

Extension Approaches for Scaling Out Livestock Production in Northern Lao PDR (EASLP)

Project Newsletter No. 5
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Summary of activities since July 2009

During the second half of 2009 the project continued to develop specific tools to assist extension staff working with farmers in the northern Lao provinces. These tools include operational guidelines for working with Hmong, Khamu and Akha people, particularly on how to communicate and behave with village leaders and families. The guidelines were discussed in September 2009 in Huaphan province with district and provincial livestock staff and have been distributed to LDP, LEAP, NAFRI, LPAFC, NGOs (World Vision, CRWRC and GAA) and other NAFES projects

Another development has been staff training in making digital stories on livestock production techniques and farmer case studies. Digital stories are a strong audio-visual tool presented on CD or DVD, in the farmers own language. A training workshop was held in September 2009 to teach EASLP, LDP and CIAT staff how to make the stories. The project team have since been developing a range of digital stories showing examples of pig, goat, cattle and buffalo production by women and men farmers from poor to medium wealth upland families. These have been tested with ethnic villages in Luangprabang province and will be distributed on DVD and CD to district staff to use with their farmers. Guidelines on making digital stories for livestock production have also been published.

In addition, sixteen farmer case studies were developed by staff from Koun, Phonexai, Viengthong and Viengxai districts in brochure form. These case studies have been distributed to all LDP target districts along with guidelines on how to make case studies and run cross visits. However they will need follow up and mentoring in how to use these farmer learning activities.

Project staff also carried out research on the impact of cross visits and other factors on farmer decision making and livestock production. Results show that cross visits were instrumental in stimulating farmers to take action, and demonstrate the flow on effects of farmer to

farmer learning as more farmers in each village followed the lead of the cross visit farmers.

In November 2009, Viengxay Photakoun completed his Masters thesis on "The role of capacity building for livestock extension and development in Lao PDR." A summary of the results and recommendations follow in this newsletter.

On February 3rd 2010, the third meeting of the EASLP Project Steering Committee was held at NAFES, Vientiane. Chaired by Mr Somxay Sisanoh, the meeting included presentations by project leaders Dr Joanne Millar and Mr Boualy Sendara on the research and capacity building activities undertaken in 2009. Viengxay Photakoun presented the research results and recommendations from his Masters thesis, while Anne Stelling presented the project's guidelines on extension ideas for Khamu, Hmong and Akha people, and the development of digital story making capacity amongst Lao staff.

Welcome to new project team member!

Mr Sombat Vannaphoun has joined the project team at NAFES. Sombat has a Bachelor degree in agriculture from the University of Lao and several years experience working with NGOs. He will be assisting with digital story development and evaluating their use and impact in the field.



Mr Sombat Vannaphoun at work



Extension ideas for Akha villages

In addition to our guidelines for working with Hmong and Khamu farmers, the EASLP project has recently developed guidelines designed to help extension officers working with Akha villages. The Akha value their cultural identity very highly and prefer to keep themselves apart. They view lowland people with suspicion and distrust. Akha believe themselves superior to lowlanders because of their common sense, their devotion to a long line of ancestral tradition and their closeness to nature. They avoid marriage to other ethnicities and they don't allow other ethnicities to become Akha.

Akha people see themselves as all equal. Not having a nation-state is an important part of Akha identity and a source of pride, and historically they have preferred migration to domination by other ethnic groups.

All Akha people know their ancestors back 57-60 generations by name. This is a source of legitimacy and pride; everyone knows exactly who they are in relation to everyone else. The people know their history, traditions and lineage through traditional oral texts, which they call the heart book.

The Akha *zah*, or way of life, encompasses everything from traditional religion, law, customs, etiquette and ceremonies. The obligation to live correctly and carefully, in balance with their environment, governed by their laws, is taken very seriously. The rules of how to behave are handed down through generations, and must be performed properly and exactly as taught.



Akha village

A multitude of rituals addressing ancestors and spirits are part of everyday life; from daily to seasonal to annual rituals. These are intricate and time consuming and require regular sacrifices of livestock, especially chickens. For extension, this requires acknowledgement of the importance of these rituals. Plan any extension activities around rituals. Emphasise the advantages of increased

livestock production to be gained from improved practices.

There are very clear roles and responsibilities for particular people in every village. Understanding these roles could be very helpful to extension officers entering an Akha village. For example, the village elders choose a spiritual leader (the *dzoma*) of the village from a hereditary line. This leader is responsible for overseeing the customs, prescribing rituals and settling disputes. His most important job is the regulation of the yearly agricultural cycle through performing rituals at the times he deems suitable.

There is also a separate village headman appointed. This may be by the village council of elders or a government appointed person. The headman deals with external affairs (meeting and greeting strangers, government officers etc), while the spiritual leader deals with internal affairs – the ritual and the spiritual. Every Akha village has a blacksmith who is the keeper of technical knowledge. He is skilled in making hoes, cultivating tools, knives etc. There are also fertility mothers and shamans who are skilled in healing and increasing fertility of crops, livestock and people.

The Akha village provides a place of protection for Akha people. Spiritual power radiates from the centre of the village (where the spiritual leaders house is located) outwards to the village boundary. Outside the village is believed to be dangerous and wild; outsiders may be met with suspicion and distrust and people don't leave the village without special spiritual protection. Extension officers need to build trust with the villagers. Try to work within the village (for example by starting village learning activities) rather than asking villagers to leave their village (ie to go on cross visits or elsewhere for training). Remember that the greatest influence in the village lies with the people who live at the centre; those on the outer edges have questionable status within the village.

The Akha don't speak Lao as their first language and don't have a literate culture. It is unlikely that Akha people will be comfortable speaking Lao language or reading or writing Lao script. They learn through songs, recitals and story telling, have many traditional ballads and often sing together as they work in the fields. Therefore, extension materials and activities for the Akha should be built around audio rather than written materials. The village reciter could be invited to create songs/stories about using new technologies. *For copies of the guidelines on how to work with Akha, Hmong or Khamu villages (in Lao or English), contact project staff below.*



Engaging the poorest farmers

In response to requests for assistance with engaging the poorest farmers, the EASLP project has recently undertaken a literature review drawing out relevant learning from developing countries around the world. One of the key lessons about poverty is that reaching the poor is no easy task. Even though development organisations specifically aim to benefit the poor, they often find that benefits tend to accrue disproportionately to the 'middle' poor, leaving the poorest with little benefit. Why is this?

Joining development projects is more difficult for the very poor. They may not have the labour, time or funds available to even begin. Poor people often lack self confidence and won't put themselves forward. When better-off households are already engaged, poor people think that the project is not for them. There is also the attitude of other villagers, who may not believe that the poorest will contribute adequately (for example paying back loans) and so may not support their enrolment. Similarly, who will be involved in a group is often decided via the kinship links of those first consulted, or those villagers accessible to staff – likely to be the wealthier villagers in positions of influence.

The poorest farmers are also the most likely to drop out of development programs. Again there is a lack of self confidence, feeling that the program is really there for others, feeling unable to risk changing to a situation beyond their skill level, not having the time or resources to keep up with others in the group, or being scared of failure.

Studies have shown that households who succeed in moving out of poverty are most likely to do so through diversification of income. They have several sources of income which mean regular inflows of money to the household. This generally means either that families increase their range of enterprises, or that more family members work to generate income. In many cases this means a changed family environment, which allows the women to be responsible for earning family income as well as the traditionally male breadwinner.

Government officials play an important role in creating an enabling environment for any project. Activities that include local government officials (such as cross-visits, demonstrations, study tours, village meetings, project celebrations) can therefore be valuable in creating shared understanding and enlisting their support. Projects need to be specifically designed to actively encourage the poor. Experience from

around the world has shown that failure to do this discourages the poorest from joining. There are seven elements of project design and implementation that can assist in genuinely reaching the poor;

1) Ask villagers to form a local management committee for the project, which will be responsible to ensure that the project is working with the poor and following correct procedures.

2) Assist the villagers to develop their own rules, regulations and project management procedures. This way, the rules and procedures will be within their capacity in terms of education levels, skills, knowledge, perceptions and understanding. Rules and regulations should include specific selection criteria based on level of poverty, and a formal monitoring system.

3) Identify individual poor households in each village. Studies have shown the most effective method is a participatory wealth ranking process. This can be done at a village meeting, where locals identify the levels of poverty in their village and allocate all households to different levels.

4) Build the capacity of women to contribute financially to the family livelihood. The participation of women begins with cooperation from other family members, particularly husbands. This depends highly on the compatibility of the project activities with her current responsibilities, and on the cultural aspects of her ethnic group. Extension officers can help women to harmonise their participation with the existing family livelihood, for example by organising meetings at times and places to best suit the women, assisting with seasonal planning, and ensuring that the circumstances fit the cultural environment (for example by having women-only groups).

5) Form the first groups in the village of the poorest villagers, and do not include the 'not-poor'. If the not-poor are included, the poor will think that the program is not for them. The not-poor will push the pace too fast for them. Groups of exclusively poor villagers (with adequate support) can then provide demonstrable examples of poor people succeeding.

6) Build the villagers capacity to make changes and cope with the new circumstances. Members of the management committee will need management skills such as accounting and record keeping. Group members will need help with group formation and development. As well as technical skills, participants will need skills in planning and budgeting. If the poor can't manage



their new circumstances, they will return to the old ways.

7) Assist the management committee to develop simple and effective impact monitoring systems, where data collection and analysis is carried out by and for the participants. These provide a learning environment for participants and project staff – demonstrating success or failure and providing a forum for improvement.

The impact of farmer cross visits - two years on.

The purpose of this study was to understand how much influence the cross visit had on farmers and what other factors influenced them to change livestock management practices. Benefits were assessed along with future plans and whether they have influenced other farmers.

25 farmers (9 women) from Koun, Phonexai, Viengthong and Viengxai districts were interviewed (comprising 50% of all farmers attending cross visits in 2007 and 2008). All were poor to medium wealth upland farmers, including 5 Lao lum families, 8 Hmong families, 7 Khamu families, 4 Thaideng families and 1 Phouane family.

Results show that the cross visits were instrumental in stimulating farmers to take action. Follow up advice by district staff enabled them to make the changes and was a major influence identified by farmers.

Other factors included motivation to increase income and reduce shifting cultivation according to Lao government policy, attending training courses in animal health, and the positive influence of family members.

All farmers had made significant progress with fattening chickens, ducks, pigs, goats, cattle or buffalo. Incomes ranged from 3 to 29 million kip over the last 2 years since the cross visits, and farmers had been able to invest in more animals, house construction, hand tractors, paddy rice stocks, rice field land, motor cycles, furniture, school, clothes and medicine.

Over 100 other farmers (including poor families) had started improving livestock production after talking to the cross visit farmers, demonstrating the flow on effects of farmer to farmer learning.

This study confirms that cross visits can stimulate farmer motivation to improve their livestock production and reduce shifting cultivation. However, district staff need to follow up with

regular advice, and farmers also need follow up training courses to keep learning about livestock management. Learning activities need to be designed for poor families, women and each ethnic group separately.



Farmers have been able to invest increased income in a variety of household improvements.

Digital stories and farmer feedback

In 2009 we introduced the concept of using digital stories as a tool for extension staff. Digital stories can be used to show farmers what other farmers are doing. They can cover a whole range of topics, from case studies showing what another farmer has done and the benefits they have gained, to introducing a new system of production or showing the technical details of how to do something. They can be presented in different languages and given to farmers as a CD to view whenever they need to.

Making digital stories is a straightforward process using digital photos, a computer with Microsoft's Photostory software downloaded, and a microphone. Training in planning the right content for different audiences and different purposes is important. The planning process is included in the guidelines we have developed, available from the EASLP project.

In September 2009, the EASLP project conducted a two day training workshop in Vientiane in making digital stories. Eight participants attended from CIAT, the SADU project, the LDP project and EASLP. EASLP staff have since made a range of stories, concentrating on case studies of farmers producing pigs, goats, buffalo and cattle, with basic technical information.

In February 2010 a number of stories were tested with farmers, to gauge their reactions and ask for their feedback. Stories on cattle fattening, cattle and buffalo fattening, and pig feeding were shown to Hmong farmers in Ban Phou Soung, Phoukoun



district. They were particularly interested in Hmong language stories showing Hmong farmers, and preferred stories with more detail. They requested further digital stories on poultry raising, vaccination and worming for cattle and buffalo.

Stories showing cattle fattening, pig feeding and goat raising were shown to Khamu farmers in Ban Had Ngum, Pak Xeng district. The most popular case study was a Khamu goat farmer from Phonexai district, in Khamu language. These farmers would also like to see stories on cattle and buffalo fattening techniques and chicken raising, preferably in Khamu language.

In Ban Sokcheung, Pak Xeng district – a Lao Loum village – three stories on goats, pigs, and cattle were shown. These farmers were very interested to see new management practices for goats and new feed mixes and drenching for pigs. They would also like technical stories on feed formulas, animal health, pen siting and design, and planting forages.



Khamu farmers viewing a digital story, Feb 2010

Currently, we have 6 stories available on CD, as detailed in the list below. These stories are being distributed to DAFO offices for use with farmers and feedback from DAFO heads and extension staff. They are available from the contacts at the end of this newsletter.

We will continue to develop more digital stories based on farmer needs and farmer/staff feedback.

Title	Farmer Name	Ethnic Group	District	Province	Languages
Pig fattening for family income (introduction)	Ms Tien	Tai Deng	Viengxai	Huaphan	Lao, Khamu, Hmong
Using technology to fatten pigs quickly	Ms Lit and Mr Ken	Lao Loum	Koun	Xieng Khouang	Lao, Khamu, Hmong
Goat raising can increase income (introduction)	Mr Chanthone	Khamu	Phonexai	Luang Prabang	Lao, Khamu
Cattle fattening to improve family income	Mr Yongnengtor	Hmong	Khoun	Xieng Khouang	Lao, Hmong
Cattle raising creates good economy	Mr Chongkakeu		Khoun	Xieng Khouang	Lao, Hmong, Khamu
Livestock production for demonstrating increasing family income	Ms Bounthone	Tai Deng	Viengxai	Huaphan	Lao, Khamu

Capacity building for livestock extension in Laos

Mr Viengxay Photakoun's Masters thesis examined capacity building of livestock extension staff in Laos. The study sought to understand the capacity building methods being used, their effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for staff and farmers, factors influencing effectiveness and ways to strengthen the capacity building of district livestock extension staff.

The research concluded that each capacity building method has advantages and

disadvantages, so designing and using a combination of capacity building methods works best. An example of an effective capacity building program may be workshops provided at project implementation and then every six months, followed by specific topic training according to staff and farmer needs, plus encouraging district staff to work directly with farmers. Mentoring and staff meetings are also important in the first year with at least one cross visit or study tour as shown in Table 20 overleaf.



Methods	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4				Year 5			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Workshop training	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
On-the-job learning	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Mentoring	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Staff meeting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cross visits	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Table 20 Quarterly implementation guide for Capacity Building Methods
Note: Q= Quarterly

Selecting the right district extension staff to work in remote areas and at Kumban level is essential. Investment in district extension staff who are active, enthusiastic and responsible is necessary as they return benefits to farmers quickly. More women and ethnic group representatives are needed.

DAFEO heads and project managers can build effective teamwork within districts by mixing staff together; senior with younger staff (volunteer, contract or government staff), men with women, ethnic minorities with Lao Lum. Using local, experienced mentors is more cost effective than using national or foreign mentors. Having good examples or demonstration plots within districts also saves money in organising cross visits.

Teamwork and staff motivation are also best achieved when DAFEO heads provide rewards equally to all district staff. This can include releasing them to attend workshop training, cross visits and study tours, allowing them to study at higher levels, promotion and selection to become permanent staff.



Mentoring is an important element of effective capacity building

Linking government and NGO staff together helps district staff gain knowledge, skills and motivation. They can exchange ideas, share information in the meeting room and experience in the field, and plan to expand impact to large areas more quickly than with single projects. PAFO, DAFEO heads and project managers are in an important position to facilitate information exchange between government, private and NGO district extension staff. The study recommended they work together to devise processes for this suited to each provincial and district situation.

Teachers can also stimulate student interest in agricultural extension by organising local mentors to give lectures in the province's Agriculture Colleges. This provides an opportunity for students to exchange ideas about extension and other topics. Linkages between extension theory and real practice need strengthening. It is recommended that project managers increase funding to agriculture students for field practice in extension. This will increase their skills to the extent that on graduation they are suited to apply for extension positions with DAFO, development organisations or the private sector.

Plans for 2010

Guidelines for working with different ethnic groups will be further developed in 2010. The EASLP team will discuss the guidelines with ethnic villages in March. Later in the year we will evaluate if the guidelines have made a difference to how staff work with Hmong, Khamu and Akha communities.

We will continue to follow up the scaling out effects of cross visits by interviewing 24 farmers who have followed cross visit farmers in 4 districts. We intend also to evaluate the use and impact of cross visit and case study guidelines by district staff.

Guidelines will be developed from Viengxay Photakoun's work in staff capacity building, and a further study will investigate the cost effectiveness of the different capacity building methods.

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To view project newsletters and reports visit: www.csu.edu.au/research/ilws/researchers/millar.htm

