods without exceptions, also for imported products. It was suggested that after a clear work flow for the serious, although not formal equivalence exercise is developed, then the countries may be able to sign a letter of intent to work towards a formal MLA, which would not require the high levels at Ministry. If the exercises on standards and certification requirements are finished by the end of the GOMA project (May 2012), then the only thing left is on-site peer review. This letter could state the intent to proceed, based on the results. The countries were encouraged to explore and identify the decision processes for MLA in their governments.

Questions arose about the resources for the work that would lie ahead for making the MLA. The Steering Committee stated that it would be seeking a way to continue work on harmonization and equivalence, but encouraged the group to think about "Plan B"

in case the organizations do not receive funding, and in any case, self-funding should be the long-term strategy. It was proposed that GOMA serve as the initial Secretariat for the work and countries can also provide some Secretariat assistance. The working group decided to issue a declaration calling for donor support to continue GOMA's support of the Asia Framework for Organic Labeling and Trade, which is in Annex Two of this report.

A suggestion was made to plan and budget to keep the private sector involved in this process. Several government participants expressed that some participation from the private sector is critical especially in ensuring that the work leads to practical and positive results, but also that as the process moves toward more formal steps, the nature of the participation will need to change.

Participants commented on the establishment of a council for this work. There was general support for establishing a council and it was suggested that perhaps the council structure would also be able to own the standard. It was advised to start with a few willing countries signing letter of intent and a limited scope of products, say crops, and build up from there. Agreements are often for certain commodities and a limited scope could make it easier. The council should not be developed too quickly and it is better to operate ad hoc for a while longer. This Working Group or a similar forum could continue for now and longer term, provide input to the formal council. It was pointed out that in Central and South America there are clearly designated "competent authorities," that form such councils. The group received a short explanation of the history of these competent authorities and how they operate.

### **Working Groups**

A rough draft of a timeline for establishing the Framework for Cooperation was presented and distributed, along with rough draft language of an MLA that started in Mumbai and slightly revised by the Steering Committee. Participants were organized into three discussion groups to consider and react to these documents with heads of delegations from regulating governments constituting one of the groups.

*Regulating countries:* This group reported that the peer review might be complicated because the government organic regulators have different systems and structures involved in CB accreditation/approval. There are basically three different schemes as follows:

- direct accreditation/approval of CBs by the main regulating body, e.g. the Ministry
- main regulating body delegates to a national accreditation body which is peer reviewed for scope of organic, and it coordinates with the accreditation body
- main regulating body is not involved with CBs, but CBs operating in the country are required to be ISO 65 accredited by their national accreditation body, which is in turn peer reviewed through IAF, without organic scope.

*Group one:* This group mainly discussed what is practical and how to be inclusive. The group made suggestions for adjusting the timeline in the plan. It also suggested to include Certification Alliance (CertAll) as an observer at the council. Also, development and approval of instruments for the MLA could be subject to stakeholder review. A letter of intent should be accompanied by a briefing paper, so that it is thoroughly explained and transparent.

*Group two:* The group elaborates the process previously discussed in a diagram. An MLA Working Group would study options for ownership, who the country actors are, and the final decision process. GOMA should guide the process initially and longer term it might be ASEAN or some other institution. The first round of the Council can

start with three to four countries and add on others. GOMA's assistance in the nearer term can include self-assessments, education of government agencies, Briefings of CAARD, ASEAN. Working both a top-down (from FAO UNCTAD etc. and a bottom up the develop the technical steps is suggested. ASEAN already has MRA's so it could be easiest for the ASEAN countries to work via that system.

### **Next Steps and Conclusion**

It was concluded that the MLA will take two to three years. Because there was no consensus on the participation of the private sector in the next phase of the work toward Council, the Steering Committee will decide.

Next steps through May 2012:

- Revise plan and schedule according to feedback
- Approve AROS and work on the self-assessments
- Task force on conformity assessment
- Draft letter of intent and include briefing notes so that the Ministries understand.
- GOMA to contact ASEAN about the idea and process, which includes first stage as AROS and second stage as MRA/MLA. (It was noted that there is an MRA on testing & certification for some products). A letter should be written for inclusion as agenda item for the ASEAN Sector Working Group on Crops, and ask that copies of AROS sent to respective focal points.
- Countries sign letter of intent to be in the working group.

The meeting ended with a joint session to update the IFOAM World Board about the GOMA project.

## ANNEX ONE AGENDA

### Agenda GOMA Asia Working Group Meeting 26-27 September 2011 Hotel Riviera, Seoul

Monday, 26 September

- 09:00 – 10:00 Conference Opening
- Welcome from GOMA Steering Committee
  - Introductions
    - o Report from GOMA Project Manager on progress GOMA Project - general
    - o Framework for Cooperation on Organic Labelling and Trade in Asia
  - Review and Approval of Agenda
- 10:00 – 10:30 Coffee/Tea Break
- 10:30 – 12:30 Harmonized Standards
- Asia Regional Organic Standards (AROS)*
- Report from Drafting Group
  - Review of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft
- Options for Ownership
- Certification Alliance Standard*
- Report from CertAll
- Discussion of Next Steps*
- 12:30 – 14:00 Lunch
- 14:00 – 16:00 Equivalence of Standards and Certification Requirements
- Report from Steering Committee on the EquiTool/ Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards (COROS) and IROCB
  - Report from Indonesia/Philippines on pilot project
  - Proposal from GOMA Steering Committee for Assessing Asian Standards and Certification Requirements
    - o Discussion
- 16:00 – 16:30 Coffee/tea Break
- 16:30 – 17:30 Equivalence of Conformity Assessment Presentation of Terms of Reference for Task Force on Equivalence of Conformity Assessment
- Discussion

## **Tuesday, 27 September**

09:00 – 09:30	Putting the Framework Together (standards, conformity assessment, cooperation)
09:30 – 10:00	Multi-lateral Agreement for Cooperation on Organic Labeling and Trade in Asia
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee/Tea Break
10:30 – 12:00	Discussion Groups on Implementing the Framework for Cooperation, including the MLA
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 14:30	Reports from the Groups
14:30 – 15:00	Coffee/tea Break
15:30 – 16:00	Realizing the Framework for Cooperation Discussion/Decisions/Commitments
16:00 – 16:15	Closing Remarks
16:30 – 17:00	Joint Session with the IFOAM World Board

## ANNEX TWO: DECLARATION

### **Declaration of the Global Organic Market Access Asia Working Group from its meeting in Seoul, Korea on 27 September 2011**

Recognizing that organic agriculture and trade afford the world a high level of agro-ecosystem services and present social and economic opportunities for people, especially those in need of food security and ways out of poverty, the GOMA Asia Working Group, consisting of 33 representatives coming from 15 Asian countries and administrative regions<sup>1</sup>, is committed to developing a framework for cooperation on organic labeling and trade in Asia. This framework will enable farmers to develop market access for organic products and consumers to get access to these products, through an efficient regional organic market in Asia. Our aim is to develop and facilitate multilateral recognition and cooperation among countries, supported through a strong public-private regional partnership, which reduces or even eliminates transaction costs from multiple organic standards and conformity assessment requirements in the region.

We urge donor agencies to support the continuation of this work in service to the sustainable development of the Region.

*Working group members come from the governments of:*

Bhutan  
China  
Hong Kong, China (SAR)  
India  
Indonesia  
Malaysia  
Lao  
Philippines  
Singapore  
Thailand  
Vietnam

*Civil Society representatives come from:*

Cambodia  
China  
Hong Kong, China (SAR)  
Nepal  
India  
Indonesia  
Japan  
Malaysia  
Nepal  
Philippines  
Sri Lanka  
Thailand

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<sup>1</sup> Geographic scope is East, South-east and South Asia

### ANNEX THREE LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Country	Name	Title	Organization
<b>Regulating Countries</b>			
China	Mr. Maohua Wang	Deputy Director of Agricultural Products Division of the Registration Department	Certification and Accreditation Administration of China (CNCA)
China	Ms. Maozhi Tang	Senior Engineer	China Certification & Accreditation Institute
China	Ms. Na Xu	Deputy Director	CNAS, China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment
China	Mr. Xingji Xiao	Director	Organic Food Development Center (OFDC)
India	Ms. P.V.S.M Gouri	Advisor	Agricultural and Processed Foods Product Export Development Authority (APEDA)
India	Mr. Manoj K. Menon	Director	International Competence Centre for Organic Agriculture (ICCOA)
Indonesia	Ms. Sri Sulasmi	Director	Ministry of Agriculture
Indonesia	Mr. Agung Prawoto	Director	Biocert
Japan	Mr. Yutaka Maruyama	President	Japan Organic Inspectors Association
Malaysia	Ms. Norma Othman	Director--Crop Quality Control Division	Department of Agriculture
Malaysia	Ms. Selina Gan	Board member	Organic Alliance Malaysia (OAM)
Philippines	Mr. Gilberto Layese	Technical Adviser	Bureau of Agricultural Research, Department of Agriculture
Philippines	Ms. Lara Vivas	Senior Science Research Specialist	Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards, Department of Agriculture
Philippines	Mr. Patrick Belisario	Board of Trustee	Organic Producers and Trade Association

Philippines	Mr. Pablito Villegas	Convenor for Asia (INOFO)	Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmer's Organizations
Thailand	Mr. Utai Pisone	Senior Advisor	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS)
Thailand	Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee	Senior Standards Officer	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS)
Thailand	Ms. Monthicha Boonumpol	Standards Officer	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS)
Thailand	Mr. Pisan Pongsapitch	Director, Office of Commodity and System Standards	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS)
Thailand	Ms. Chayaporn Wattanisiri	Chair of Executive Board	Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT)
<b>Non-Regulating Countries</b>			
Cambodia	Mr. Hironobu Kurata	Chairman of the Board	Cambodian Organic Agriculture Association (COAA)
Hong Kong, China	Mr. Jonathan Wong	Director	Hong Kong Organic Resource Center
Hong Kong, China	Mr. Kwei-kin Liu	Assistant Director (Agriculture)	Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Hong Kong Government
Laos	Mr. Thavisith Bounyasouk	Head	Laos Certification Body Department of Agriculture
Nepal	Mr. Basanta Ranabhat	Chair person	Organic Certification Nepal (OCN)
Singapore	Ms. Khoo Gek Hoon	Deputy Director	Agri Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore
Sri Lanka	Mr. Thilak Kariyawasam	President	Lanka Organic Agriculture Movement (LOAM)(SRICert)
Vietnam	Mr. Le Thanh Hoa	Deputy Director	International Cooperation Department – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>Supranational</b>			
Thailand	Mr. Vitoon Panyakul	Chair	Certification Alliance

<b>Steering committee /staff/consultants</b>			
UN	Ms. Sophia Twarog	Senior officer	UNCTAD of the United Nation
IFOAM	Mr. Ong Kung Wai	World Board member	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
IFOAM	Mr. Andre Leu	IFOAM vice president	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
IFOAM	Ms. Diane Bowen	GOMA project manager	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
IFOAM	Ms. Zhenye Zhang	GOMA project coordinator	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
New Zealand	Mr. Jon Manhire	AROS coordinator	The AgriBusiness Group Ltd.
<b>Observer</b>			
Argentina	Ms. Patricia Flores	Latin American coordinator	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
India	Mr. Miguel Braganza	Additional Director	Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI)
Indonesia	Mr. Rasdi Wangsa	Executive Director	Indonesia Organic Alliance
Japan	Mr. Masaya Koriyama	World Board member	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM)
Vietnam	Mr. Koen den Braber	Technical Advisor	ADDA-VNFU Organic Project