

Supporting Agricultural Transformation through Extension and Learning Network

Souvanthong Namvong

Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC),
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao PDR



Supporting Agricultural Transformation through Extension and Learning Network

Souvanthong Namvong

Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC),
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao PDR

Mekong Extension Learning Alliance



The Mekong Extension Learning Alliance

About MELA



The Mekong Extension Learning Alliance

The name MELA is very appropriate for this network, being a Sanskrit word meaning **‘a gathering’** or **‘large meeting’**.

Rationale for MELA

- It is home to 225 million people, with more than 60% of them living in rural areas.
- Investment, trade, expertise and labour are flowing from one country to another, while social and environmental impacts are also crossing national boundaries.
- Agricultural extension and rural advisory services in the Mekong Region have many features in common



MELA History and Milestones



- Established at the Workshop on ‘Reaching the Millions’, funded by SDC and organised by Helvetas & GFRAS in Hanoi, March 2015
- Agreement between 5 countries:
 - Cambodia
 - Laos
 - Myanmar
 - Thailand
 - Vietnam

MELA Vision and Mission

The vision of MELA is **to better serve** millions of **small farmers** in the Region, so that rural families may overcome poverty and have better livelihoods.



The mission of MELA is to be **a network for all stakeholders** in agriculture and rural development in the Mekong Region to continuously **learn** and **share knowledge** and **best practices** with each other and from outside sources in the area of **advisory services** for **sustainable agriculture, marketing** and **rural development**.

MELA Functions & Regional networking

MELA Functions

- a. **Providing voice and advocacy** within regional policy dialogues and **promote improved investment** in RAS;
- b. Supporting the development and synthesis of **evidence-based approaches** and **policies** for improving the effectiveness of RAS; and
- c. Strengthening RAS actors through facilitating **interaction and networking**.

Regional networking

Global Forum for Rural Advisory Service (GFRAS)

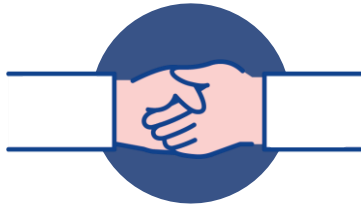
Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Service (APIRAS)

ASEAN Working Group on Agriculture Training and Extension (AWGATE)

The image features a white background with decorative blue abstract shapes in the corners. In the top right, there are overlapping light blue and medium blue curved shapes. In the bottom left, there are overlapping medium blue and light blue curved shapes. The central text is in a bold, dark blue font.

Capacities built through MELA

MELA is a collaborative and interactive platform



That fosters connections & partnerships between different type of stakeholders



Enables knowledge sharing, personal & institutional learning and skill development.



Policy influence through evidence-based action research in different countries

Leveraging collective expertise through MELA

- The diversity in expertise and institutional representation enriches the exchange in knowledge and best practices, as well the collective creation of knowledge
- Being a network makes it a safe place for exchange of knowledge and to share. It is not a government meeting, or NGO meeting, it a safe shared space with a common interest.
- It emphasizes the importance of context specific knowledge and localized solutions.
- Invites to seek continuous improvement, and creates a culture for learning, which is an ongoing and an iterative process.
- It can be a gate way to more experiences and knowledge, as well as to other networks.

The slide features a white background with decorative blue abstract shapes in the corners. In the top right, there are overlapping light blue and medium blue curved shapes. In the bottom left, there are overlapping medium blue and light blue curved shapes.

Current challenges in the sector

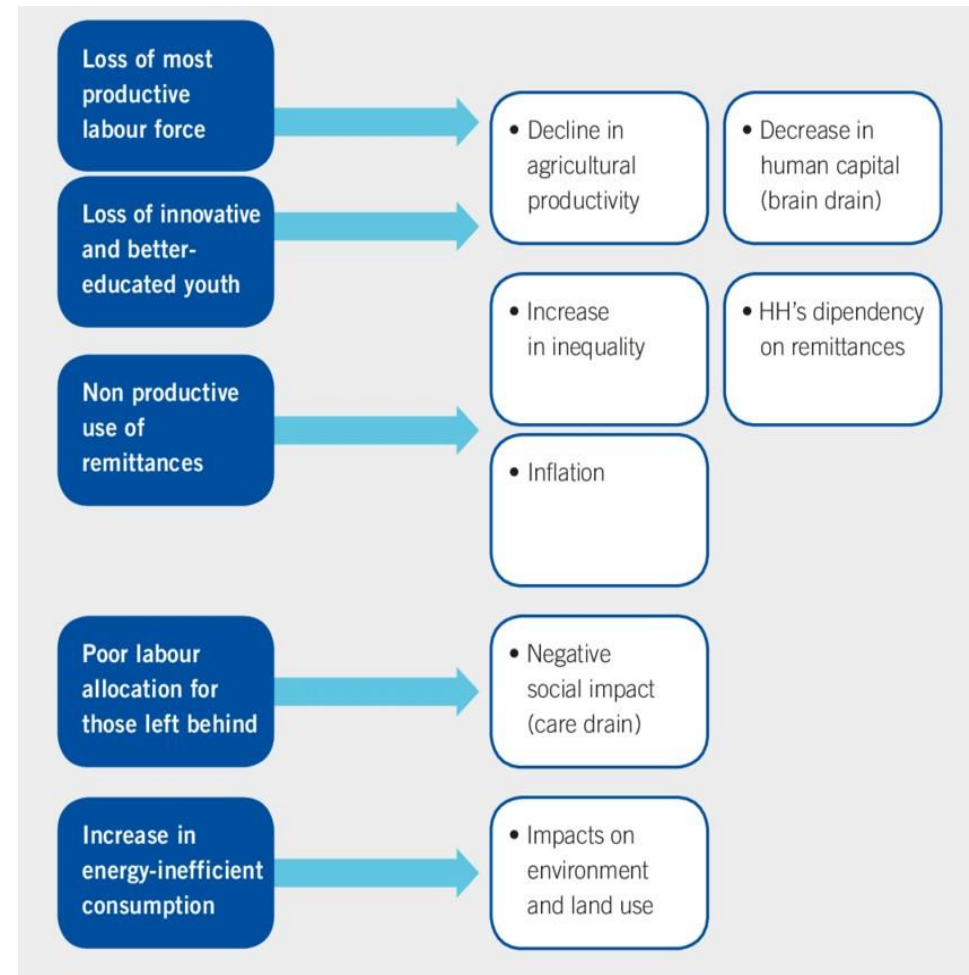
Current challenge: labour trends

Rural youth:

- have a crucial role to play in the future of our food systems
- are leaving their villages because of lack of opportunities in income generating activities.
- limited availability will affect the support system to the older people in the future.

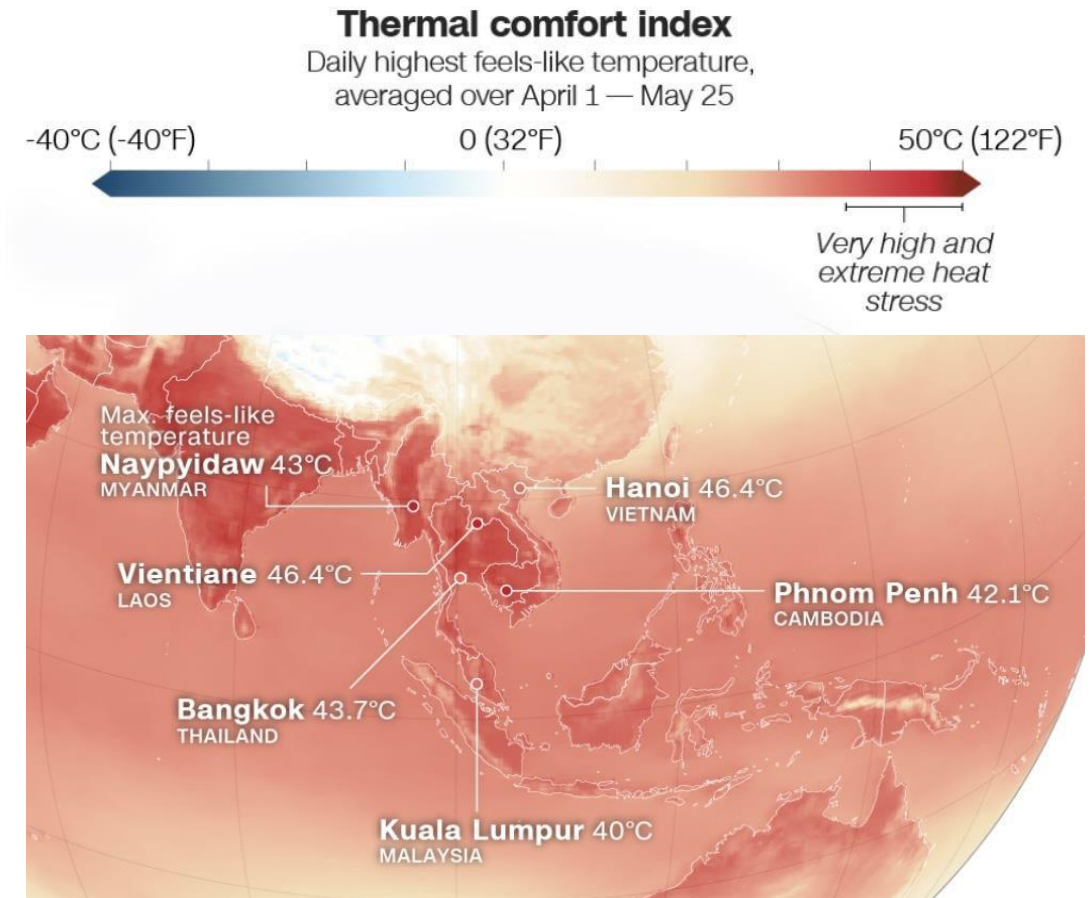
➤ **What can be done to keep the sector productive, innovative and resilient?**

negative impacts of youth migration on rural areas of origin



Current challenge: impacts of climate change

- **Extreme weather** is already affecting the Mekong Region. The extreme heat in April and May 2023 is the latest example.
- Climate change will have a major impact on the agriculture sector, **affecting farming systems**; *what* can be produced and *how* it is produced.
- The next generation of farmers need **new knowledge and skills** to survive and thrive under these difficult conditions.
- Climate change can disrupt food availability, reduce access to food, and affect food quality.



Current challenge: entrepreneurship

There are many examples of young people who are willing to work in the agriculture sector, *if...*

They make their own decisions

They earn their own money

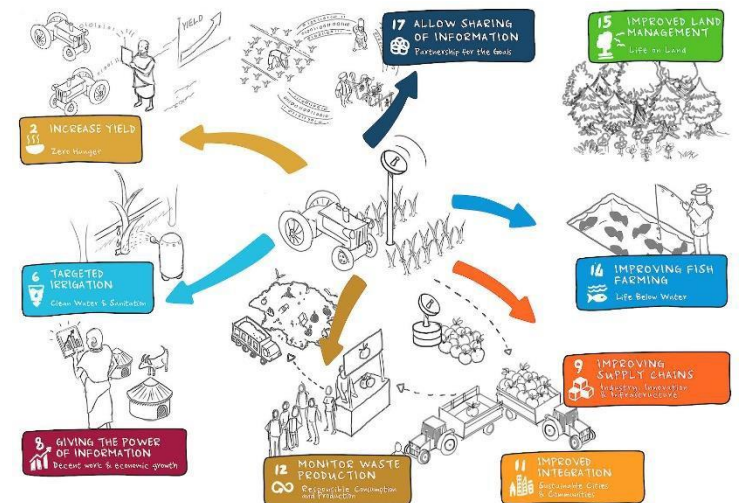
They get respect from their peers

- Entrepreneurship is the key. Most rural youth do not want to be farmers like their parents, but they can be ‘agripreneurs’.
- Small entrepreneurs need support in the form of training, networking and start-up capital.
- Schemes like *Young Smart Farmers* in Thailand, and *AGREE* in Laos, are examples of new forms of Rural Advisory Services.

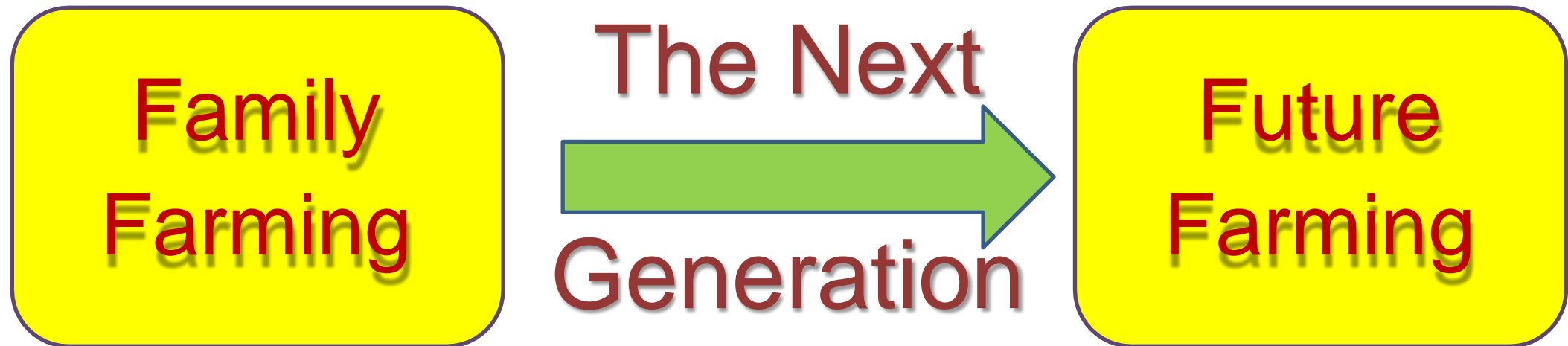


Current challenge: technology & digitalisation

- **The technology** used by the next generation of farmers in the Mekong Region will be very different to that used by the previous generation.
- **Digitalisation** offers many potential benefits in terms of environmental monitoring, producer networking, supply chain management, quality assurance, online marketing etc.
- The knowledge and skills associated with this technology are lacking in traditional extension systems, but available in the private sector. How can we make **PPP connections to provide better services?**

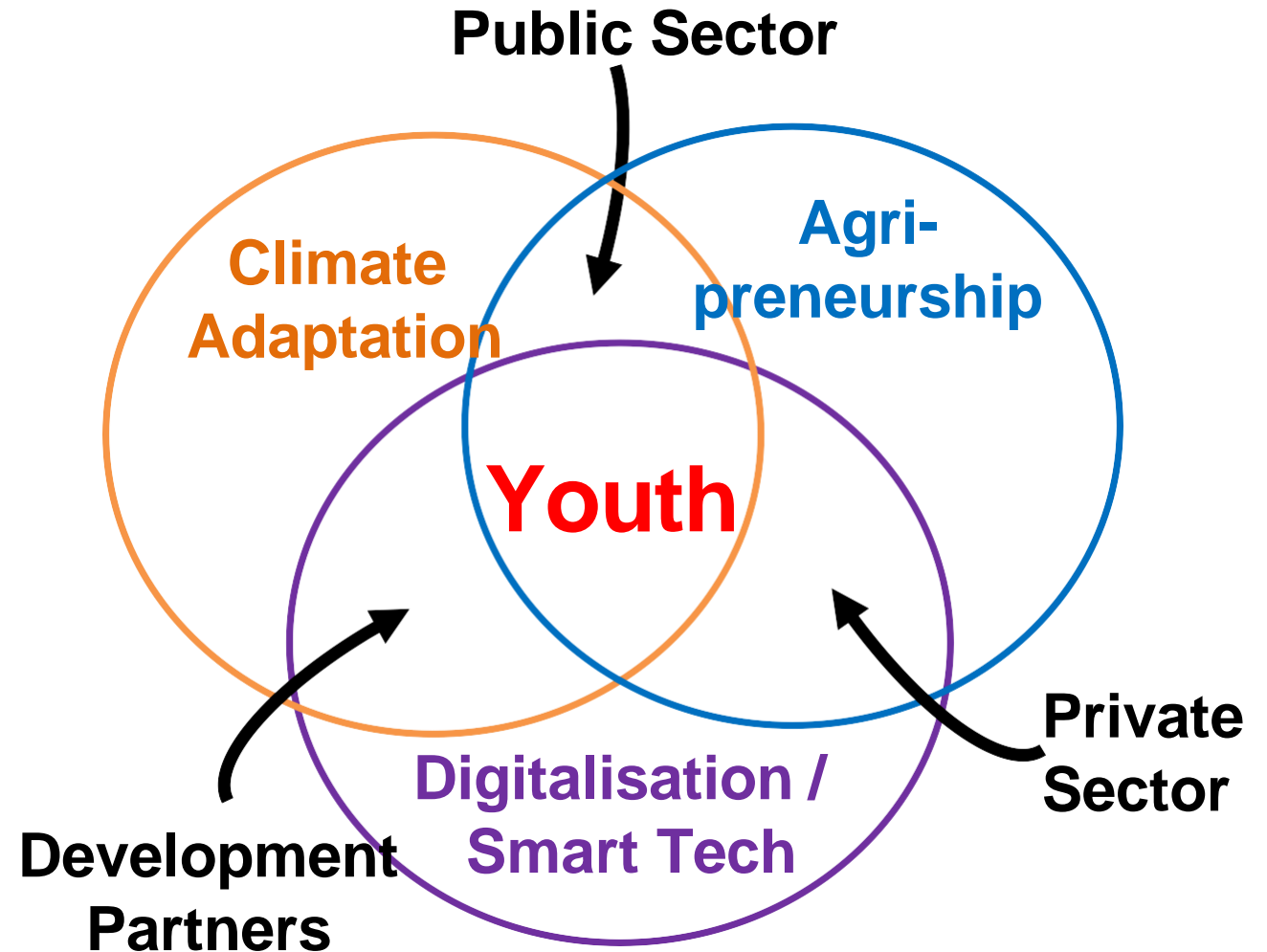


Evolving priorities for agriculture extension/rural advisory services

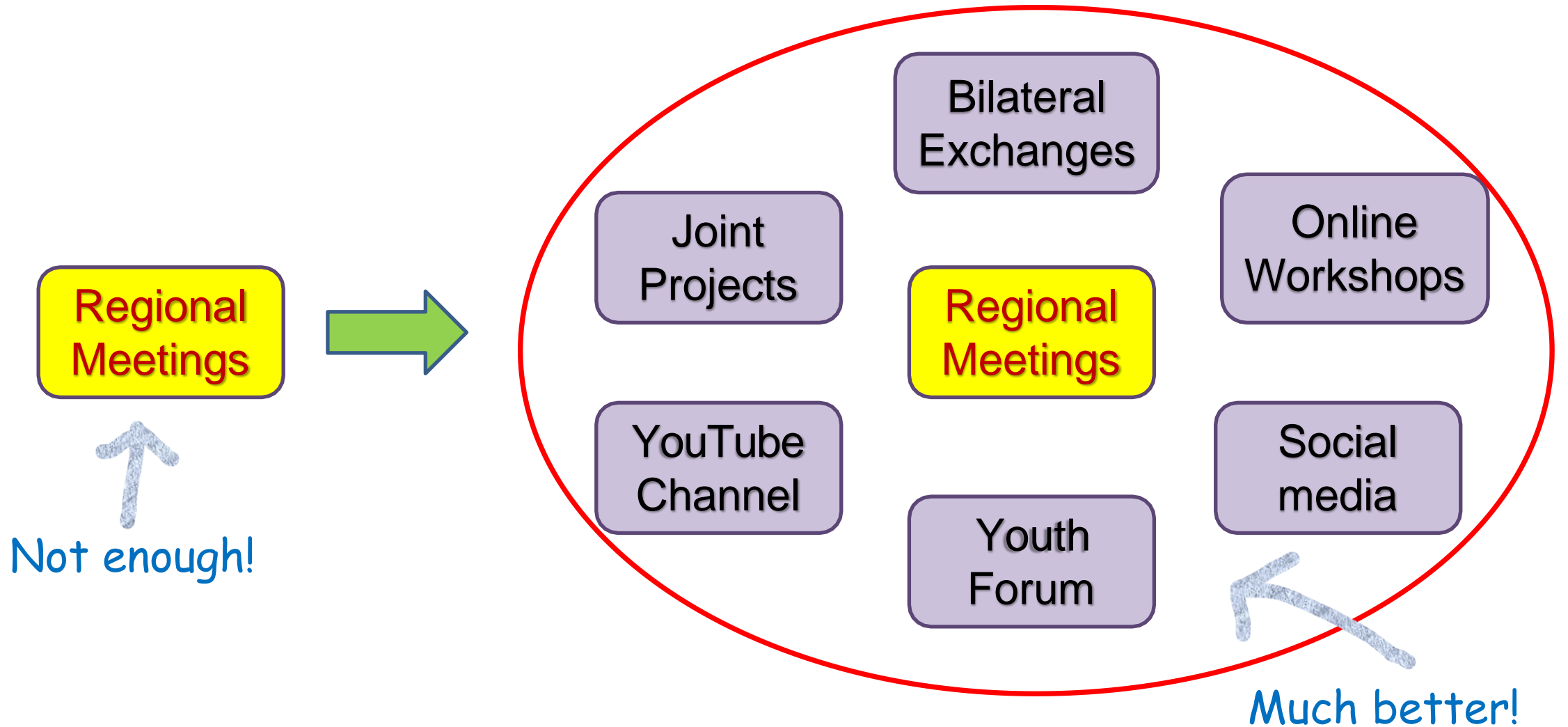


A 'Future Farming Strategy' for MELA

- We must work together to **provide better services for the next generation of women and men** in the agriculture sector across the Mekong Region.
- The sector is threatened by **the impacts of climate change** and all producers must learn to adapt.
- At the same time, young people need to acquire new **knowledge and skills** if they are to find attractive jobs and incomes in the sector.
- Capacity-building for entrepreneurship and the application of **digital technology** is essential to achieve these goals.



A 'Future Farming Strategy' for MELA





ORGANIZED BY

CO-HOSTED BY



Thank you very much for your kind attention

Contact: namvongs@gmail.com

Mobile: +856-20-2222 4541

WhatsApp or LINE: +856-20-2222 4541