



Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP)

Assessment of LEA *plus* implementation in Hotspots



Final Report

November 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has developed and scaled up Lao Extension Approach (LEA) throughout the country over the past decade with support from the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP). LEAP is funded by SDC and implemented by the Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC) with technical assistance from HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. LEA was endorsed by MAF as one of the extension approach and acknowledged as the best practice in MAF Agriculture Development Strategy. The DAEC mandate and its extension strategy were formulated based on the experiences and lessons learned from LEAP. In the refinement phase (Phase IV), LEA was further developed to take into account the changing context and challenges in rural economy which farmers needed to cope with. This has been defined by addition of three new pillars to LEA, which are market engagement, organizing capacity and partnerships for service delivery.

The objective of this assessment was to assess the achievements and lessons learned from LEA plus implementation in five hotspot districts in the Northern Uplands (Namor in Oudomxay, Bunneua in Phongsaly, Xiengkhor in Huaphanh, Nambak in Luang Prabang, and Khoun in Xieng Khuang). Lessons learned were collected and achievements in three areas of interest as below were assessed.

- sustainability of LEA basic and LEA plus as public extension system
- quality of extension service and government's capacity to deliver the services
- benefits of LEA plus for the production groups

The assessment team visited seven villages in three districts and presented preliminary findings and lessons learned in a workshop participated by all hotspot PAFES and DAFO staff to consolidate the lessons and achievements.

Findings

LEA Principles

LEA plus is not only a conceptually strong, but it also gives a strong evidence that if supported in all areas of technical, organizational and market engagement capacities, a learning group will get lasting benefits. LEA plus is based on **six principles** and in implementation, **group-based**, **participatory** and **inclusive** principles are very clear, while **needs based**, **pluralistic** and **decentralized** principles also show good but slightly ambiguous results. An exceptional fact of LEA plus was how extension workers in all the districts have internalized comparative advantage of farmer groups as against model farmers. 64 production groups were trained and coached, and production groups demonstrate a remarkable inclusiveness vis-à-vis gender, ethnicity, and pro-poor criteria. 41% of the members are women, 53% belong to the Non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups, 48% of the members are considered as poor, and 40% of the target villages were ranked as poor. The analysis of social inclusiveness was only possible as DAFO maintained a village level M&E system with disaggregated data on production group - another exceptional outcome of the LEA plus implementation. It was also found that almost all extension menus deal with chicken, pigs, or rice, which is a phenomenon related to methodological and capacity problems. District development priorities can destabilize the decentralized notion of LEA, and DAFO depends more on district decision makers (e.g. target village selection) than on farmer's demand. LEA plus haven't taken full advantage of possibilities for farmer groups' strengthening, and the

appropriate tool to develop social capital among farmers, the Farmers to Farmers Exchange (FEF), in particular between villages, was largely ignored. For a government-run project in Laos, the pluralistic requirement is probably the most ambitious principle. Pluralistic efforts were observed by integration of other agencies in the district (LWU, other projects, Industry and Commerce) and cooperation with banks (APB, Nayobai), but to a much lesser extent by collaboration with associations or iNGOs apart from SAEDA, a specialized NPA on promoting sustainable agriculture practices.

LEA Pillars and LEA plus Tools

Market engagement was very relevant for all hotspots, and particularly Oudomxay has made good progress with development of a provincial contract farming guidelines, that is already applied in several districts. The pillar on organizing capacity of farmer has a strong outcome related to the capacity to utilize the farmer organization guideline and the successes in organizing production groups. Lesser impact was seen in the endeavors to promote associations and cooperatives, apart from Khoun district, which promoted farmer organizations (both association and cooperatives) already in the past with the help of LEAP and other projects.

Benefits at community level

Farmer groups benefit from better income, more food security, improved soil fertility, and social aspects: clear group objectives, good leadership, access to credits & markets and knowledge about new production techniques. The well performing pig raising groups affirmed doubling productivity in pig fattening, reduced mortality and improved soil fertility by using manure. Chicken raising groups stressed additional income of about one million Kip to other group indicating an annual income of 12 million Kip. With the data from the hotspot village database, overall group performance was assessed along six performance indicators. Better performing groups were often found in the Lao-Tai ethno-linguistic group, most probably due to their good social networks, and general better-off livelihoods (more paddy, less upland). Overall poverty, a village extension worker, access to credits and road could lead to better performance. An interesting indicator is the gender of the group leader. Out of 64 production groups, 19 are led by women, of which 17 (89%) are performing at high or medium level. For the 42 groups led by men, only 57% are performing at high or medium level. Women are said to be the better managers, promoting group cohesiveness, transparency, and accountability, and are able to manage the small funds very well.

Quality of services

While planning and implementation of the extension activities are very good, follow up and coaching of production groups is rather rare and of lower quality. All visited production groups expressed that follow up and Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange must happen more regularly in order to keep up with the innovations in the markets and technologies.

Success Factors

Eight stories from the visited production groups as well as from the DAFO colleagues working in the hotspots are presented as heard in the field, in order to provide field realities instead of highly abstract information only. Its headings label the essence for success or failure in the particular case, and are repeated at this point, too:

- Provincial Contract Farming Regulations
- Motivation Stories for Innovation and Change

- Group Leadership
- Group Ownership and Gender Equity
- Practical Demonstrations and Participatory Reflections
- Social Capital, Regulations, and Confidence
- Inputs Access and Many Options to Choose From
- Time for Innovations and Innovation Process

Lessons Learned

Slightly Readjust LEA to Maximize Benefits for Everyone

Given the lower effect of LEA to remote and poor upland farming villages compared to market-integrated farming villages, the LEA strategy needs some fine-tuning to be more efficient in traditional villages. In place of the straight-forward value chain approach, an integrated livelihood approach would better response to the needs. Explicit handling of gender inequalities and better access to small funds and grants are to be addressed, potentially by building strategic partnerships with iNGOs, NPAs, LWU or other projects.

Improved Dialogue and Reflection Among Stakeholders

Learning from failures, an open and frank dialogue are very much encouraged during the course of the project, but as so often in Laos, project success in terms of reached numbers are more often debated than the reasons behind. Hotspot practice also demonstrates, that failures are rather ignored or production groups without strong performance are left behind than reasons for failure actively addressed. Conflict avoidance strategies are common, in particular if attitudes between various stakeholders, e.g. DAFO and production groups, do not match. Not all opportunities and tools (e.g. SIFT) are effectively used to learn from each other.

LEA is free from Subsidies but Benefits from Complementary Efforts

The main benefit for production groups is to help the groups to change their production and marketing efforts by provision of technical knowledge and organizational capacities. However, farmer often evaluate those projects with free inputs or soft loans at a higher value than the pure training approach. If villages have both, the training on techniques and group organization, they can benefit most. LEA alone, without complementary projects or access to credits or inputs may be less powerful, which is evidenced in those remote poor villages that do not have opportunities to choose from.

Innovation Needs Time

LEA needed a decade to reach out that far. Similar observations have been made related to building up associations and cooperatives. In two mentioned cases (Nambak and Khoun) a time span of around 12 years was necessary from project start with production or credit group to a more formalized cooperative or association. This lesson suggests to never forcing any production groups to get formal registration right from the beginning, but to let this formalizing naturally emerge from the innovation process.

Recommendations

A total of 27 recommendations have been formulated in five major fields. All recommendations stand and fall with the commitment of MAF and DAEC to take LEA forward by finding a new and sustainable mechanism to fund the LEA running costs, and/or

to jointly develop intelligent funding modalities with Provincial administrations, the private sector, INGOs/NPAs or projects. Other recommendations are related to capacity building in cooperation with Agricultural Colleges, the readjustment of LEA Basic/LEA Plus in poor and traditional upland farming villages, the progress in market engagement by multi-stakeholder engagement and further empowerment of production groups by greater networking.

Table of Content

Executive Summary.....	2
Acknowledgement	8
1 Introduction / background.....	9
2 Objectives.....	10
3 Methodology.....	11
3.1 Assessment Design.....	11
3.2 Data Collection Methods	12
3.3 Data Analysis Methods	12
4 Findings	14
4.1 Extension system - institutional level	14
4.1.1 Internalisation of LEA principles	14
4.1.2 Market Engagement	18
4.1.3 Extension System Management - planning, implementing, monitoring and follow up	19
4.1.4 LEA plus Tools	20
4. 2 Outputs at the community level	22
4.2.1 Benefits to community in “High Performing Groups”	22
4.2.2 Failures in “Low Performing Groups”	24
4.2.3 Factors influencing the performance of groups	25
4.2.4 Quality of Services Delivered	30
5 Costs of LEA plus in Hotspots.....	33
6 Lessons learned.....	34
6.1 Different Strategies in order to Maximize Benefits for Everyone	34
6.2 Improved Discussion and Reflection among All Stakeholders	36
6.3 Subsidy-Free Extension Matches With Other Efforts	37
6.4 Innovation Needs Time	39
7 Recommendations	39
8 Annex	43
8.1 Terms of Reference.....	43
8.2 Validated data from hotspot districts (2010-2013)	45
8.3 Indicators guiding the assessment.....	51
8.4 Interview Guidelines and Questionnaires	52
8.5 Cost / budget details.....	54
8.6 LEA - Stakeholder Matrix: Information, Knowledge, Materials.....	55
8.7 Field visit itinerary.....	56
8.8 References	58
8.9 Abbreviations	59

Tables

Table 1: Overview of different phases of LEAP.....	9
Table 2: Poverty Status of Villages, Group Members and Gender Inclusiveness.....	15
Table 3: Principles in the LEA plus Hotspot Practice	18
Table 4: Market Engagement Activities in the Hotspots	18
Table 5: Extension Tasks and Average Time Allocation.....	20
Table 6: Factors Influencing the Performance of Production Groups.....	25
Table 7: Costs of LEA <i>plus</i> Implementation	33
Table 8: Budget supported for LEA plus implementation in Hotspots.....	54

Figures

Figure 1: LEA Plus House of Extension.....	10
Figure 2: Timeline of LEA <i>plus</i> Implementation in Hotspots	11
Figure 3: Thematic Cluster: Management of Production Groups	13
Figure 4: Principles of Lao Extension Approach.....	14
Figure 5: Usefulness of LEA Tools (25 answers).....	21
Figure 6: Application of LEA Tools (25 answers).....	22
Figure 7: Ethnicity and Group Performance	26
Figure 8: Village Extension Worker and Group Performance.....	27
Figure 9: Gender as Proxy for Good Leadership	27
Figure 10: Access to Credits and Group Performance	28
Figure 11: Access to Roads and Markets and Group Performance	28
Figure 12: Poverty Rank of Village and Group Performance	34
Figure 13: Categories of villages targeted in LEA plus Hotspots	35

Boxes

Box 1: Success Factor: Time for Innovations and Innovation Process	15
Box 2: Success Factor: Provincial Contract Farming Regulations	19
Box 3: Success Factor: Group Leadership	24
Box 4: Success Factor: Group Ownership and Gender Equity	29
Box 5: Success Factor: Practical Demonstrations and Participatory Reflections	32
Box 6: Success Factor: Social Capital, Regulations, and Confidence	32
Box 7: Success Factor: Inputs Access and Many Options to Choose From	38

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Rakesh Munankami, Somxay Sisanonh, Dr. Liliane Ortega, Celestine Kroeschell, government officers in Oudomxay, Houaphanh, Phongsaly, Xiang Khuang and Luang Prabang, in particular from the districts Namor, Xiangkhor, Bunneua, Khoun, and Nambak, the members of the seven production groups in the five hotspot districts, and several extension experts working in Lao PDR.

The assessment team would like to thank all of them for their wise guidance, support, patience, and time to answer and comment on all questions and concerns of this assessment.

For the assessment team

Dr. Silke Stoeber, consultant for LEAP

Ms. Engsone Sisomphone, Community Development/Gender, NUOL

Mr. Souvanthong Namvong, Coordinator LEAP since 2012, DAEC

Mr. Khampheuy Chanthavong, CETDU team since 2001, DAEC

1 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

More than a decade the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has been receiving support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for the Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP). LEAP is in the completion phase and the project will be ending in January 2014. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the main achievements in each of the five phases.

LEAP has been jointly implemented by the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES), which was graduated to a fully-fledged Department of Agriculture and Cooperatives (DAEC) with approximately 190 staff with its own strategy based on the experiences of **Lao Extension Approach (LEA)**, that has good potential for further dissemination and enforcement. The strategy is supported by a wide-ranging collection of accepted extension methodologies, guidelines and messages that are already being used by other projects or promoted in public campaigns.

Table 1: Overview of different phases of LEAP

Phase	Year	Main features
I	2001-2004	<i>Pilot Phase</i> - Various extension approaches practised in Laos was consolidated, develop and test a participatory extension methodology in 3 Provinces, and draft Lao Extension Approach (LEA)
II	2005-2007	<i>Expansion Phase</i> - Endorsement of LEA by MAF, further dissemination of LEA in 14 Provinces, LEAP appointed as Secretariat of SWGAB
III	2007	<i>Alignment Phase</i> – Continue support LEA scale up, alignment of LEA to new MAF policies and strategies
IV	2008-2012	<i>Refinement Phase</i> - Improvement of quality of services by addition of Market Engagement and Farmer Organisations to the core function of Technical Production; implementation of LEA plus in 5 hotspots in 2011, formulation of NAFES strategy and further collaboration with NPAs and private sector.
V	2012-2014	<i>Completion Phase</i> – Conclude all field activities, support to transition of NAFES to DAEC and consolidate lesson learned from past experiences

LEA has been implemented in 39 districts in all 17 provinces, and has been referenced as the best practice example for public extension service in the Strategy for Agricultural Development 2011 to 2020 (p.18) and the Agricultural Master Plan 2011 to 2015 (p.81). **“Extension for Everyone”** as major principle emphasizes on its social inclusiveness, and the bottom-up planning process at the sub-district (‘kumban’) level is recommended for rural development and food security programmes, such as the Northern Upland Development Programme (NUDP).

While LEA (basic) focussed on extension services only in technical production, the LEA plus concept takes into account the rapidly growing market economy. Market integration

processes need an extension approach, that supports farming families to better understand the new challenges of market engagement, such as contract farming, product quality, and value chain development. These new issues are captured in the three new pillars of LEA plus, and comprise market engagement, organising capacity, and partnership with civil society (Figure 1).

Figure 1: LEA Plus House of Extension

LEA-Plus

**Supporting an inclusive,
demand-driven
extension system**

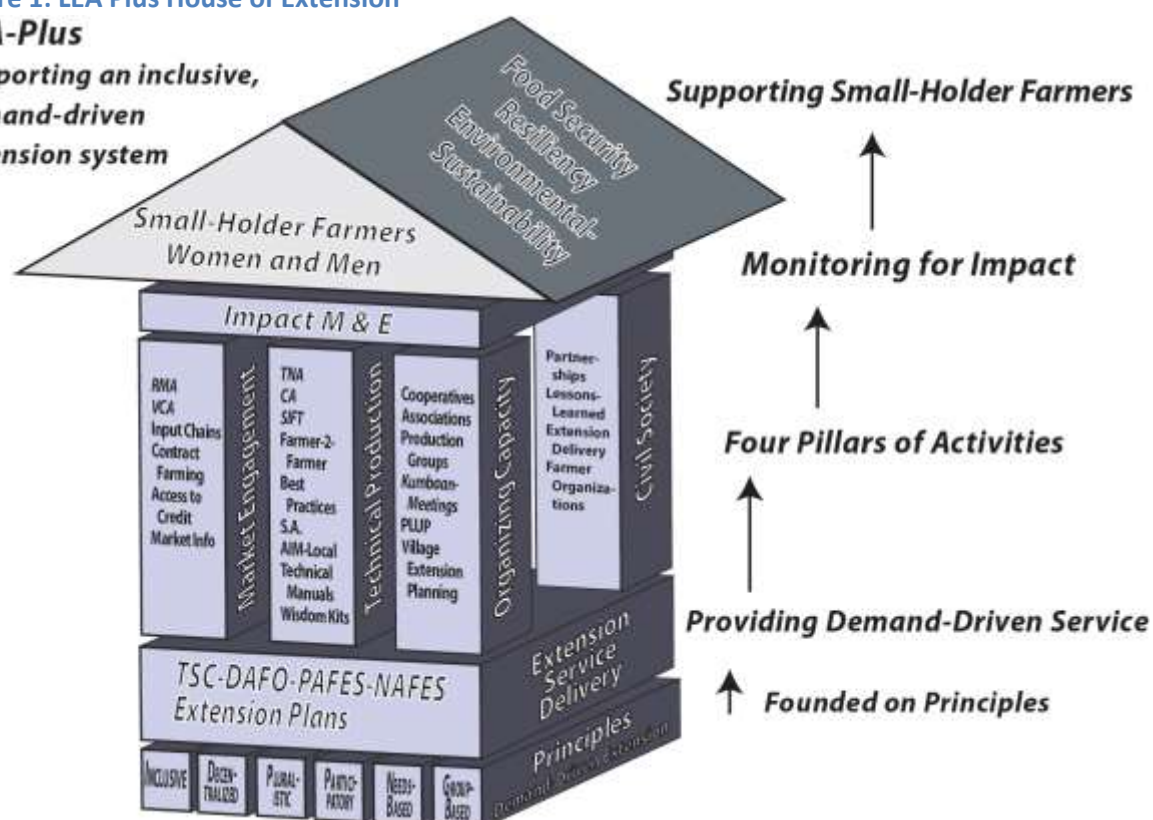


Figure 2 provides a timeline of LEA plus Hotspot Implementation with major milestones from December 2010 to October 2013.

2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to assess the achievements and lessons learned from LEA *plus* implementation in Hotspots districts¹.

The purpose of the study has been combined into three areas of interest:

- Sustainability of LEA *basic* and LEA *plus* as public extension system
- Quality of extension services in hotspots and capacity of government extension delivery
- Benefits of LEA *plus* to the production groups (related to production, markets, environment, income and their organizational capacity)

¹ under Output 3.2.1 in the logframe of the LEAP V completion phase

The assessment of LEA *plus* implementation in hotspots can also serve as a reference document on experiences from public extension services delivery in Laos. The report reflects on what has been achieved within the 18 months of LEA *plus* implementation in the hotspots and gives insights into some success stories, shortcomings and major pitfalls in the same time.

Figure 2: Timeline of LEA *plus* Implementation in Hotspots



Month	Activity
Dec 2010	- Review of Lao Extension Approach (LEA) - Finalize LEA plus Concept - Selection of 5 „Hotspot“ Districts
Feb 2011	District Extension Planning Workshops in 5 Districts: 18-months Work Plan
April 2011	Launch of Hotspot Activities with Final Activity Plans
May-Jul 2011	Village Livelihood Analysis (VLA) in 5 Districts
Dec 2011	6-monthly M&E Reports
Jan 2012	Hotspot M&E and Planning Meeting in Luang Prabang
Sep-Oct 2012	18-months M&E Reports
Dec 2012	Hotspot M&E and Closure Planning Workshop
May 2013	Closure of field activities in Hotspots
Oct 2013	LEA + Assessment of Lessons learned including Workshop in Xiang Khuang

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Assessment Design

The assessment focuses on capitalizing **learning** among hotspot extension workers and production groups in order to extract lessons learned at district and village level. This requires a good relation and atmosphere between assessment team and district staff, a precondition for open dialogue and transparency. To measure **accountability** issues, such as benefits and quality of services, the interviews have been complemented with the analysis of project monitoring reports and village databases.

The selection of districts has been mainly influenced by logistics and time constraints. Out of the 5 Hotspot districts, Namorr, Nambak, and Khoun were selected.

Village selection criteria have been determined and shared with the three districts, and a list of high, medium and low performing production groups have been provided by each of the districts. High or medium performing groups, indicating a strong impact of LEA plus, meet at least two of the following indicators:

1. Strong farmer organization or farmer group in terms of leadership and management,
2. Socially inclusive group (women and poor people largely involved),
3. Increased market engagement,
4. Effective farmer-to-farmer learning outreach.

Lower performing villages meet at least two of the indicators presented below:

1. Nascent/weak farmer organization or farmer group in terms of leadership and management,
2. Socially not inclusive group (women and poor people not much involved),
3. No market engagement,
4. Little farmer-to-farmer outreach.

Analyses were guided by a set of indicators (see annex 8.3 for details) with the main headings listed here:

- Level 1: Outputs and actual results of LEA plus hotspot implementation
 - Level 2: Impact and benefits for the production groups in the five hotspots
 - Level 3: Impact on other actors and partners in extension
 - Level 4: Impact on the system (procedures, roles, policy-making, regulations)

3.2 Data Collection Methods

For the discussion with three DAFOs and seven production groups, interview guidelines have been used. In Namor, focus group discussions in villages have been split up into men's and women's groups. In Nambak and Khoun this procedure was skipped, as more than 95% of the focus group participants have been women (4 villages), and in one village the women were not invited and available at all.

Annex 8.4 contains interview guidelines for focus group discussions with production groups, district staff, and the questionnaire for the hotspot extensionists distributed during the workshop.

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

After each working day, the assessment team gathered the findings of the day by reading through the field notes and discussing the main issues of each focus group discussion. Findings were then coded on coloured index cards, as:

- Strengths, positive aspects (white cards)
- Weaknesses, problems (yellow cards)
- Suggestions, proposals, ideas for improvement (green cards)

Upon completion of fieldwork, the team members began to cluster the cards, whereby the cards were clustered by thematic area, regardless of their coding (as strengths, weaknesses, suggestions). Ten key topics emerged from this process:

1. Extension Planning (village selection, activity selection, partnerships)
2. Extension in the field implementation
3. Extension Follow Up
4. Tools for Extension
5. Gender equity and inclusion of the rural poor
6. Management of Production Groups (leadership, objectives, cohesiveness)
7. Behavior Change of and benefits for Production Groups
8. Access to credits
9. Access to markets
10. Support from national level towards extension programming

Figure 3: Thematic Cluster: Management of Production Groups



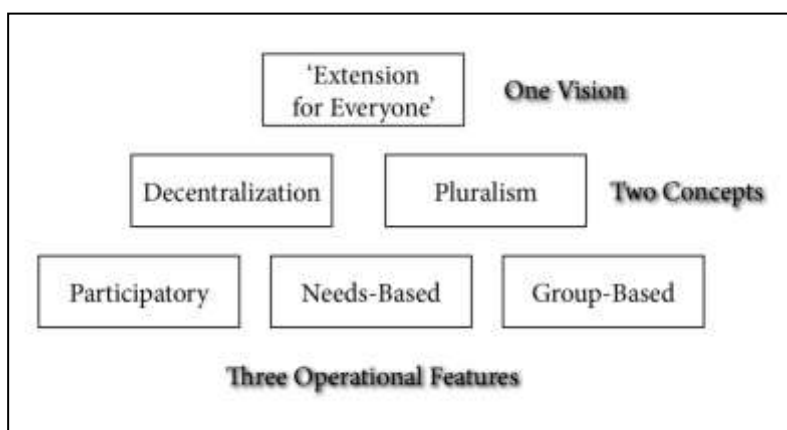
4 FINDINGS

4.1 Extension system - institutional level

4.1.1 Internalisation of LEA principles

In general, extension staff understood very well the concept and principles of LEA. Looking at the six principles of LEA in practice, it seems that the participatory, inclusive and group-based principles are implemented less ambiguous than the three principles of needs based, decentralised, and pluralistic.

Figure 4: Principles of Lao Extension Approach



Group-based 😊😊😊

Learning groups or production groups are in the centre of all endeavours, and during the 14 days of field assessment the term “model farmer” has not been mentioned once. This fact is definitely exceptional, as in Laos and in many donor-funded projects the model farmer approach still enjoys great popularity.

The degree of application of group-based principle into practice is highlighted in a statement given by a hotspot extension worker, when he was asked to assess the performance of a particular group: *“This is not yet a well performing group. Basically it is only one model farmer with improved techniques, but the production group doesn’t work as so far.”*

Another indicator for group-based acknowledgement is the fact that all hotspots extension staffs find the Guidelines for Facilitating Group Organization very appropriate and staffs are confident to apply.

Participatory 😊😊

All extension activities are based on participatory planning approach, the Village Livelihood Analysis, and ranking of activities (😊) for the production or learning groups has been used as outlined in the guidelines for the Training Needs Assessment. It seems that participatory methods are being used in meaningful and sensible ways, and DAFO extension workers were able to reflect (😊) on the village, group and activity selection process.

Inclusive ☺

Social inclusiveness was not only addressed in the extension concept, but also largely promoted by DAFO in all locations. The DAFO M&E System, which disaggregated extension activities by wealth, ethnicity and gender (☺), had made helped to do this analysis possible.²

Targeting of poor villages, targeting of poor households, integrating women farmers and Non Lao-Tai ethno linguistic groups are the four benchmarks that measure social inclusiveness. Overall, the social inclusiveness is very high (☺), more than 10% over the set target of 30%. 40% of the 43 target villages are considered as being poor, 48% of the members are poor, 41% of the members are female, and 53% do not belong to the Lao-Tai ethno linguistic group (Table 2). Nambak District has been following very stringently the pro-poor extension approach (☺), which included targeting Non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups. Khoun district directed almost all support towards women farmers with an exceptional rate of 84% of the members are women (☺), however, the ethnicity and poverty focus have been largely ignored (☹).

The results of Khoun do reflect two particular issues. Khoun employs two female extension staffs working with LEAP since several years. They are aware, that chicken and pig raising production groups function very well with women. Secondly, Khoun has recently graduated from the list of poorest districts. Villages typically consist of several sub-villages, of which usually some or at least one is a very remote sub-village. In Nathong village, women of the three Lao sub-villages are joining the chicken production group, while the remote Hmong sub-village does not take part (☹). In Phai village, all chicken group members are Lao; the five Khmu families in the villages did not take part, as they do not have enough space for the chicken house.

Table 2: Poverty Status of Villages, Group Members and Gender Inclusiveness

Social Inclusiveness	5 Hotspots	Namor	Bunneua	Xiangkhor	Khoun	Nambak
No of villages	43	10	7	9	7	10
No of better off villages	7	3	0	0	4	0
% of poor villages (numbers)	(40%) 17	10% (1)	57% (4)	44% (4)	14% (1)	70% (7)
No of group members	827	139	122	157	92	317
% of poor members (numbers)	48% (396)	40% (56)	18% (22)	62% (98)	12% (11)	71% (209)
No of women members in group	341	67	27	57	77	113
% of women members	41%	47%	22%	36%	84%	36%
% Lao-Tai	47%	60%	43%	56%	72%	10%
% Mon-Khmer	26%	10%	0%	44%	0%	60%
% Hmong-Mien	19%	30%	0%	0%	28%	30%
% Sino-Tibet	9%	0%	57%	0%	0%	0%

² Target village and beneficiary tables have been validated during this assignment, and discussions brought up that village poverty rank did not always match with the real situation, and adaptations have been made.

Needs based ☺☺

Production group members in all visited villages explained their objectives very well (☺), a strong proxy-indicator for ownership (☺). Many groups confirmed, that the activities have been chosen based on real needs (☺). Extension workers explained, how activity selection was based on farmer's problems, experiences, potentials, priorities, and its technical feasibility. Nevertheless, and this was confirmed by the team in Nambak, it is most questionable, that most of the activities in all hotspots are dealing with pigs, poultry, and rice (☹). This problem has been raised in earlier reports. The project's Mid Term Evaluation (2010) stated for example: *"It is interesting yet, that all menus beyond chicken, pigs and rice (e.g. maize or fish) were not chosen as actual LEA topic of any village. This indicates that there is still strong guidance by DAFO staff in choosing the topics."* Based on the hotspot practice, it is suggested that this phenomenon is a result of the specialisation of the extension worker who has not sufficient capacity and networks to provide meaningful advice beyond his/her technical specialisation (☹). Moreover, methodological problems play a role, as farmer experience is one criterion for selection, and the majority has experience with rice, chicken and pigs. Other priorities than those of the villagers do not seem to influence the choice of extension topics in the visited hotspots (☹).

Decentralised ☺☹

In the five hotspot districts, planning and implementation has developed its own dynamic (☺), a good indicator for decentralised approach. In Khoun, DAFO and the kumban leaders (☺) selected target villages, which created high local ownership. In Nambak, DAFO and LWU decided together (☺) on the target villages, and both were involved in planning, which created synergies between technical extension and linkages to village development funds provided by LWU.

All three visited districts critically reflected, that district authorities interfered (☹) in the target village selection process, and were promoting rather their district development priorities than extension as such. As LEA does not foresee grants and subsidies to influence the behaviour change of farmers, district expectations were not always matching with the LEA approach (☹). Overall, it seems that some districts (eg DAFO Khoun) works more autonomous than others (e.g. Nambak and Namor) where districts largely influence resource allocation decisions. In Khoun, this maybe also lead to the result, that most selected villages are better-off villages with easy access to roads.

In the four middle income or better-off villages that have been visited in Namor and Khoun, production groups have demonstrated, that they are confident to make use of their right to request for extension advice from DAFO (☺). In the remote village in Namor, but also in both villages in Nambak, production groups admitted that they would still wait for orders from DAFO before taking on next steps (☹).

The assessment team didn't meet with any farmer associations in the villages visited (☹).³ Box 1, however, illustrates, how many years are needed before groups start to formalise. The visited vegetable cooperative (Hoy village) in Khoun also needed 12 years of intensive

³ In Khoun district four farmer cooperatives and one farmer association have emerged during the past years. Interviews with the vegetable cooperative in village Hoy and DAFO Khoun referred to SADU having contributed to this achievement. SADU has worked in Khoun for eight years and gave considerable support for market engagement and farmer organization development.

cooperation between the farmers, and even has been producing vegetables, since 1975, before developing to a cooperative recently.

Another LEA tool, Farmers Exchange with Farmers (FEF), is meant to build social capital and bridging networks between farmers and villages, which would contribute to decentralisation efforts. In hotspot practice, it was found that it hasn't been implemented at scale, but only in some villages (☹). In conclusion, decentralisation efforts have been working at government level (☺), in line with the Three Builds Approach (Sam Sang). From the farmer organisation promotion perspective, the decentralisation efforts have not yet been supported enough (☹).

Box 1: Success Factor: Time for Innovations and Innovation Process

From informal credit group to credit cooperative: 13 years

In 2000, ACCU, the Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions, supported 24 villages in Nambak with village funds. The project evaluation revealed, that after 10 years of implementation only 2 villages funds were functioning. Among the most important success factors were:

- Members understand the village credit and saving concept and policy
- Transparency in accounting
- Accountability of management board
- Increase of memberships
- Problem solving capacity of the credit group

In Namthuam Tai village, in 2013, after 13 years of implementation, the credit group has decided to form a credit cooperative.

For Mrs. Somnone Sittiving, Head of LWU Nambak during 2005-2012, the key problem of ACCU was, that men managed the credit group. She sees more potential in women leadership, as women are more realistic, are very strict in collecting back the money, and ask many details and questions before lending the money. Of the 12 women's groups supported by LWU since 2008, women lead 10 groups, and two Hmong ethnic groups are led by men, of which one is not very successful. She explained, that even if women were selected as head, the men would not allow the women to become the leader. Therefore, LWU conducted awareness raising among the men, and in some villages men agreed to give an opportunity for women. She also sees many synergies between LWU and DAFO for women's groups and extension. LWU can provide training on gender analysis and gender awareness, hygiene, women's workload and credit management, and DAFO could provide technical support to the production groups. This has worked out quite well in Nambak.

Source: LWU Nambak

Pluralism☺☹

All DAFOs are committed to develop partnerships with other government agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations (iNGOs, NPAs and cooperatives). Cooperation

between various stakeholders was observed in all visited districts, with DAFO's role acting either as service provider to other projects or making use of the services of others.

As confident **applier of extension planning tools**, DAFO in Nambak and Namor have offered services to iNGOs (CCL) and donor-funded government projects, i.e. SSSJ and NUDP, to plan extension programmes. Mainly the LEA Basic Tools (e.g. VLA, TNA, SIFT) have been used (☺).

As **facilitator to improve access to credits** (☺), DAFO Namor has worked closely with Nanyobai Bank and DAFO Nambak has collaborated with LWU and APB to facilitate access to credits and village saving funds to be used for productive activities. In Khoun, this cooperation seems to be taking place since longer time, and should not be regarded as LEAP plus achievement.

In their role to **promote environmentally safe and marketable agricultural products**, DAFO Khoun has collaborated with the NPA SAEDA (☺) in training farmers on safe use of pesticides. PAFO Oudomxay has included Good Agricultural Practices (☺) as regulatory standard in contract farming guidelines. The regulations have been drafted jointly with Industry and Commerce and Finance Offices. The Justice Office hasn't been involved yet (☹), which was acknowledged as important missing link for improvement (see Box 2).

Linkages to private or civil society sector apart from those organizations mentioned above haven't been established (☹).

Table 3 summarizes the overall assessment of the six principles as implemented in the LEA plus Hotspot practice.

Table 3: Principles in the LEA plus Hotspot Practice

Group-based	☺☺☺
Participatory	☺☺
Inclusive	☺
Needs based	☺☺
Decentralised	☺☹
Pluralistic	☺☹

4.1.2 Market Engagement

In two visited districts, Namor and Nambak, the market engagement interventions came just in time, as both districts were in the process on searching for solutions to cope with contract farming problems. The Values Chain Analysis and development (VCAD) has been done in three districts on maize and oranges, with big involvement of the central extension unit. For Khoun district, market engagement activities haven't been done as much during hotspot implementation, as they have done many activities already with SADU.

Table 4: Market Engagement Activities in the Hotspots

	Namor	Bunneua	Khoun	Xiangkhor	Nambak
VCAD	Maize	Not done	Not done	Maize in cooperation with Oxfam	Oranges
RMA	Done in 6 villages	Not done	Tool 1: chicken, pigs, ginger, fruits, vegetables	Tool 1 to 2: rice, pigs, goats, chicken, Tool 1 to 3: maize, chicken	goat, chicken, pigs, Job's tears, oranges

	Namor	Bunneua	Khoun	Xiangkhor	Nambak
Contract Farming	New provincial regulations	Training of staff	Not relevant	Training of staff	Training of staff
Others					Agricultural Fair

Source: 18 months reports of DAFO

Box 2: Success Factor: Provincial Contract Farming Regulations

Contract Farming Regulations and Organic Vegetables Promotion

When LEA plus hotspot activities were launched in Oudomxay, the province faced many problems about contract farming with Chinese companies. The 2 plus 3 model is a common practice in the province, in which farmers provide land and labour, and the company, inputs, technique and market outlets). In Namngeun village, villagers planted beans, which the company did not buy from the farmers. Farmers lost approximately 40 Mio Kip. Kuang village faced similar problems with sugar cane. In Nasavang village, maize contract farming was very ambiguous. After completion of the maize Value Chain Analysis and Development in the district, contract-farming regulations were drafted in consultation with District Industry and Commerce, district collectors and district Finance for the first time in the province. The new draft regulations contain among others:

- Upfront money deposit as guarantee from investors, and a committee to decide where the money is deposited.
- Prices vary according to product quality
- DAFO advises before the contract is signed, and acts as witness and facilitator.
- Good Agricultural Practice as part of the contract

Contract farming procedures have considerably improved since then, and transparency has increased. However, some districts still face many problems. PAFES suggests to work on three aspects in the future on contract farming: clarifying **legal** aspects of contract farming, maintaining **soil fertility**, and improving **product quality** (e.g. size and specifications of marketable products).

It is the nature of most contract farming companies that they are interested in quick short-term profits, and therefore promote the use of chemicals to increase the yields. Most farmers are not fond of chemicals. During hotspot activity implementation, the idea to promote organic vegetables has emerged, and this vision might guide future investments.

Source: Interview with PAFES Oudomxay

4.1.3 Extension System Management - planning, implementing, monitoring and follow up

Extension planning in hotspots followed three key result areas: 1. technical production, 2. market engagement and 3. farmer organization. The same structure has been also used for monitoring and reporting, and reports are consistent but contain different levels of details.

While the general knowledge promotion approach is broadly accepted, in rare cases, some problems have been reported related to unreasonably high expectations towards grants. In one village, farmers complained, that they were promised study trips and funds upon completion of technical trainings. In another village, other projects provided subsidies and anticipated behavior change did not take place, as farmers were rather waiting for grants.

Monitoring and follow up methodologies as described in the LEA Basic handbook e.g. SIFT, are well known. Nevertheless, follow up is not done frequently enough. All visited villages reported, that follow-up visits have been taken place only **two to three times per year**. Five of six visited learning groups expressed that they would like to have closer contact with DAFO. *“If road access is difficult, we cannot follow up regularly.”* was one of the arguments against regular follow up. This does not yet explain, why villages along the roadside were visited at rare intervals. Lack of efficiency was another reason, and there should be scope for improvement: *“It is a waste of time if district follows up with 3 people every time; it would be better to have one staff member each time, but more regularly.”*

Lack of time was not a major issue for missed follow up work. Table 5 explains, that a sufficient amount of time (40%) has been spent in the field.

Not all learning groups change techniques upon participation in trainings (e.g. Box 5). Consequently, DAFO could either intensify the visits or gradually phase out. DAFO Namor decided to gradually pull out: *“If farmer groups are not active, we also reduce our follow-up visits.”* Given DAFO’s various attempts to meet with production group members without success, the decision is understandable; but does not solve the problem as such.

Table 5: Extension Tasks and Average Time Allocation

Extension Planning and Support Activities: including conducting needs assessment, program planning, preparing reports, in-service training, program evaluation	35%
Extension and Advisory Service Activities in the field: including implementing educational programmes, such as farm visits, conducting on-farm demonstrations, organising training courses, workshops, field days with / for farmers, etc.	40%
Other Activities: including carrying out non-educational activities such as regulatory work, data collection (e.g. surveys), working on other projects, and assisting local government	15%

Source: Questionnaire (25 hotspot extension workers)

4.1.4 LEA plus Tools

Extension staffs throughout the country are highly benefitting from the tools developed under LEAP since the beginning. When asked about the usefulness and application of the tools developed under LEA *basic* and LEA *plus*, the participants ranked as most useful LEA plus tools the Farmer Organization and Contract Farming Guidelines (Figure 5). RMA, VCAD and the Input Assessment Guidelines have been considered as useful, but with a lower rank. Related to their confidence and capacities to apply these tools in practice, only the farmer organization guideline has been internalized well, at approximate the same level as the LEA Basic Tools. Almost half of the hotspot extension workers (40%) feel confident to teach other extension workers on the farmer organization guidelines (Figure 6).

The story in Box 3 is not considered as real extension case, as it is a fun story used to motivate farmers. It should illustrate, what kind of stories will add value to the technical LEA tools. Many factors that hinder behavior change are related to culture and traditions, and therefore motivation stories to create awareness and to break with stereotypes are of great importance in extension work. Box 3 is the only story provided in written form by extension staffs at the Xiang Khuang Workshop. Other stories about success or failure were rather general, and extension staff admitted, that they would like to learn more about the stories and experiences of other hotspots.

Figure 5: Usefulness of LEA Tools (25 answers)

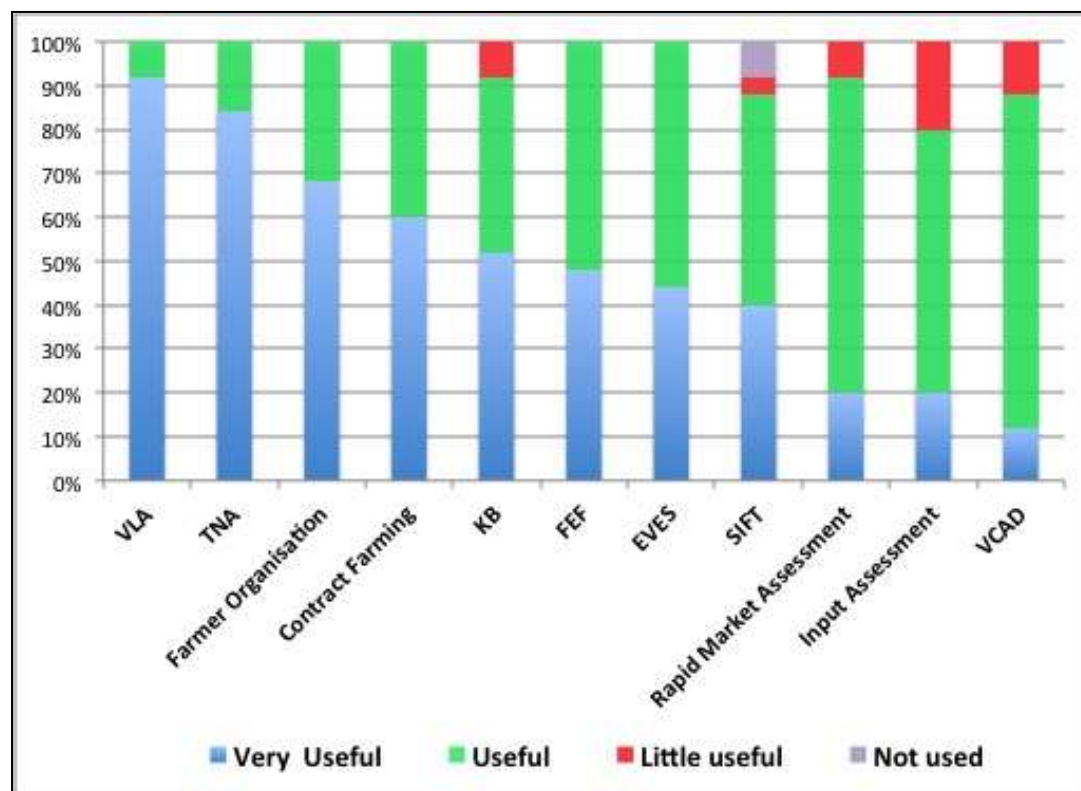
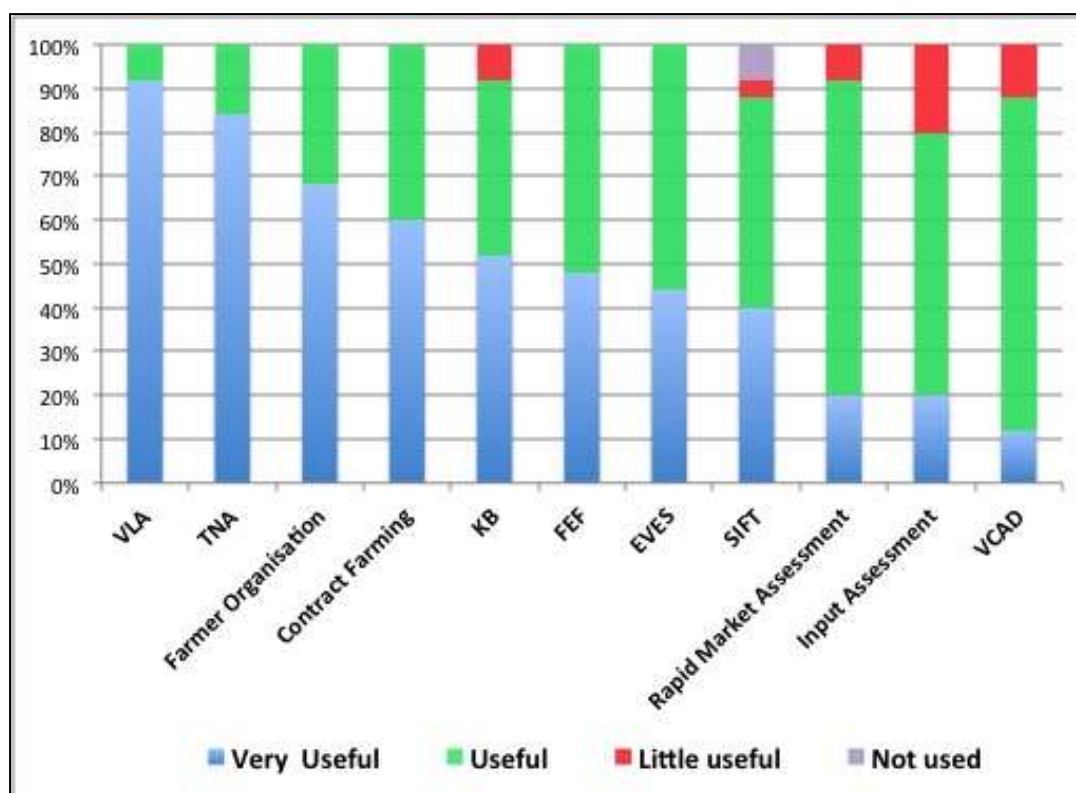


Figure 6: Application of LEA Tools (25 answers)



4. 2 Outputs at the community level

Seven production and learning groups (chicken or pigs) have been visited in three districts. In Namor and Nambak, one each of a well performing and low performing group were visited. In Khoun district, three better performing groups were visited, as the low performing group was too far.

Farmer groups benefit from better income, improved food security, improved soil fertility, and particular social aspects of group work: clear objectives, good leadership, access to credits, and good knowledge about new production techniques.

4.2.1 Benefits to community in “High Performing Groups”

For the well-performing **pig raising** groups, benefits can be summarized as following:

- Productivity in pig fattening has doubled even without increase of the pig stock. The number of pigs sold per year raised from one to two to two to four pigs due to a shortened fattening period from one year to six months. A pig is sold at current ex-farm prices of 20,000 Kip/kg, which means in terms of additional income an estimated raise of two million Kip per annum.
- Piglet mortality has been reduced due to regular vaccination, medication, and assistance during littering.
- A village vaccination fund is in place, purchase of vaccines is based on demand, and most women can vaccinate the pigs.
- Village hygiene has been improved, as pigs are kept in pens.

- Workload for pig fattening is increased, mainly due to more efforts for pig feeding, but women can request their husbands or sons to help. In the Lao villages they are very confident to do so, in other ethnic groups gender relations are not as equitable, and the workload is left only to women.
- Pens have been constructed in an easy-to-clean manner.
- Improved soil fertility, as pig manure is used in the fields (rice, vegetables) and training of compost making by SAEDA was useful.
- Demand for pigs exceeds the supply, with stable prices, and many buyers are coming to the village to buy the pigs (all locations)
- Buyers contact head of group, and head of group knows prices in the area.

In the **poultry raising** groups, the benefits have been expressed in a similar way, and more specifically as such:

- Chicken flock has increased from 10 to 40 animals. Income has increased from 150,000 Kip to one million Kip, for some families three million Kip per annum.
- In one specialized chicken-raising group in Khoun (Phai village), ten members own about 1500 chicken. They sell three kind of chicken in batches twice a year: chicks for 5,000 Kip/couple, small chicken for 20,000 Kip/head and big chicken for 70,000 Kip/head. The income is up to 6 million Kip per batch or 12 million per family and year.
- The policy of the group encourages transparency and accountability among each other. Problems are regularly discussed in meetings.
- Pens are constructed close to the house, and locked in the night, as theft has become a major problem.
- Besides vaccination, bio-anticoccidiosis and B12 as feed supplements are regularly applied.

Box 3: Success Factor: Group Leadership

Strong leadership by Lao Women

Mrs. Meung is not only the vice headwoman of the village, the former village representative of the Lao Women's Union, but the head of the pig-raising production group in Pakham, Namor district. This Lao Lue village is located rather far (45 km) from the district center with difficult road access.

The group members, all of them are men, explained, that they used to have a male leader but it didn't work out well. They decided to hand over to Mrs. Meung, as she is experienced in vaccinating pigs, and knows how to manage funds.

In 2011, DAFO conducted a series of trainings on improved pig raising, and encouraged to form a pig production group. 10 pig raisers have changed their practices since then: the pigs are fenced in, are regularly vaccinated, the feed mix is more diverse as pumpkin, banana stem, and vegetables are included into the ration, and during littering, farmers observe and help sow and piglets. As the daily feeding ration is known, they collect less feed than in the past, when they had to throw away the leftovers every day.

They keep the Low External Input Pig Raising system and did not increase in pig numbers. They were able to double the productivity as such. Before they have sold one to two pigs per year, with a weight of 50 kg. Now they sell pigs after 6 months with an average weight of 50-80 kg. The group has increased to 15 members by now. Mrs. Meung manages a village vaccination fund that has grown to 1.2 Mio Kip. At start up, she put in her own money to initiate this fund.

Mrs. Meung and her husband grow tobacco under contract farming. The company provides seed. They earn an estimated 17 Mio Kip per year. Besides that, they sell 2-3 tons of rice for 7.5 Mio Kip, and fish fingerlings for 2.5 Mio Kip. They also sell two pigs per year, each about 50 kg or 1 Mio Kip. Her income is about 29 Mio Kip, and money was used last year to buy a tractor and a television.

Mrs. Meung confirmed, that women are mainly responsible for the pigs, but men and women help each other. An iNGO (German Agro Action) provided gender training, and since then women even share some household work with the men.

Source: Focus Group Discussion with women and men, Phakham village, Namor district

Questions to reflect upon:

Why Mrs. Meung is accepted as leader in a group where all members are men?

How did the work of iNGO contributed to the success of this group?

4.2.2 Failures in “Low Performing Groups”

In two of the seven visited groups the production techniques for chicken or pigs haven't been changed at all or just a little bit. Both villages belong to the Hmong ethnic group, but also depend on upland farming. They said that lack of labour and lack of money to start

were the main reasons for not beginning with the new techniques. Weaker leadership seems to be another issue for the mixed results.

Moreover, in traditional ethnic villages, strong gender stereotypes do not allow for good flow of information and shared workload between women and men. In both villages, women were not explicitly targeted, but mixed training groups have been done. Village leaders are not yet aware about the benefits of extension activities targeted towards women. In conclusion, it was more related to socio-cultural aspects why the groups have failed.

4.2.3 Factors influencing the performance of groups

DAFO extension workers have ranked the performance in three categories, high, middle, and low. The validated results of the hotspots with achievements and corresponding factors of each group are provided in annex 8.2.

In the five hotspots, 64 production groups have been formed, of which 18 are considered as high performers (with good benefits related to productivity, income, food security, and group organization). 6 high performing groups are working on rice, 6 on pigs, 5 on chicken, and one group on goats. From the available data, there is strong evidence that six performance factors are of importance: ethno-linguistic group, local knowledge (in form of village extension worker), group organization with leadership, management cohesiveness, of which female lead groups show better results, poverty and access to markets and credits.

Table 6: Factors Influencing the Performance of Production Groups

Performance factors	Explanations and evidence
Ethno-linguistic groups (Figure 7)	All high performing groups belong to the Lao-Tai and to a lesser extent to the Mon-Khmer ethnic groups. Gender inequality, language barriers and general poverty including dependence on upland farming in Hmong and Sino-Tibetan villages may better explain this phenomenon than ethnicity as such. Lao-Tai villages are usually much better linked to government system, as most government workers also belong to this ethnic group.
Existence of Village Extension Workers (Figure 8)	95% or 30 production groups that are supported by village extension workers are performing well or at medium level, while in the 28 groups without a VEW only 50% are considered as medium or high performers.
Gender as proxy indicator for group organization (Figure 9)	Group cohesiveness, strong leadership and good management generally support group performance. 19 groups of which 18 are high or medium performers work under a female leader. In the 42 groups with a male leader, only 57% are ranked of medium or high performance.
Village poverty rank (Figure 12)	In the middle income or better-off villages, more than 80% count for medium or high performance. This ratio is much lower in the poor villages with higher or medium performance at a rate of approximately 60%.
Access to credits (Figure 10)	50% of the villages (32) have access to credits by the Nanyobai Bank, the Agricultural Promotion Bank and/or village saving funds, of which 43% are high performers, and only 13 % count to the group of low

Performance factors	Explanations and evidence
	performers. In the remaining 32 villages without credit access only 13% are considered as high, and 25% as low performers.
Access to roads and markets (Figure 11)	Road access and access to markets is another factor influencing performance. 40% of the villages with good road access are performing well, while the rate in villages with difficult access is at less than 20%.

Figure 7: Ethnicity and Group Performance

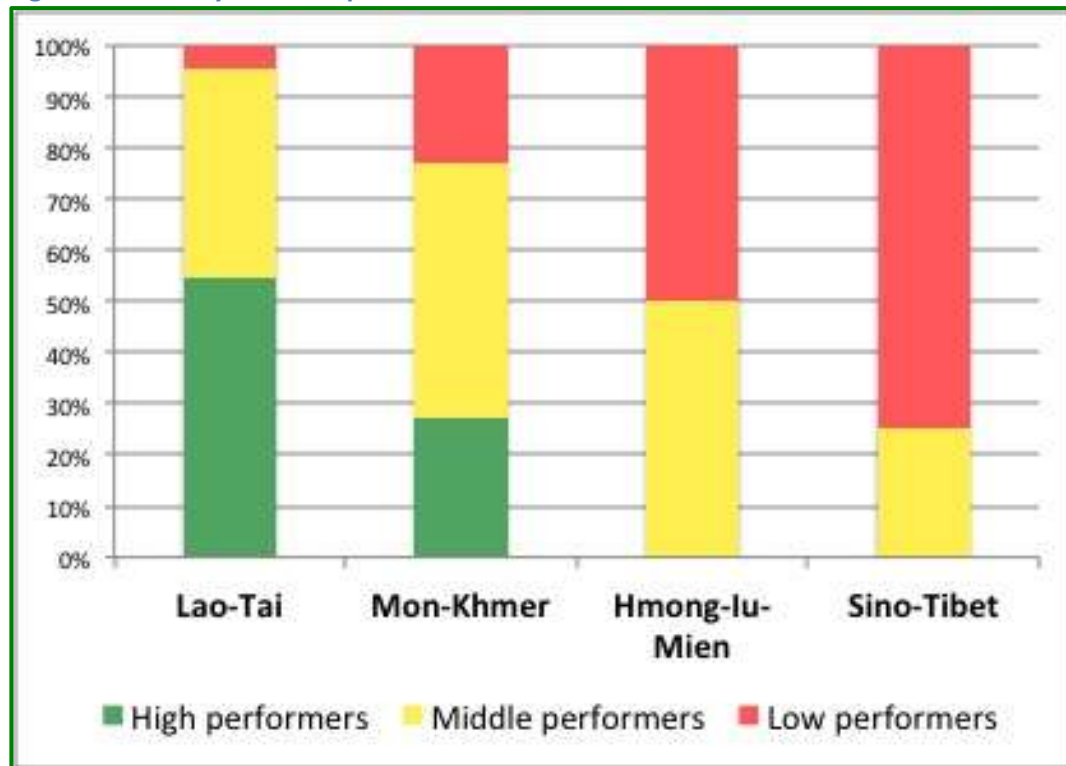


Figure 8: Village Extension Worker and Group Performance

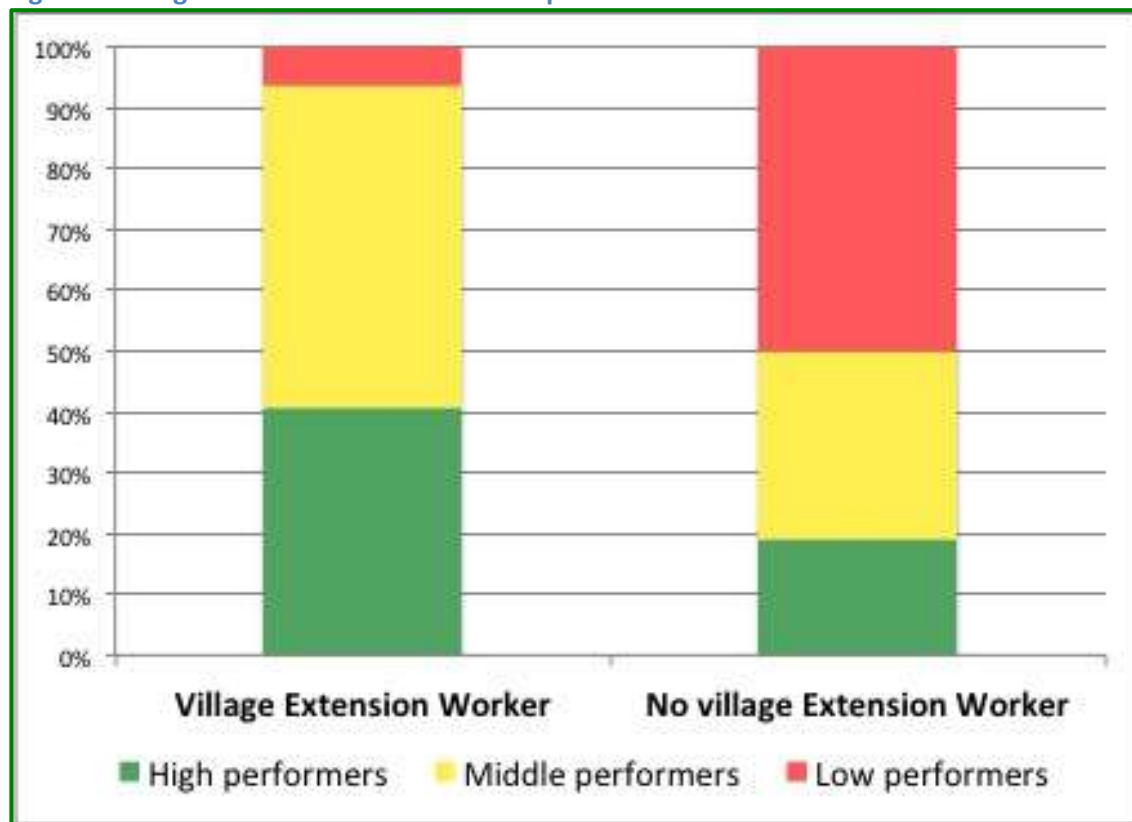


Figure 9: Gender as Proxy for Good Leadership

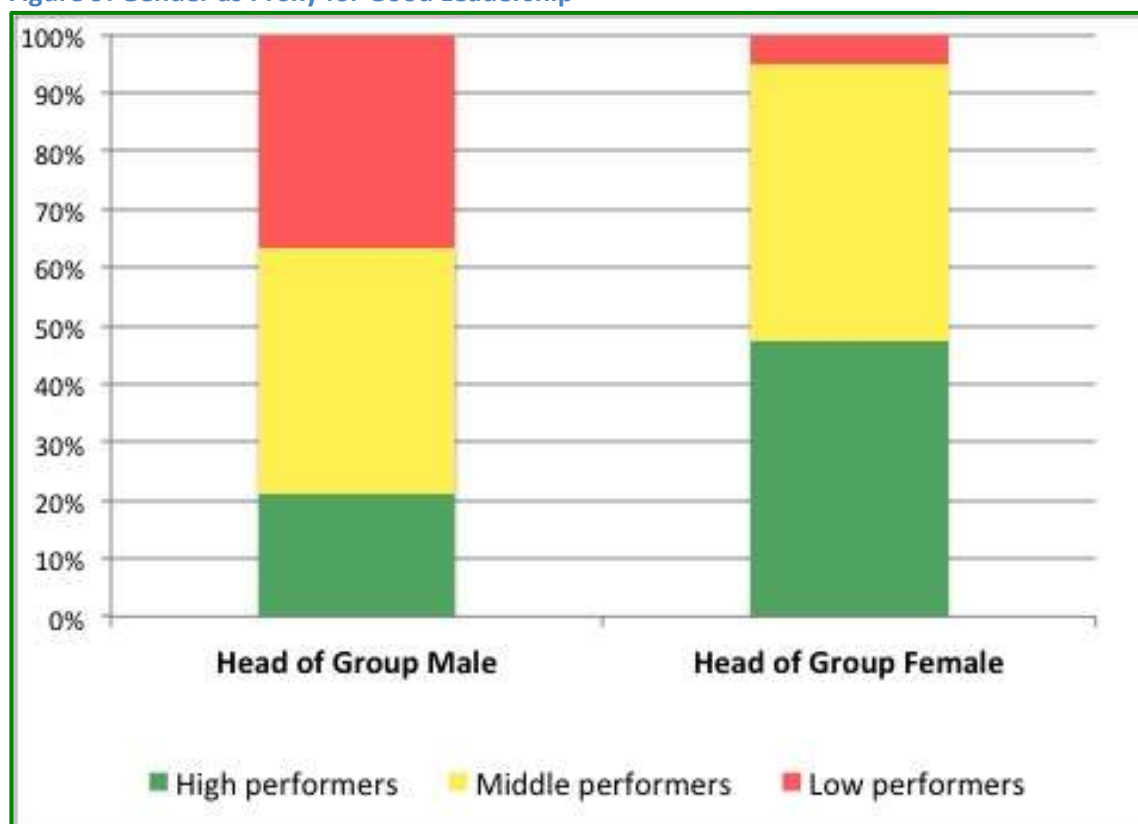


Figure 10: Access to Credits and Group Performance

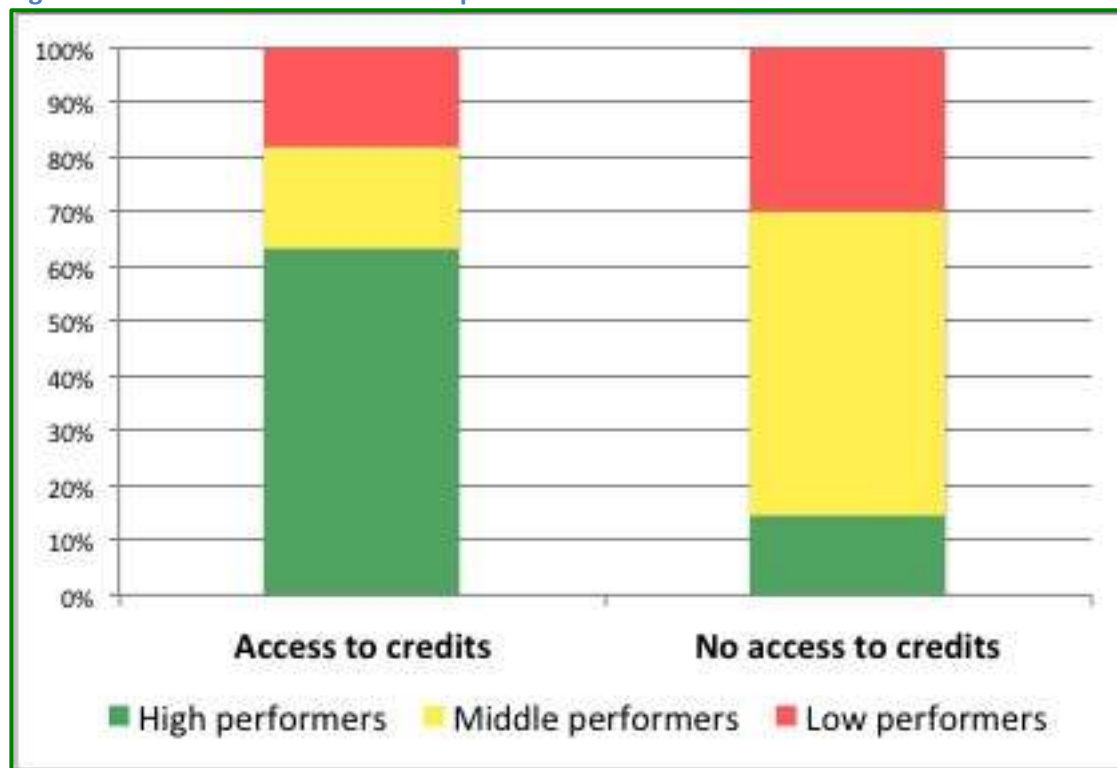
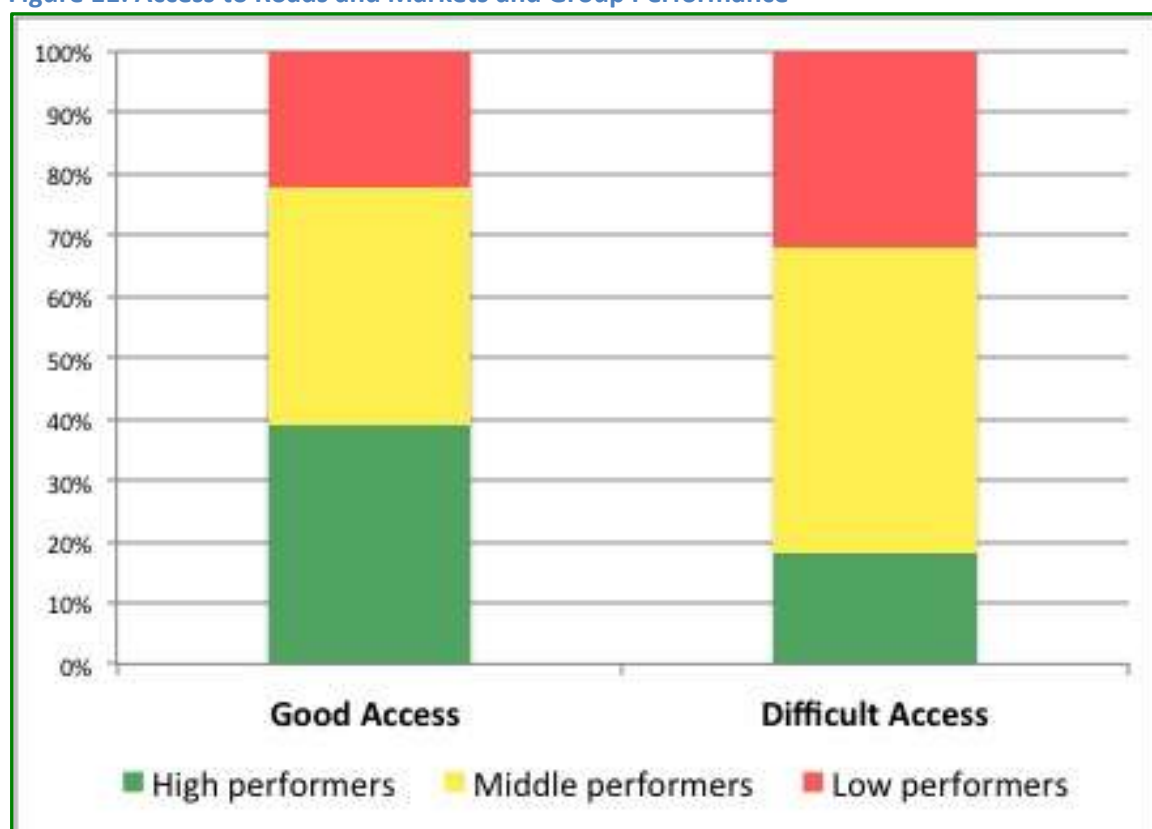


Figure 11: Access to Roads and Markets and Group Performance



Misunderstandings – Lack of Ownership – Gender Inequity – and lots of Disappointments

In Kieularn village in Namor district, families plant rice and maize in the uplands with some families planting paddy rice (13 ha). Maize is planted on approx. 150 ha, of which each family plants one to three ha, depending on the labour in the family.

Mrs. Yemvang, a member of pig production group explained, how the extension activity has started. *“DAFO staff came in our village, and asked, if there are women who are raising pigs, and how the pigs are kept - in pens or in the forest.”* As they all wanted to learn how to reduce the mortality of the piglets, they joined the training sessions, which were run in their own language, in Hmong. *“We have learned, that the pig house should have the size of 3 x 3 m, how to apply the vaccine, and we got some vaccines for demonstration. There were two kinds of vaccines, a black and a yellow one.”*, she remembered. After vaccination of piglets, most of her piglets died. So she bought antibiotics for humans from the pharmacy, and gave it to the pigs. She didn't construct a new pen, so the pigs were still roaming freely in the forest. Only five of 15 families constructed new pens. She joined the group as she wanted to have more pigs for slaughter, as during Hmong New Year festival a lot of chicken and pigs are consumed, and she wanted to be able to offer meat to her guests. She also raises pigs to have enough money for taking care of the sick people in her family. In the first year, she raised ten piglets, but eight died. In the second year, she raised 15 piglets, and all of them died. On the question if she had followed the advice of DAFO, she admitted that she did only the vaccination, but not the advice related to penning and feeding. Women do all the work in the house and for pigs and chicken, and she didn't receive any help from the rest of her family. She has the phone number of DAFO, and she could call, but she didn't call for advice. *“DAFO didn't tell us that we should meet together in the group and discuss problems, so I never talk about the lost piglets. I also raise chicken and ducks in the fields, and if they grow bigger, they are often stolen”*, the woman disclosed with tears in her eyes. *“The village vet does not help the villagers, as the villagers have no money for the service.”*, she complained. *“I am very disappointed, and I gave up, anyway, I still do have maize and NTFPs for income.”*

The men confirmed, that they had high expectations to the pig raising activity, and promises were made, that after construction of the pens, DAFO would facilitate to assess credit from Nanyobai Bank. Men were also waiting for an exposure trip to another village to learn about pig raising. During the first year of the extension project the contact between extension workers and the village was quite close, but as their expectations were never met, they gave up meeting with DAFO, and DAFO gave up visiting the village. On the question what they would prefer to improve under an extension project next time, the men had clear ideas: maize, rubber, and cardamom. Only one man supported the idea of improved animal raising: *“Income generation through animal raising is good for the environment. If we plant more maize, we would need to cut more of the forest.”*

Source: Focus Group Discussion with women and men, Kieularn village, Namor district

Questions to reflect upon:

Why the extension did not work?

What should be the specific extension strategy for this village?

4.2.4 Quality of Services Delivered

Extension services seemed to be of rather good quality, in particular related to activity selection, extension planning (VLA), group formation and capacity building of groups, improved access to credits and markets, and the technical training as such. In all visited villages, farmer groups emphasized the well-received and understood **technical training** contents. In those cases where farmers didn't follow the advice, it was not due to lack of knowledge, but due to lack of time and investments needed for improvement or adoption. The role of DAFO to facilitate access to credit, the advice on village saving and vaccination funds, has been a positive outcome mentioned by production groups.

The regular visits to **follow up**, as outlined in LEA Handbook as **SIFT**, and in order to further advise on the new technologies, or to critically reflect on achievements has been ranked at lower quality. Farmer groups disclosed that the follow up visits haven't been often enough, and visits haven't been conducted in an efficient manner. *"We like the DAFO to visit our village more regularly, because otherwise we forget, what we have learned"*, has been stated in all visited villages in Nambak and Khoun, even in the well-performing villages. Only in Namor, the village Phakham was very satisfied with the extension service follow up visits. They are even confident enough to ask for advice by phone.

If problems in the cooperation between DAFO and production groups persist, DAFO tends to pursue a conflict avoidance strategy by gradually phasing out instead of openly discussing the problems, a strategy that cannot be recommended from the development perspective and therefore discussed again under recommendations.

One important but partly ignored service activity is the **farmer-to-farmer exchange**. This instrument has been declared as core mechanism within LEA and LEA plus. Obviously it is a most efficient instrument to promote farmer organisations, to develop social capital within and between villages, and to empower farmer groups.

In the well-organised villages exchange is happening within the village, as heard during the focus group discussion in Phai village, Khoun district: *"We do meet at least once a month within the group. If the other families ask us, why our chicken are growing so well and why the mortality rate is reduced, we share our knowledge."* (Box 7) However, in the less organized traditional upland villages this exchange does not arise by itself (Box 5). In both villages, the role of DAFO related to farmer-to-farmer exchange hasn't become clear, so it is assumed that DAFO did not play an active role to support this mechanisms. It also became obvious, that farmer-to-farmer exchange across villages hasn't happened at all. *"We have never seen other groups, and we want to visit them. We want to know the reasons for success, we want to learn from others, too."* (FGD, Phai village)

Box 5: Success Factor: Practical Demonstrations and Participatory Reflections

LEA in Practice: Chicken Raising Extension – A True Story from Northern Laos

“The perfect Chicken House”

In a poor and remote village, a team of extension workers conducted a series of training on chicken raising. During the village Livelihood Analysis the topic “**improved chicken raising**” emerged as villagers’ top priority. Villagers saw a lot of potential in raising more chicken for consumption and sale, which actually is difficult due to chicken pandemics that regularly wipe out entire flocks.

The extension workers conducted the first training on penning chickens, and it was agreed that interested families would construct simple chicken pens with local materials. After a while, the extension workers realized during their regular follow-up that nobody started to build a new pen. Therefore, the extension agents decided to help to construct a chicken pen as demonstration pen at the farm of a poor family.

They worked for 2 days, cut the bamboo in the forest, and constructed the chicken house. The extension workers hoped that this demonstration pen would give new motivation to the production group. When they visited the village again, they realized that again no other pens were built, and even worse, apparently the chicken house was now home of the poor family. The farmer explained, that the chicken pen was of better quality than their old house, in which the grass roof was leaking and the rain poured in, therefore they were so grateful in moving to the dry place as interim solution.

The extension workers then sat together and reflected on what went wrong in this poor and remote village. They haven’t found out the failure yet, but want to go back and talk with the villagers.

Source: DAFO Nambak

Questions to reflect upon:

What went wrong in this extension project?

How much effort did the extension workers put into the motivation of farmers?

What could be the reasons for failure?

Was the effort of the extension agents helpful at all?

How would you have solved this problem?

Box 6: Success factor: Social Capital, Regulations and Confidence

Success Factor: Chicken Raising Group Regulations

Phai is a Lao village close by the Khoun district town with 231 inhabitants. 10 out of 37 families joined the chicken production group. The five Khamu families do not participate in the group, as they do not have the space for the chicken house. All members are women. The deputy head of the group is in the same time the deputy headwoman of the village. The village LWU head is member, too. The chicken house has been constructed with the help of the men. During the construction women stood behind the men and advised on the design.

In the past, families produced upland rice, but now income is generated in other ways. Chickens are sold twice a year, each time for about six million Kip, and small, big and chicks are sold at different prices. The flock counts for 1569, or 157 animals per family.

They also generate income from rice, weaving, pigs, cattle, and buffaloes. Many projects support the village with grants: 20 million Kip for the village saving fund, which has grown already to 29 million Kip. LWU has subsidized 1 ton of rice, of which 300 kg needs to be paid back. Villagers have formed a cattle group and a weaving group and received start up funds. For pigs, it was offered to take credit, up to one million Kip for interest rate of 8.4%, from the Plain of Jars Association. A mushroom training was conducted, with mushroom spawn provided. Two families have started to produce mushrooms.

All members have learned to apply vaccines and medicines, but only three members are very confident in doing so. However, they know how to check the stool, and when to apply antibiotics. The village vet can be called in to apply vaccine, and he wouldn't take any service fee from the members. Non-members would be charged 500 Kip per animal. The vaccines are bought in the private pharmacy, not at DAFO, and a vaccination fund is used to pay for the vaccine.

As the group follows all advice provided by DAFO (housing, feeding, vaccinating, and marketing) they were able to reduce mortality rates to almost zero, and significantly increased their income from chicken sales. The middlemen purchase in the village, or group members sell in Khoun. Additional benefit is the chicken manure used in the field, and chicken meat for consumption. The main problem in chicken raising is theft, so they have to keep the chicken close to the house.

Besides improved techniques used, women said that a strict group policy is important with three regulations:

1. It is not allowed to buy chicken from outside for consumption in the village in order to avoid the import of diseases.
2. Members meet one time per month to discuss problems, but meet even more often in case of any problems.
3. If the group member has problems with the chicken they are required to let the other members know immediately.

In the future, the women wanted to learn from other production groups, and get lessons from the success of other groups. This would further enlarge their social networks, a necessary requirement for future development.

Source: Focus Group Discussion with women's production group, Khoun district

Question to reflect upon:

How could the poor families be also integrated?
What kind of group regulations do you additionally suggest?

5 COSTS OF LEA PLUS IN HOTSPOTS

The Lao and the Swiss Government shared the funds for extension services through LEA plus. The Lao Government provided the salaries of three DAFO extension workers and two coordinators from PAFES in each district. The project supported the activity costs for 21 months. These costs included per diems, transport allowances, and materials to be used in the field. As no major grants as subsidy were provided to farmer groups, the total amount of activity costs spent per month was on average 6.8 million Kip or 853 USD – about 800,000 Kip per village and month. These costs also include support from PAFES supervision and follow up. The details of all hotspot expenditures are provided in annex 8.5.

Table 7: Costs of LEA *plus* Implementation

Districts (5 LEA plus and 2 LEA basic)	7
Target Villages	61
Support to PAFES	371,172,400 LAK
Support to DAFOs	632,401,565 LAK
Sum	1,003,573,965 LAK
PAFES in % of DAFO	37%
Per district	143,367,709 LAK
Per district and month (LAK)	6,827,034 LAK
Per village and month (LAK)	783,430 LAK
Per district and month (USD)	\$853

6 LESSONS LEARNED

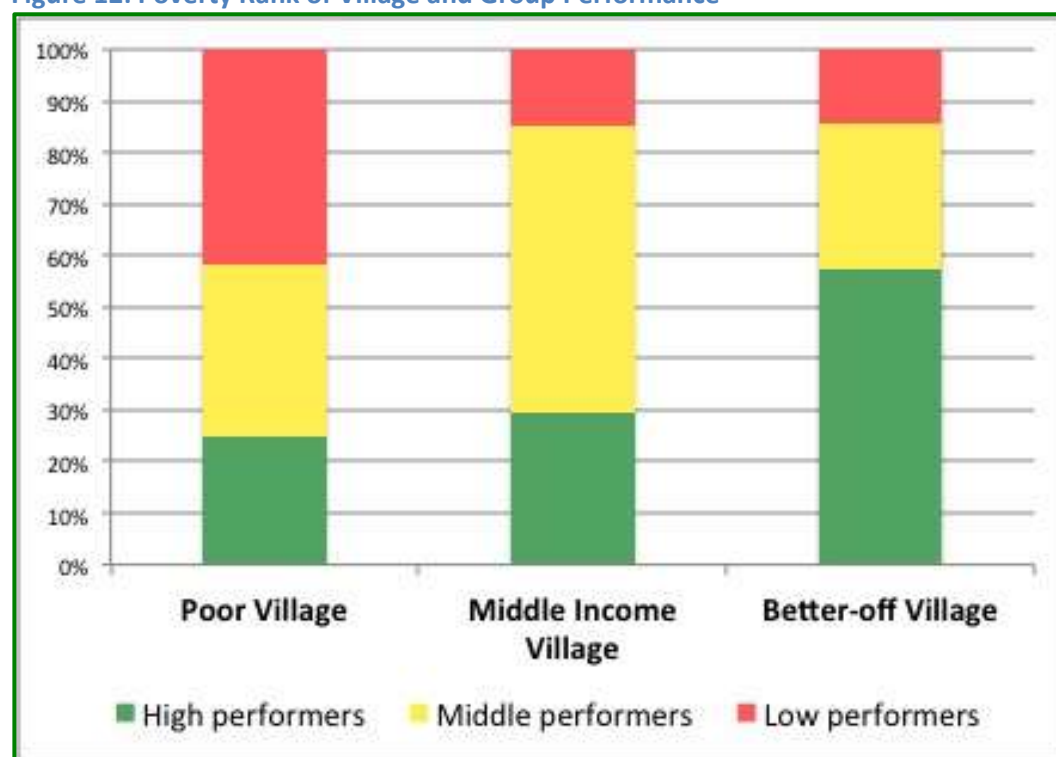
6.1 Different Strategies in order to Maximize Benefits for Everyone

Pro-poor extension is not only an empty phrase in the hotspots - extension workers have been undertaking tremendous technical and social efforts to fill this principle with life. *“Everybody is welcome to join the training, that is what we promote – the poor, the disabled, and those, who can not walk anymore.”* Mr. Leexong from Namor discloses his conviction towards social inclusiveness. If the poor do not change their behavior and production practices afterwards, doesn't mean, that they did not get anything from the training. During the workshop participants have been widely agreed, that the target groups of the LEA are those farming families, who want to change their farming practices irrespective of their wealth, ethnicity, and gender.

On the other hand, Nambak, the district with the largest proportion of poor villages and households in comparison to other hotspots, critically reflected on the difficulties of targeting the poor: *“The project advised that we should select the poor villages, and this policy is correct, but the reality turned out to be difficult, as people are just too poor to follow our extension advice. For example, some do not dare to take loans, as this doesn't fit to their tradition and culture.”*

Figure 12 shows the disproportional benefits in poor, middle income and better-off villages. While ten production groups in poor villages show low performance, only six are performing well. The opposite case is found in better-off or middle-income village, where 12 belong to the high, and only five to low performers.

Figure 12: Poverty Rank of Village and Group Performance



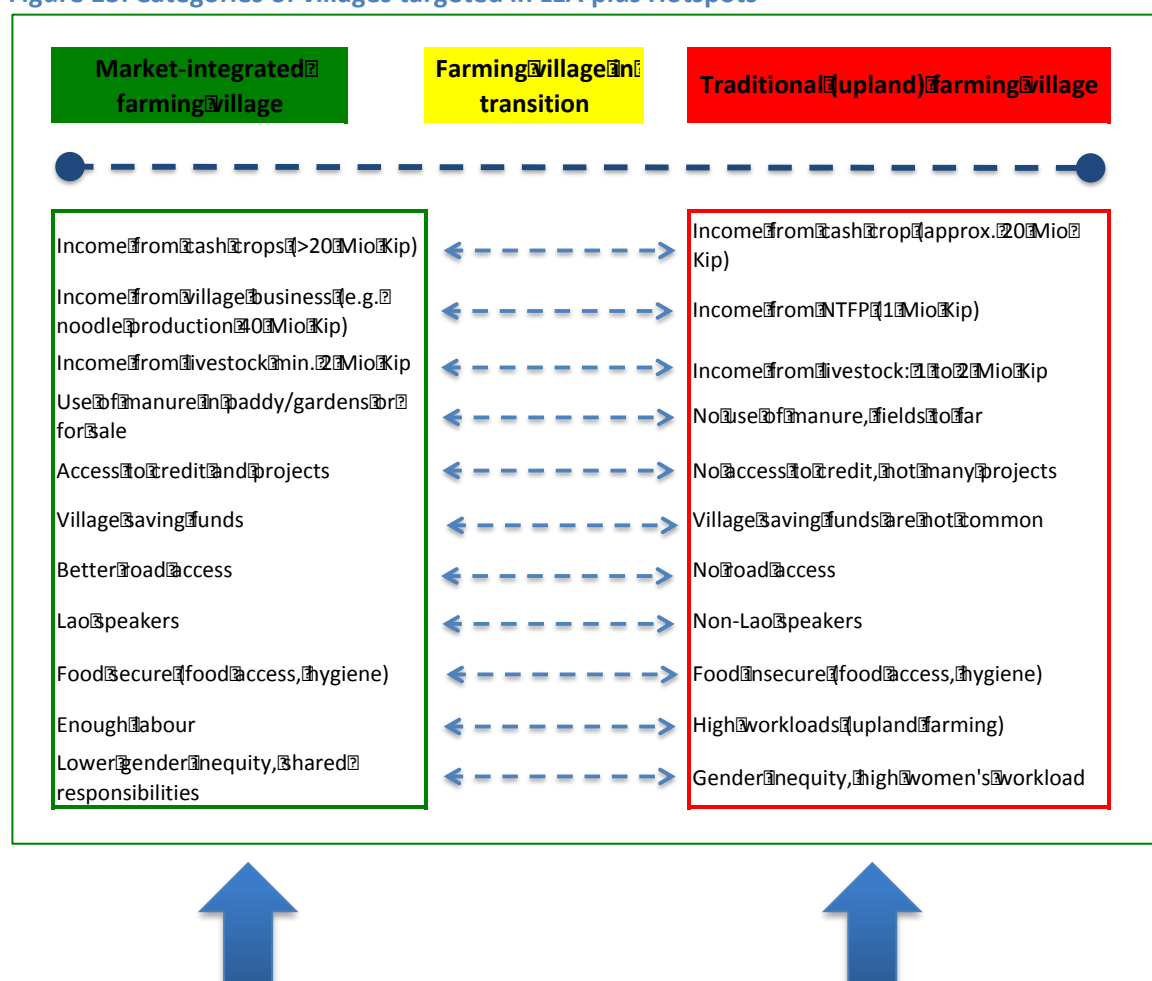
Social inclusiveness is a strongly enforced principle in LEA *plus* practice; however, to get the most benefit for all, supplementary strategies are necessary. Different village categories have been targeted during hotspot implementation (Figure 14), which is the traditional

(upland) farming village, the market-oriented farming village, and the village in transition with both features from each categories. Typical features are given below. These features are more or less pronounced, and of course are subject to change. Both categories call for different intervention strategies to capitalize on the agricultural extension approach **(Extension for everyone)**.

The main differences between the two strategies are as follows:

- In traditional (upland) farming villages the best fit conceptual approach is the integrated livelihood and community development approach, potentially in collaboration with INGOs, NPAs or larger donor funded projects, while market integrated villages can cope well with a straightforward commodity approach as practiced by SADU and LEA *plus*;
- Access to small funds and inputs (subsidized by INGOs, NPAs or projects) for poorer communities are yet to be promoted, as poor villages do not yet have many projects compared to the better-off (see box 5,6 and 7);
- DAFO must develop partnerships (e.g. LWU, NPAs) to get support on addressing gender inequality in traditional villages. Gender training and awareness raising as precondition for villages with strong gender stereotypes and inequality.

Figure 13: Categories of villages targeted in LEA plus Hotspots



Proposed Intervention Strategies

Commodity Approach	Conceptual Approach	Sustainable Livelihood Approach Community Development
- Value Chains - Contract Farming/legal advice	Market Engagement	- Value Chains - Contract Farming/legal advice
Liaison with banks	Access to Finance	- Liaison with INGOs/NPAs Soft loans for inputs (revolving)
- Safe use of pesticides - Organic farming	Environmental sustainability	- Safe Use of pesticides - NTFP promotion/domestication
- Production Groups - Cooperatives	Farmer Organisation	Production and learning Groups
Women Groups	Gender equality	Gender training (in collaboration with NPAs, LWU) Labour saving technologies - Women groups
- Land Use Planning - Land titling	Land tenure security	- Land Use Planning - Customary rights - NTFP regulations

6.2 Improved Discussion and Reflection among All Stakeholders

The tools used in LEA *plus* for extension planning, implementation and follow up are useful for coaching and facilitation. The hotspot implementation practice shows, that activity selection and follow up is not practiced as reflective and participatory as it could be.

The activity selection is sometimes based on the number of households with a certain amount of animals and if they are interested to learn more about (activity selection based on farmer experience!). Therefore, chicken, pigs and rice, produced by the majority of villagers, become major extension subjects. This is aggravated by the fact, that most extension workers are most confident in the above-mentioned subjects.

Box 5 and 6 illustrate typical cases of conflicts or failures in an affective manner. The stories disclose that extension requires step-by-step reflection between extension workers and farmer groups. The facilitation of this process needs tools (yes, there are, e.g. SIFT), capacities (yes, have been trained) and confidence to apply (less obvious).

Hotspot practice shows, that DAFO's tendency is to keep rather modest or even phase out, if conflicts arise (conflict avoidance strategy). Extension workers admitted, that DAFO attitudes often do not match with villagers' attitudes, and communication and cooperation is not always frank and balanced. Derived from the conflict theory, those who avoid conflict often have low self-esteem or hold a position of low power. The lack of confidence of extension workers to fill out the role as coach, to cope with failures, and to resolve conflicting interests between farmers and DAFO may be the cause of this.

However, observations in particular in Khoun also show, that farmer groups and extension workers are rather confident in talking with each other on an equal footing. Farmer groups are rather self-confident, maybe also because they are better-off, and extension workers have learned from development projects like SADU and LEAP for 12 years. So both parties have good knowledge, and farmer cooperatives and associations demonstrate how resilient and successful rural civil society can be. DAFO extension workers have developed facilitation

skills that provide space to farmers, and farmers have knowledge and capacities that reflects a longer period of capacity building and dialogue between government, private sector, and farming families. The self-reliant women in NaOu, a better-off noodle production village close to the main road between Khoun and Phonsavan demonstrate their resilience as follows: *“There are many companies coming to our village and offering projects that we normally refuse, because we have found our own way.”*

Typical for Laos is a very strict segregation of stakeholders. Though many efforts have been made to overcome the separation between civil society, government, and private sector, farmer groups, private sector and government staff have exchanged in the market engagement pillar eg VCAD, beyond that there was not regular exchange. Often, for logistical or practical reasons, farmer groups are excluded from workshops, as participants from the public sector already make up many participants. Not all opportunity are fully used to discuss at eye level between extension workers and farmer representatives. Multi-stakeholder dialogue, as recommended in many project documents of LEAP, SADU and others should become more common, and it has been often requested by DAFO, which know very well, that both levels – district and farmer groups – need to share experiences. Upon growth of (technical) confidence among all actors, this exchange should happen more regularly. If Laos has a growing number of NPAs and farmer associations who are able to request to participate, and government who is confident to allow participation, multi-stakeholder dialogue will happen.

Other instruments, like innovation stories from the field (similar to those in the boxes), farmer-to-farmer exchange, and binding agreements between farmer groups and DAFO, regular communication also by phone between DAFO and farmers, are only some communication tools that will potentially get more attention in the future.

6.3 Subsidy-Free Extension Matches With Other Efforts

During the assessment, all extension staffs supported the rationale of a grants-free and subsidy-free extension approach. In the same time it was acknowledged that facilitation of access to credits is a core extension function. Many villages, e.g. those four visited in Khoun, are able to choose from a wide range of farming and income generating activities offered by DAFO and other agencies. At first sight, it seemed that farmers have been overwhelmed, but they have learned to choose. It seems that free input projects or soft loans are ranked very high, as women in Nathong revealed in the ranking of projects (see Box 8). But even if not ranked as best project, LEA plus extension activities was liked for the following reasons: learning some new techniques, and a strong women’s group by working and learning from and in the group.

In very rare cases, LEA did not work out so well, as other projects came in with subsidies and grants, and more attention was paid to these options (e.g. in district focal development zones).

Box 7: Success Factor: Access to Inputs and Many Options to Choose From

“The Pig Project Support was the best, as we got a cheap loan”.

In Nathong village, 15 women, including four village development committee members, join the chicken production group. Related to chicken raising they did not change many techniques. Now, they raise chicken in the field in order to avoid spreading of disease and apply the bio-anticoc and B12 feed additive. Most members were able to reduce mortality, but those, who keep the chicken in the village and close to the road still have high losses due to road accidents, diseases and theft.

Besides the LEA supported chicken project, five other projects came into the village during the past two years, and a ranking of the projects was done. Projects that provided cheap loans or free inputs were ranked in the best category.

Project and Rank	Reason why the project was successful or not
1. Pigs 😊😊	APB provided loans for pigs up to one million Kip at an interest rate of 13% per annum. Families have paid back the loan, and made good profit.
2. Weaving 😊😊	Weaving products have been sold at the local market. LWU provided a loan at 5% interest rate. The loan has been paid back. Earning was good.
3. Rice 😊😊	DAFO provided rice seed for demonstrations. In 2012, 8 kg/person of Thaddokham 2 and 30 kg of fertilizer with mixed results. In 2013, DAFO provided 10 kg of KhaoGaiNoi seed and hope for a very good result.
4. Chicken 😊	LEA plus supported chicken training, group formation, and follow up. Women have some additional profit, approx. 800,000 Kip per year, but still do not vaccinate. Working and learning as group and group management was seen as strongest point.
5. Passion Fruit 😊	It was encouraged by SADU to grow passion fruit, but farmers were not interested in doing this.
6. Cassava contract farming 😊	In 2010, the Lao-Viet company negotiated a cassava contract with the headman, and provided plants for 4 ha. Some families planted cassava in the uplands. During harvest time, the company took a sample and complained about the quality, the cassava was too small. But villagers also heard that the company went bankrupt.

Source: Focus Group Discussion with women, Nathong village, Khoun district

6.4 Innovation Needs Time

Behaviour change and diffusion of innovation needs patience and time (see box 1). An innovation in policy or social network is more complex than a simple technology e.g. improve the feeding of the animals. This is also true in LEA *plus* implementation practice. While the new instruments of market engagement (VCAD, RMA) are more complex than simple production techniques, and the immediate benefit for farmers does not become clear, it has been only adopted by a few staff, and only those, who received coaching and advice to practice.

The time dimension to foster change and innovation is very relevant to LEA as most success can be seen only after many years. While the economic context is rapidly changing within the past 12 years (since LEAP start up), the political context is rather stagnant, and national policies try to catch up with this dynamic growth. Related to the pillars farmer organization and civil society, policies and its enforcement are lagging behind. With the farmer conferences and farmer statements, and the group-based extension approach, LEAP has set very important landmarks. In the hotspots, the LEA concept has been well internalized, even if there are still other projects promoting model farmer families. It will still need many years, until the culture of group-based extension is completely absorbed.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DAEC should keep the momentum and concentrate on taking LEA (*plus*) forward

LEA is not only a tested extension approach that has been developed for Lao context, it is well aligned with the MAF agricultural development strategy and DAEC extension strategy “a breakthrough in supporting smallholder farmers”. It has a significant impact on policy making while at the same time directly benefiting the community; there are strong evidences that agricultural extension have changed behavior of farmer groups and resulted in increased smallholder agricultural productivity.

As prerequisite for other activities, a **comprehensive funding strategy** could be a good starting point.

- 1.1 Develop a funding strategy for LEA’s running costs within MAF and present to political decision-makers.⁴

Another intervention would be an improved **communication system** within DAEC to promote LEA.

- 1.2 Identify a focal person within DAEC to manage communication and liaison for expanding / marketing LEA to government, projects, donors, civil society, and private sectors.
- 1.3 Review, validate and maintain a databank of extension experts, including important resources and materials that can be used by extension staffs and publish these in www.lao44.org in coordination with CLICK.

⁴ NOTE: LEA is not just a foreign-funded project, as it has the character of a programme-based approach, despite funding mechanisms was not channeled within the government system via planning, finance, and agriculture, but allocated directly to the district and provincial extension services.

To develop and strengthen **partnerships** with actors involved in agricultural extension to disseminate LEA, also with partners that are able to fund extension activities.

- 1.4 Continue to expand collaboration with donor organizations and development projects eg IFAD/SSSJ, NUDP, and others by capitalizing on present cooperation that have already started in selected districts. Such collaborations should be on application of LEA for extension service provision, use of already existing tools and utilize LEA trained extension staffs at all levels.
- 1.5 Inform policy and decision makers in Provinces by demonstrating impacts of LEA *plus* on smallholder productivity with an indicative cost calculated per district or per village and get commitments from Provincial administration to allocate budget for LEA as supporting instrument to the “Three Builds” decentralization efforts in its priority zones or for regular agriculture extension work in the Province.

External communication and marketing

- 1.6 Disseminate lessons that have been learned from LEA *plus* implementation to INGOs (e.g. CARE, Oxfam, CCL, GAA / welthungerhilfe, DGRV, HELVETAS etc), NPA network, private sectors through sub/sector working group mechanism (eg SSWG Uplands, Agribusiness etc)
- 1.7 Marketing of LEA by publishing promotional materials e.g. leaflets in English and Lao that briefly explains the LEA extension concept and the services that can be provided to other projects, private sector, INGOs etc by DAEC eg tailor-made ToT on LEA - *basic* or *plus*), VCAD, RMA, FO facilitation etc.
- 1.8 Promote LEA at different events that will be organised in 2014 to commemorate the International Year of Family Farming.

2. DAEC should lead and coordinate to build and expand capacity around LEA

- 2.1 Provide possibilities for DAFO to reflect on extension work, to participate in refresher courses, to share stories of failure, and to develop strategies for communication and conflict resolution in extension. This has been suggested by DAFO for future support (more details see annex 8.6 expectations matrix)
- 2.2 Promote learning from exchange visits to both extension staffs and farmers e.g. farmer-to-farmer exchange and cross-visits to cooperatives and farmer associations in Khoun and elsewhere.
- 2.3 Liaise with the Agricultural colleges (supported by SURAFCO⁵) and other agriculture educational institutions to send students for practical internship courses and research thesis to collect lessons learned on different aspects of LEA mainly focusing on farmers organization development and market engagements. This will help not only to capitalize lessons from the field but also building capacities of future agriculture extension staffs.
- 2.4 Maintain and expand the LEA trained staffs by utilising LEA master trainer / Hotspot Coordinators pool at DAEC / CETDU. Demand based ToT can be delivered to

⁵ SURAFCO is a SDC funded project implemented by Helvetas supporting the reform of the Agricultural Colleges. The Agricultural Colleges, e.g. the Northern Agricultural and Forestry College in Luang Prabang, have an extension module in their education and cooperate with DAEC, formerly NAFES, since 2009. Each year, approx. 100 students conduct practical training from January to June, of which the topic extension could play a more prominent role than in the past.

interested organisations including NPA and private sector staffs and to teachers at Agricultural Colleges to integrate LEA in curriculum colleges.

3. Modification and adaptation of extension package to compliment LEA in poor and traditional upland villages

- 3.1 Provide facilitation courses for extension workers working in traditional, non-Lao speaking communities, including broadening their understanding of traditions, culture and social issues around farming practices
- 3.2 Additional focus on constraints of poor households who cannot take up innovations due to lack of labour and lack of money by
 - promoting labour saving technologies
 - linking to other organizations that could provide soft loans and inputs for demonstrations (e.g. LWU, iNGOs, Nanyobai Bank)
- 3.3 Focus on other income generation potentials (NTFPs, cardamom, Job's tears, maize, chilies, herbs, and other high-value-for-weight products, and small livestock) in production and marketing
- 3.4 Link with other iNGOs/NPAs/LWU etc to level the ground before applying LEA under community development/livelihood approach (incl. nutrition, health, hygiene, water, and gender)
- 3.5 Address gender inequality and challenging gender stereotypes by raising gender awareness and gender analysis to men and women, and possibly in cooperation with LWU (capitalizing on lessons learned from Nambak hotspot)
- 3.6 Train more women and Non-Lao-Tai ethnic extension staff on LEA main modules
- 3.7 Allocate more time for planning and follow up of extension activities compared to market-integrated farming villages

4. Smallholder market engagement calls for multi-stakeholder policy dialogues and capacity building inputs

- 4.1 Capitalize different initiatives on smallholder interaction with markets eg LEA *plus*, SADU, SAEDA work in Khoun district and expand to new districts and with interested new partners (e.g. DGRV, CORD, OXFAM etc) to develop capacity of farmers organisation on market engagement and rolling out Farmer Cooperative Decree No 136
- 4.2 Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues for mutual learning and action, in particular with DAFO, Industry and Commerce, Justice, Finance, farmers groups, private companies etc on constraints around particular value chains.
- 4.3 Capitalize on Oudomxay's contract farming regulations and collect experiences from other provinces in comparison, disseminating of contract farming regulations.

5. Empower farmer groups and organisations by building social capital

- 5.1 Farmer to Farmer peer learning through cross-visits for farmer groups' representatives to well-established cooperatives and production groups, in order to learn soft skills from their attitudes towards accountability, transparency, leadership, inclusiveness, marketing and production-related successes
- 5.2 Continue organising annual farmer organisation conferences to establish network of farmers organisation and resolutions for policy dialogue

5.3 Promote products produced by smallholder farmers by developing a collective identity e.g. TV series on agricultural products, (“Products from Our Farmers - Along the Value Chain”) which would create collective identity and is in line with party policies and general socio-economic and agricultural policies. (e.g. NaOu noodles, Hoy vegetables, Paknamthong pigs, and Nammong chicken) (Potential partner: TV3 Friends of farmer program)

8 ANNEX

8.1 Terms of Reference

Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) - Assessment of LEA *plus* implementation in Hotspots

A. Background

The Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) with technical assistance from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. The objective of the project is *"to contribute to the development of a decentralized, participatory, pluralistic and sustainable agricultural extension system that is capable of benefiting poorer households and communities, and reaches male and female farmers equally"*. The project was started in 2001 and is currently in the fifth phase.

In Phase I (2001-2004), the project studied the experience of previous extension efforts in Laos, and put together a participatory extension process based on the 'best practice' that was successfully tested in 3 Provinces. At the start of Phase II (2005-2007), the practice tested by LEAP was endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), as 'Lao Extension Approach' (LEA). During the Phase II, the project supported NAFES to introduce LEA into the remaining 14 Provinces of the country. The approach has also been adopted by a number of other projects, with the result that approximately 20,000 farmers had been reached by the end of 2007. In January 2008, the project started a 6 month Alignment Phase to adjust the LEA to the new strategies and structures introduced by MAF.

In Phase IV (2008 – 2012) the project focused on the quality of service delivery, in order to complement the attention that was given to increasing geographical coverage in earlier phases and to further promote the vision of 'extension for everyone' improving the content of LEA with the changing scenario of the agriculture sector in Laos. The concept note for LEA *plus* is attached in Annex 1.

The project focused to improve the quality of LEA approach with development and implementation of LEA *plus* in hotspots (Luangprabang – Nambak, Oudomxay – Namor, Huaphan – Xiengkhor, Xiengkhouang – Khoun and Phongsaly – Boun Nuea) incorporating smallholder's interaction with markets and farmer's organization development along with the technical production. Participatory extension planning and results based monitoring system was development in each of these hotspots. The services delivered to smallholders were demand based and a wider range of extension materials were developed.

This Terms of Reference (ToR) is developed to assess the outputs of LEA *plus* implementation in Hotspots and to compile lessons learned.

B. Objectives

The objective of the consulting assignment is

1. To assess the outputs of LEA *plus* implementation in Hotspots districts

The specific objectives of the assessment are:

I. Government Extension Delivery

- What is the capacity of Government extension staffs in planning and delivering demand driven – output oriented extension services to the smallholder farmers?
- What is the capacity of Government extension staffs on providing services related to market engagement and farmers organization?

- Were process and tools developed under LEA plus helpful to provide these diverse services and what is their capacity in applying / using it further?
- How are these tools / methodologies used / adopted further and applied by the extension staffs?
- What are the lessons learned on strengthening / capacity building of extension services in Hotspots and service delivery?
- What were the operational costs for implementing LEA *plus* in a district?

II. Community Level

- How were the beneficiaries for extension delivery selected?
- Was LEA plus “inclusive”? What was the involvement of women and ethnic minority?
- What types of services did the community receive? How do they rate the services they received (from DAFO)?
- What was the frequency of visit by the extension staffs?
- How were the learning / experience from the groups expanded to other farmers within the village, other villages (Farmers to Farmers learning)?
- What was the outcome of these services specially in regards to
 - Food security (and nutrition)
 - Production and productivity
 - Income
 - Organization and empowerment
- What are the lessons learned from the community level?

C. Outputs / Deliverables

- Develop key indicators for assessment and methodology (including selection of districts and villages)
- Organize field visit and meetings in selected hotspot districts and villages with extension staffs and farmers groups for assessment and lessons learned
- Organize a workshop to present draft findings and consolidate lessons learned
- Draft and submit final report

D. Tasks

Under the supervision of the TA Team Leader and in close coordination with NPD (DDG, DAEC), the consultant shall carry out following tasks.

- Review of project documents, progress reports and other relevant documents
- Organize meetings with project team and stakeholders for their inputs to the assessment
- Organize field visit to meet with selected hotspot districts meeting with Provincial, District extension staffs and farmers groups
- Organize a workshop with Hotspot extension staffs to present preliminary findings and to document lessons learned
- Presentation of draft reports
- Submit the final reports

8.2 Validated data from hotspot districts (2010-2013)

Namor, Oudomxay province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Performance	Village code	Accessibility	Production Group	Market Engagement	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	total	female	%	
1	Namo	Phouly	medium	403016	diff	pig	Maize	sufficient	9	4	2	15	4	27%	Hmong
2		Mixaisamphan	medium	403046	easy	rice	rice	Sufficient	6	3		9	0	0%	Hmong
3		Keawlarn	low	403045	easy 13 km	pig	poultry	sufficient	11	4		15	6	40%	Hmong
4	Namgner n	Huana	medium	403031	diff 47 km	rice	rice	sufficient	9	7		16	0	0%	Khamu
5		Namngern	high	403028	diff 35 km	poultry	poultry	poor	5	4	6	15	15	100%	Lao
6		Phakham	high	403039	diff 45 km	pig	cardamom	sufficient		11		11	6	55%	Lao
7	Pangsa	Parknamtong	high	403007	diff	pig	pig	sufficient	10	3		13	13	100%	Mix
8	Nathong	Nathong	low	403006	easy	pig	rice	better-off	6	9		15	5	33%	Lao
9	Khouang	Khouang	high	403019	easy	rice	rice	better-off		15		15	9	60%	Lao
10		Nasavang	high	403018	easy	rice	rice	better-off		15		15	9	60%	Lao
Total	5	10				10			56	75	8	139	67	47%	

Bunneua, Phongsaly province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Performance	Village code	Accessi- bility	Production Group	Market Engage- ment	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	Rich	total	female	%	
1	Donexay	Donexay	high		easy	rice		sufficient	3	6	15	24	7	29%	Phunoy
2		Namphae	medium		easy	rice		sufficient	4	5	11	20	8	40%	Phunoy
3		Bounxang	low		diff	pig		poor	4	3	3	10	2	20%	Akha
4		Vangdoy	medium		easy	rice		sufficient	2	4	9	15	4	27%	Phunoy
5		Houilae	low		diff	pig		poor	3	7	13	23	2	9%	Akha
6		Houihed	medium		easy	pig		poor	4	4	8	16	2	13%	Akha
7		Houipong	low		diff	pig		poor	2	5	7	14	2	14%	Akha
Total	1	7				7			22	34	66	122	27	22%	

Khoun, Xiang Khuang province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Perfor- mance	Village code	Accessi- bility	Production Group	Market Engagem ent	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	Total	Female	%	
1	Youn	Dongdarn	medium		easy 13 km	Poultry		better-off	5	6		11	5	45%	Mix
2		NaOu	high		easy 4 km	Pig		better-off	4	10		14	14	100%	Lao
3	Xieng	Phai	high		easy 5 km	Poultry		better-off		9	5	14	14	100%	Lao
4	Samphanxa Y	Sibounheuang	medium		diff 40 km	poultry		sufficient		18		18	12	67%	Lao
5		Nathong	medium		easy 15 km	Poultry		better-off		15		15	15	100%	Lao
6	Sanlouang	Sanlouang	low		diff 30 km	Poultry		poor	2	3		5	2	40%	Hmong
7	Nmaoun	Nacham	medium		diff 40 km	Poultry		sufficient		15		15	15	100%	Hmong
Total	5	7				7			11	76	5	92	77	84%	

Xiangkhor, Huaphanh province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Performance	Village code	Accessi- bility	Production Group	Market Engage- ment	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	total	female	%	
1	Natong	Sopdoun	medium	702017	diff	Goat		Poor	7	3		10	0	0%	Xingmun
			medium			poultry			10			10	10	100%	
2		Phiengxang			diff	Goat		poor	9	1		10	0	0%	Xingmun
			medium	702076		poultry			10			10	3	30%	
3		Nanong		702010	diff	pig		sufficient	6	4		10	3	30%	Taidam
			medium			Goat			4	6		10	0	0%	
4	Xiengkhor	Ngeum	medium	702055	easy	rice		sufficient	9	10		19	5	26%	Taidam
5		Phonna	high	702056	easy 4 km	rice		sufficient	5	7		12	0	0%	Taidam
						pig			6	4		10	10	100%	
6		Huailang	high	702058	easy	pig		poor	8	2		10	10	100%	Xingmun
7		Khounkham	high	702047	easy	rice		poor	7	2		9	0	0%	Xingmun
						Goat			8	2		10	4	40%	
8		Sopvan	high	702081	easy	pig		sufficient	6	1		7	4	57%	Taidam
9		Sae	high	702051	easy 3 km	rice		sufficient	2	8		10	4	40%	Taidam
			high			Poultry			1	9		10	4	40%	
Total	2	9				15			98	59	0	157	57	36%	

Nambak, Luang Prabang province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Performance	Village code	Accessi- bility	Production Group	Market Engagement	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	total	female	%	
1	Xongcha	Kached	high	605065	easy	cucumber		sufficient	5	5		10	3	30%	Khamu
			low			pig			7	3		10	0	0%	
			high			poultry			15			15	15	100%	
2	Jakmong	Nammong		605064	easy 13 km	rice		poor		12		12	1	8%	Khamu
			high			pig			4	6		10	10	100%	
			high			chicken			7	5		12	12	100%	
3		Vanghin	high	605062	easy	Vegetable		poor	3	4		7	5	71%	Khamu
			high			poultry			7	6		13	2	15%	
4		Namsad	Kiewha	low	605136	easy	goat		poor	12			12	0	0%
	medium			chicken			13					13	13	100%	
	low			pig			8			7		15	2	13%	
5	Pongtai		low	605125	diff	pig		sufficient	15			15	1	7%	Khamu
			medium			poultry			14			14	14	100%	
			high			goat			3	11		14	0	0%	
6	Phouku		medium	605141	easy	chicken		poor	11			11	6	55%	Hmong
			low			goat			9			9	1	11%	
			low			pig			15			15	1	7%	
7	Thongtherng		medium	605137	easy	pig		sufficient	11	4		15	6	40%	Khamu
			medium			goat			3	8		11	0	0%	
8	Namtheuam	Huaikheua	low	605129	diff 30 km	pig		poor	5	5		10	0	0%	Hmong
			medium			poultry			8	7		15	4	27%	Hmong
9		Phaluang	medium	605130	diff 35 km	poultry		poor	17			17	4	24%	Hmong
			low			pig			13			13	0	0%	
10	NamNga	Simoungkhoun	medium	605150	easy	pig		poor	1	14		15	0	0%	Hmong
			medium			poultry			3	11		14	13	93%	
Total	5	10				25			209	108	0	317	113	36%	

Thathom, Xiang Khuang province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Performance	Village code	Accessibility	Production Group	Market Engagement	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	total	female	%	
1	Thedsabarn	Namphang	medium		easy	rice, chicken		better-off	5	16		21	2	10%	Lao
2		Samkorthong	low		easy	Poultry		sufficient		6		6	1	17%	Lao
3	Thavieng	Namlong	high		easy	rice		poor		10		10	2	20%	Lao
4		Phiengta	medium		easy	Poultry		sufficient	3	7		10	2	20%	Lao
5		Nasong	high		easy	rice		sufficient		10		10	1	10%	Lao
6		Viengthong	medium		easy	rice		better-off	4	7		11	2	18%	Lao
7	Yamchalern	Phiengsavath	medium		diff	Poultry		poor	10			10	1	10%	Khamu
8		Yamchalern	medium		diff	Poultry		better-off	5	5		10	2	20%	Khamu
9	Parkyong	Vanghai	medium		easy	rice		sufficient	5	5		10	2	20%	Khamu
10		Thidnoon	high		easy	poultry		poor	9			9	1	11%	Khamu
Total	4	10				11			41	66	0	107	16	16%	

Viangkham, Luang Prabang province

No.	Kumbaan	Villages	Perform ance	Village code	Accessi- bility	Production Group	Market Engage- ment	Village poverty status	Member poverty status			No. of members			Ethnic Group
									poor	sufficient	rich	Total	female	%	
1	Meuangmoui	Meuangmoui	na		na	rice		sufficient				12	4	30%	Khamu
			na			Chicken						11	6	45%	
2	Sopheung	Viengthong	na		Na	Chicken		sufficient				15	7	51%	Khamu
			na			pig						11	2	51 %	
3		Navaen	na		na	rice		poor				12	5	41%	Khamu
			na			pig						13	1	8%	
4	Mokkha	Phonkeo	na		na	Chicken		sufficient				12	7	58%	Khamu
			na			pig						13	6	46%	
5		Nackkhaly	na		na	Chicken		sufficient				11	0	0%	Khamu
			na			pig						10	2	20%	
6		Nackkha	na		na	Chicken		sufficient				12	3	40%	Khamu
			na			pig						14	6	43%	
7		Poungtao	na		na	Chicken		poor				10	2	20%	Khamu
			na			pig						10	4	40%	
8		Parkxang	na		Na	Chicken		sufficient				12	1	8%	Khamu
			na			pig						15	7	47%	
Total	3	8				16						181	59	31%	

8.3 Indicators guiding the assessment

Level 1. Uptake and outputs (from Monitoring reports and DAFO meetings)
- Number of farmers reached (disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age, and wealth status)
- Number of farmer groups (size, extension of groups, % women farmers)
- Number of training topics
- Expenditure of Hotspot extension per year (personnel, per diems, transport, materials,...)
- Quality of services (frequency of follow-up, training, demand-driven approach)
Level 2. Outcomes and Effects (from village visits)
- Effects upon market engagement
- Effects upon agricultural production (productivity, diversification)
- Effects upon the environment
- Effects upon farm incomes
- Effects upon women's involvement (women's workload, men's workload)
Level 3. Actors (village visits)
- Impact upon farmer attitudes and knowledge (social inclusiveness, risk taking, market engagement, decision-making, technical knowledge)
- Impact upon farmer organisation and farmer platforms/networks (empowerment, sustainability, density of networks, leadership and managerial capacities)
- Impact upon the activities of FO, INGOs, NPA, private sector (do they follow LEA in the district?)
Level 4. Procedures (workshop, meetings, village visits)
- Impact on role and capacity of public extension services (incentive system, gained knowledge, capacity gaps, support mechanisms (upward and downward communication and coordination)
- Impact on attitude and behaviour of public extension service (internalisation of LEA principles)
- Efficiency of Policy-making process (contribution of LEAP Plus to LEA and NAFES Strategy)
- Impact upon regulatory procedures (input supplies, contract farming, pesticide use, market price information)
- Acknowledgement and Political Space for Non-State-Actors (private, civil society)

8.4 Interview Guidelines and Questionnaires

DAFO

Key question	Indicators to be assessed against	Methods
How many farmer groups/persons have been reached?	Disaggregated by wealth, age, gender, ethnicity	Confirm numbers on LEAP Plus tables, compare with district population
How did the selection process did take place?	Usefulness of LEA Basic Tools Importance and value of Principle of Social Inclusiveness Enabling and inhibiting factors being socially inclusive	
How useful are the tools for Market Engagement? How comfortable do you feel in applying them?	RMA: Product Prioritisation Tool 1, Market chain map Tool 2, Seasonal price and supply Tool 3, Market trend Tool 4, Purchase conditions Tool 5 VCAD Contract Farming Guidelines Input Assessment Tools	Ask which tools are available, rank them according to 1. Application at all 2. Usefulness/effectiveness 3. Degree of acquaintance
How are the services responding to farmers' demands for content and quality?	Planning procedures that incorporate farmers' views Integrating feedback of farmers into monitoring and follow up work (SIFT) PAFES strategy to build DAFO staff capacities that are in demand	Training needs - how did you define them and what were the needs of the farmer groups? Action planning and M&E - how farmers are included?
Who provided service to farmer groups and how do you estimate the quality?	Diversity of service providers Frequency of service provided Quality of service provided Role of DAFO within this	Service provider diagram, description of role of DAFO extensionists
What has changed? What will sustain after project ends? What do you wish to leave behind?	Capacities and knowledge of DAFO and farmer groups Attitude and behaviour of farmer group and DAFO Cooperation with other actors	Let them think about the impacts: Think big-be self-reflective-be honest-what is realistic-what is my own capacity-what still needs to be done-what should be skipped
Which benefits for farmers do you see in the district?	Growth in productivity and traded volumes New products/product diversification Growth of value added and profit margins in the chain Distribution of increased value added and profit margins between chain actors Increased competitiveness of value chains Reduced poverty rates, income growth resulting from the innovation process Increased negotiation skills Increase market knowledge (prices, traders, cheaper inputs, etc.)	Ask open question which benefits for farmers

Production Group

Key question	Indicators to be assessed against	Methods
How do you get member of this group? What were your expectations towards being member of the group?	Content of group encouraged by family, friends, .. demand-driven or need-based	All together as warm up: Ask each group member for his/her name and note expectations
What has changed since working together as farmer group?	Positive Changes and why Negative Changes and why No changes and why	Write changes down on flipchart, if somebody repeats what somebody has said before, don't stop him, but make a dot/line at respective item 15 minutes
What are the benefits of this group? What benefits haven't been achieved?	- Income and market engagement - Environmental issues - Production techniques - Labour input - Group/women empowerment	Preference ranking: List on cards and rank it: what benefit was most important; give reasons for why is this benefit most important also say what is less important and ask why. (25 minutes in sub groups – men and women separate....) or poor and rich farmer separate
Who is providing services?	Diversity of service providers Frequency of service provided Quality of service provided Role of DAFO within this	List service providers, if important: big circle, less important small circle, meet frequently close to group, meet rarely farer away, relationships: clear, good, problem, ... various arrows (with women and men separate)

8.5 Cost / budget details

Table 8: Budget supported for LEA plus implementation in Hotspots

Item	Phongsaly	Oudomxay	Houaphanh	Luang Prabang	Xieng Khuang	Total
Districts	1	1	1	2	2	7
Target Villages	7	10	9	18	17	61
Support to PAFES	LAK 55,072,400	LAK 55,912,000	LAK 58,230,000	LAK 111,255,000	LAK 90,703,000	LAK 371,172,400
Support to DAFOs	LAK 99,523,400	LAK 64,833,000	LAK 98,582,000	LAK 190,461,000	LAK 179,002,165	LAK 632,401,565
Sum	LAK 154,595,800	LAK 120,745,000	LAK 156,812,000	LAK 301,716,000	LAK 269,705,165	LAK 1,003,573,965
PAFES in %	36%	46%	37%	37%	34%	37%
Per district (LAK)	154,595,800	120,745,000	156,812,000	150,858,000	134,852,583	143,367,709
Per district and month (LAK)	12,882,983	10,062,083	13,067,667	12,571,500	11,237,715	11,947,309
Per village (LAK)	22,085,114	12,074,500	17,423,556	16,762,000	15,865,010	16,452,032
Per village and month (LAK)	1,051,672	574,976	829,693	798,190	755,477	783,430
Per village and month (US\$)	\$131	\$72	\$104	\$100	\$94	\$98
Per district and month (US\$)	\$19,324	\$15,093	\$19,602	\$18,857	\$16,857	\$17,921

Source: LEAP Finance

8.6 LEA - Stakeholder Matrix: Information, Knowledge, Materials

What kind of support has been received in the past?

	DAFO	PAFES	DAEC
DAFO		1. Support in Follow Up 2. Received new ideas	Economic Calculation Tool, VLA, KBM, VCAD, RMA, EVES, AIM Video, TNA-KISS, SIFT, VES GO, FEF, Various tools (CD), How to organise farmer trainings, How to organise learning groups, Contract Farming guidelines, FO: how to analyse and set up groups, Follow up and advise, Wisdom Bag
PAFES			Received Training on extension system Useful materials on extension system
DAEC	1. Extension guidelines be applied/used? 2. Established Reporting system from district to Province to Centre necessary 3. Evaluation report about lessons learned and problems encountered		

What support is needed in the future?

	DAFO	PAFES	DAEC
DAFO			Study Trip from Province to Province (District extension Unit with Farmer Group Representatives) Technical Advice and new ways to prevent livestock and plant diseases Capacity building of extension workers at district and province in English language and IT Improve Extension System 1. Planting and Raising animals 2. Project management 3. How to write project proposals
PAFES	Full Implementation of a systematic reporting system Keep the district extension function on-going		Need extension material on access to credits Training on materials on market engagement Improve team on extension system 70%
DAEC			

8.7 Field visit itinerary

Date	Overnight	Main Activity
29.09.13	Vientiane	Arrival from Berlin
30.09.13	Vientiane	Meeting at LEAP with Mr. Rakesh Munankami, Team Leader LEAP; Mr. Souvanthong Namvong, Coordinator LEAP
01.10.13	Vientiane	Meetings: Mr. Somxay Sisanonh, Deputy Director DAEC; Ms. Celestine Krösschell, Country Director Helvetas; Ms. Viengxong Chitavong, National Program Officer, SDC; Dr. Liliane Ortega, Deputy Country Director SDC; Ms. Perrine Fournier, Technical Advisor, CCL
02.10.13	Vientiane	Meeting with CETDU Meetings: Ms. Alison Rusinow, Assistant Country Director Program CARE; Mr. Michael Jones, consultant
03.10.13	Vientiane	Finalising Workshop agenda; Dinner meeting with Holger Grages, DGRV, Rio Pals, CORD, Rik Delnoye, IFAD
04.10.13	Vientiane	Preparing Interview Guidelines
05.10.13	Vientiane	No project related activities
06.10.13	Namor	Travel to Oudomxay; Meeting with Mr. Sykham Syphakhoun, Director of Provincial Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives Section, and Ms. Thongphoun, PAEC Extensions staff; Travel to Namor; Visit Village Parknamthong (Lao) with Mr. Leesong, DAFO extension staff
07.10.13	Namor	Discussion with Pig Raising Group in Pakham (Lao Lue); data analysis with team
08.10.13	Oudomxay	Discussion with villagers in village Keawlarn (Hmong); Meeting at DAFO with Mr. Leesong, Mrs. Kambo, Mr. Hundaeng; Travel to Oudomxay
09.10.13	Nambak	Travel to Nambak; Meeting at DAFO with Mr. Maisone, Mr. Sipha; data analysis with team; discussion with poultry raising group in Nammong (Khmu)
10.10.13	Luang Prabang	Discussion with villagers in Phaluang (Hmong); travel to Luang Prabang
11.10.13	Luang Prabang	Meeting with Mrs. Sommone, LWU Luang Prabang (formerly Nambak); Travel to Xiang Khuang
12.10.13	Phonsavan	Discussion with Poultry Raising Group in village Nathong (Lao), Khoun; data analysis with team; workshop preparation dinner meeting with PAFES Xiang Khuang
13.10.13	Phonsavan	Data analysis with team, clustering of findings
14.10.13	Phonsavan	Meeting at DAFO Khoun; discussion with Pig Raising Group in village NaOu (Lao)
15.10.13	Phonsavan	Workshop preparation
16.10.13	Phonsavan	Workshop preparation

Date	Overnight	Main Activity
17.10.13	Phonsavan	Workshop, visit vegetable farmer cooperative in village Hoy (Lao), and Chicken Raising Group in village Phai (Lao)
18.10.13	Phonsavan	Workshop with LEA plus Hotspot participants
19.10.13	Vientiane	Travel from Xiang Khuang to Vientiane
20.10.13	Vientiane	Data analysis; Meeting with Andrea Schroeter, Helvetas, CTA SURAFCO
21.10.13	Vientiane	Data analysis
22.10.13	Vientiane	Data analysis
23.10.13	Vientiane	Presentation at DAEC
24.10.13	Vientiane	Reporting; Travel back to Berlin

8.8 References

- DAEC (2011): Strategy to 2020: A breakthrough in support for small farmers, Vientiane.
- GFRAS (2012): A Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension, by Ian Christoplos, Peta Sandison, Sanne Chipeta, Lindau.
- LEAP (2004): Basic Tools Handbook for Agricultural Extension, Vientiane, by Andrea Schroeter.
- LEAP (2008): Knowledge capitalization: Agriculture and Forestry Development at Kum Ban Village cluster level in Lao PDR, by Joost Foppes.
- LEAP (2009): LEA Full Report on the Findings from the Impact Study, by Juergen Piechotta.
- LEAP (2010): A Field Manual To Rapid Market Assessment, Vientiane.
- LEAP (2011): Smallholder production agreements in the Lao PDR: Qualifying Success, by David Fullbrook.
- LEAP (2012): “Up to Their Necks”, A short and Very Anecdotal Study of Indebtedness in Selected Farming Villages, by Melody Kemp.
- LEAP (2012): Non-State Actors in Agriculture Extension: Farmers Accessing Services in Lao PDR, by Michael Jones, Kheuvanh Phommathath, and Souvanthong Namvong.
- LEAP (2012): Participatory Extension Planning and results Based Monitoring and Evaluation, Vientiane.
- LEAP (2013): Capacity-building and alternative realities: Some observations on the political context of technical assistance in Lao PDR, by Andrew Bartlett.
- LEAP (2013): Learning from the Laos extension for Agriculture Project, by Andrew Bartlett.
- MAF (2010): Agricultural Master Plan 2011 to 2015, Final Draft, Vientiane.
- MAF (2010): Strategy for Agricultural Development 2011 to 2020, Final Draft, Vientiane.
- World Bank (2010): Strengthening Agricultural Extension and Advisory Systems: Procedures for Assessing, Transforming, and Evaluating Extension Systems, Agriculture and Rural Development Discussion Paper 45, by Burton E. Swanson and Riikka Rajalahti, Washington.
- SADU (2012): Value chain development in the context of the Lao PDR: Lessons learnt and recommendations for future support. Smallholder Agricultural-Market Development in the Uplands (SADU III Project), End of project workshop summary, 5th to 6th July 2012, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR.

8.9 Abbreviations

ABAS	Agribusiness Advisory Services
ABTF	Agribusiness Task Force
ACCU	Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions
AIM	Agriculture Information management
APB	Agricultural Promotion Bank
DAEC	Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
EVES	Expansion of Village Extension System
FEF	Farmer Exchange with Farmers
GES	Government Extension Service
LEA Basic	Lao Extension Approach with planning, activity selection, and monitoring and evaluation tools
LEA plus	Lao Extension Approach including new tools for market engagement, farmer organization, and input assessment
LWU	Lao Women's Union
NPA	Non-Profit-Association
PAFES	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service
RMA	Rapid Market Assessment
SADU	Smallholder Agricultural-Market Development in the Uplands
SAEDA	Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Development Association
SIFT	Success, Implementation, Failure, Training Needs
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
VCAD	Value Chain Analysis and Development
VES	Village Extension Service
VLA	Village Livelihood Assessment

For more information, please contact

Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP)

Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC)

P O Box 9159, Hoay Njang

Vientiane

Tel: + 856 21 740253

Email: leap4@laoex.org, cetdu@laoex.org