



'Extension for Everyone' - an inclusive approach

The vision of the Lao Extension Approach is summed up in the phrase 'Extension for Everyone'. It is not always easy to implement this vision, but continuous efforts are being made to turn the slogan into reality.



The policy of the Lao Government aims to create growth with equity. The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES, 2004) states that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will "Develop an integrated extension system to transfer agricultural production technologies to the poor people". Regarding the involvement of women, the NGPES proposes there should be "Gender focal points in villages to promote improved agricultural practices".

In Laos, as in many other countries, there has often been a large gap between policy and implementation. For many years, extension services focussed attention on 'model farmers'. These farmers were usually literate men, living in accessible areas, with more than average amounts of land, labour and money.

The Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) has taken a number of steps to make extension services more inclusive.

- Targeting the 47 poorest Districts in the country is a starting point for reaching communities who have been left out of mainstream development in the past.

- Working with groups rather than individuals provides greater opportunities for participation.
- Carrying out a 'gender analysis' while planning training activities helps to ensure that the role of women is given full attention.
- Focussing on the 'basics' - such as rice varieties, chicken health and pig housing - brings benefits to the largest possible number of farmers. The need for 'household food security' must not be forgotten during the commercialization of agriculture.
- Conducting practical training in farmers own fields helps to make sure that extension is relevant to local conditions and does not exclude those farmers who are illiterate (a large % of rural women).
- Supporting the decentralisation of services to the 'kumban' (village cluster) is a new strategy that will be tested in remote areas
- Creating links between extension and sources of crucial inputs such as credit is another new effort of the project that should help the disadvantaged.

As a result of these efforts, the involvement of women, ethnic minorities and poorer households in extension activities is gradually increasing. There is still a long way to go, but the vision of 'extension for everyone' remains strong.

