



JOURNY OF SPERI ANH MS TRAN THI LANH

OPEN DIALOGUE

Indigenouss peoples and development presures
RIHN Oct 8th, 2026 Seminar



Photograph by SPERI & Tran thi Lanh (update Oct 8th, 2026 Kyoto RIHN region!

The theory of Bio-Human Ecology utilizes the conceptual metaphor of the "biological cell of a living organism" to model the value system of global Indigenous communities - demographics that historically have been, currently are, and perpetually risk being marginalized by three externally imposed, pejorative labels: "Backward, Superstitious, and Uncivilized."

Throughout forty years of empirical immersion - living, cohabiting, and learning alongside Indigenous peoples within the Mekong sub-region; embarking on extensive field research across Latin America (the Amazon basin) and the Pacific Islands; and engaging with agrarian communities in Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines - Ms. Tran Thi Lanh has astutely distilled the collective wisdom, localized experiences, and institutional lessons of Indigenous farmers.

She approached this developmental paradigm through a three-tier dialectical logic:

- **Step 1:** Conceptualizing grassroots practices derived from field realities.
- **Step 2:** Empirically testing and verifying these concepts to formulate formalized, rigorous Definitions.
- **Step 3:** Actualizing these definitions through community development initiatives to establish a community-centric methodology, thereby systematically dismantling the three vicious cycles of structural poverty.

On this foundational bedrock, she established an Indigenous community engagement methodology predicated upon an isosceles triangle of "self-reinforcing attraction" (internally generated prestige/"Hữu xạ tự nhiên hương"): the Apex denotes Livelihood Sovereignty; the Left Base denotes Indigenous Knowledge Sovereignty; and the Right Base denotes Indigenous Seed Sovereignty. Within this tripartite framework lies the mandate of Community Entrepreneurs (acting as organic representatives of their

respective populations), who bear the responsibility of consolidating, enhancing, and operationalizing proactive fortitude in defending and advancing Indigenous Livelihood Sovereignty. Her methodology asserts that Community Eco-Agriculture, under the stewardship of Community Entrepreneurs, constitutes the pillar strategy underpinning all thresholds of sustainable development and self-determination.

Accordingly, she mobilized and connected Village Elders - the spiritual leaders, embodiments of epistemological wisdom, and patriarchal pillars of the communities - to construct six core networks. These networks functionally correspond to state ministries and are analogized to vital organs of the human body:

- 1) The Customary Law Network in Community-Based Natural Resource Co-Management:** Formulated to functionally align with the Ministry of Justice at the state level, operating as the Brain of the human body. The essence of this network is to preserve the traditional political institutions indigenously established by the community through their evolutionary survival and codependency with the local ecosystem.
- 2) The Indigenous Herbal Medicine Network in Community Health Care and Bio-Cultural and Biodiversity Preservation:** Engineered to correspond with the Ministry of Health and symbolized as the Left Arm of the human body. The intrinsic nature of this network resides in indigenous ethno-botanical knowledge.
- 3) The Eco-Farming Network in Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security:** Designed to mirror the mandates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development during the transitional late-1990s era.
- 4) The Women's Wisdom Network in Traditional Creative Artistry and Household Economic Governance:** Aligned with the operational scope of the Ministry of Industry and Trade.
- 5) The Savings-Credit Network for Livestock Development Parallel with Veterinary Services:** Corresponding functionally to the Ministry of Finance.
- 6) The Traditional Education Network:** Executed based on empirical insights derived from the five aforementioned networks by establishing critical watershed spaces designated as the HEPA Eco-Farming Youth Training School (HEPA stands for Human Ecology Practical Area). Its systemic mission corresponds to a comprehensive Ministry of Education, Indigenous Science-Technology, and Environment.

Over time, core agrarian practitioners, guided by Village Elders (revered within this framework as Traditional Professors) within the intergenerational space of the HEPA Eco-Farming Youth Training School, have forged and consolidated the indigenous science and technology of their respective tribes. Refined by her research colleagues through the theoretical analytical lens of Bio-Human Ecology, the HEPA Eco-Farming Youth Training School has successfully cultivated numerous graduated Youth Leaders.

From this empirical baseline, she formulated the Community Entrepreneurship Theory, empowering core farmers who possess the psychological confidence and structural fortitude to uphold the "Nurturing Nature" philosophy - a indigenous worldview internally shaped by the tribes through their co-existence and codependency with the natural world. They harbor profound institutional pride in their ethnic identity, vernacular language, script, and harmonious life path within the biosphere.

Nevertheless, on her trajectory to comprehend and map the developmental path for these communities, Ms. Lanh constantly found herself navigating against a dominant developmental paradigm that measures progress strictly through metrics of currency and individualized liberty, thereby presenting acute systemic challenges.

Yet, through her distinctive methodology and forty years of organic, trust-based coexistence with Indigenous tribes, her organization, SPERI, has yielded profound empirical outcomes:

- a.** Multiplied and conserved over 1,200,000 indigenous seed and plant varieties across villages in Vietnam and Northern Laos, structurally re-introduced into critical, vulnerable watershed forests.
- b.** Secured Land Use Rights Certificates for 139,200 hectares of natural forests, regenerated forests, and barren lands legally allocated to over 300 villages.
- c.** Synthesized a network comprising over 6,000 core members (including Traditional Professors, Farmer Coordinators, and ethnic minority Youth Leaders).
- d.** Mobilized more than 1,500 women to participate actively and leadership-wise within the six aforementioned core networks.

In terms of macro-policy impact, her organization contributed directly to Article 48, Paragraphs 3b and 3c regarding the political and legal status of wives (guaranteeing equal co-ownership of assets with husbands) within Land Law No. 13/QH11/2003 and Decree 163/ND-CP/1999. Most notably, SPERI successfully advocated for 17 distinct provisions protecting the statutory rights of 14 million ethnic minority individuals in Vietnam under institutional legal terms such as: Indigenous Knowledge, Customary Law, Sacred Forests, and Traditional Forests for Watershed Protection in Article 2; and the Statutory Right of Communities to hold Land Use Rights Certificates in Article 86 of the Law on Forestry No. 16/QH14/2017.

Ms. Tran Thi Lanh is the definitive pioneer in Vietnam and Laos to establish independent, non-governmental Science and Technology organizations operating transnationally, including the Center for High Land Human Ecology Research (CHESH) and the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI).

For institutional updates and academic briefs, please consult: www.speri.org; www.codeinter.org and www.co2justice.org/.

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