Summary of activities to July 2009

We began 2009 with a series of 3 provincial Extension Training workshops in January and February (see below). The second meeting of the EASLP Project Steering Committee was held on February 4th at NAFES, Vientiane. Chaired by Mr Somxay Sisanoh, the meeting included presentations by project leaders Dr Joanne Millar and Mr Boualy Sendara on the progress of the project, the impacts of farmer cross visits and the 2009 extension training workshops for staff. Research assistant Neuakhom Theppanid presented Farmer Case Studies, and results of staff competency assessments and training needs. Research officer Anne Stelling gave findings from development alliance evaluation of the Legumes for Pigs Project. Viengxay Photakoun presented his research into the evaluation of capacity building methods for extension staff.

As a result of the meeting, a revised EASLP Research Strategy and Plan for 2009 was developed. The plan includes research into tailoring extension methods to the needs of different ethnic groups, the effectiveness of different types of Case Studies for farmers and staff, and development of extension guidelines. Work is well underway on this research. Project staff have undertaken a literature review of the cultural needs of different ethnic groups and developed draft extension guidelines from these findings. District staff have produced a series of farmer Case Studies to be tested in the field. Draft guidelines for planning Cross Visits and Case Studies have been written District staff continue to follow up cross visit farmers.

In the second half of the year, we will introduce the guidelines to LDP staff and mentor them in how to work with different ethnic groups. We will also train key staff in how to develop digital stories and test them in the field along with regular case studies. The capacity building evaluation results will be introduced to NAFES, NAFRI and DLF with the aim of adding value to livestock extension approaches. We will continue to monitor farmer progress in terms of extension impact.

Extension training workshops

Three two-day workshops were held in Luang Prabang, Luang Nam Tha and Huaphan for a total of 54 new LDP extension staff. The aim was to build the knowledge and skills of new district staff in extension theory and practice, based on participatory approaches to livestock improvement.

The program for the first day included training in participatory extension and how to do extension activities, understanding how farmers learn and their different learning styles, introducing technology to farmers, and producing and evaluating case studies. On the second day training focused on group facilitation, working with rural communities, and planning annual extension programs. Each workshop closed with feedback on how the workshop was run and the future training needs of staff.

Assessment of staff competencies

EASLP mentor staff (Neuakhom Theppanid, Viengsuk Lorbiayao and Thongkham Vongpralath) visited 24 old LDP staff in Viengmay, Viengthong, Viengphouka, Phaoudom, Phonexai and Koune districts to assess their competencies in a range of livestock knowledge and skill areas.

Staff were asked to rate their competence in each area 1 to 5. The ratings were then averaged to show high, medium and low training needs.
Across all districts, the assessments showed a need for technical training in the areas of forage establishment and management – particularly harvest and post-harvest, livestock management and marketing, and extension training in the areas of facilitation, adult learning, extension materials, program planning and evaluation.

In general, staff rated their capacity for problem solving as low, especially in the areas of establishing forage varieties, forage management practices, livestock management practices and livestock marketing.

The assessment resulted in recommendations for training in these areas to improve staff’s technical skill and ability to create impacts with farmers. Training will also improve staff confidence in their ability to solve problems as they arise.

**Update: Cross visit farmers**

Follow up data from the farmers who attended 2007 and 2008 cross visits shows that cattle and buffalo numbers have steadily increased. Goat and pig numbers are more volatile due to shorter fattening periods and high turnover. Poultry numbers have increased but are more susceptible to disease losses especially in the cold dry season. Steady increases in forage areas indicates growing farmer confidence with using grasses and stylo for fattening livestock since attending the cross visits.

**Farmer case studies**

Twenty four livestock extension staff have now been trained in how to write farmer case studies using interviews, digital photos and a document template.

Sixteen farmer case studies have been developed featuring 10 men and 6 women farmers from different ethnic backgrounds including Hmong, Khamu, Lamaid, Thaideng, and Lao Loum. These farmers are using fodder and improved management techniques for different livestock including cattle, buffalo and pigs. Their families have all benefited from the extra income they have been able to generate and the time they save using the new technologies.

The case studies will be used as an extension tool within districts to create further awareness of the potential for increasing livestock productivity. They can be shown to farmers and other extension staff, and provide a good introduction to the methods used and the benefits they bring. [copies available from contacts at end of newsletter]
Case study farmer Mr Yongnegthor, a Hmong farmer from Sanekhing village, Khoun district, fattening cattle.

Case Studies: Feedback from Extension Staff

DAFO and PAFO staff from the provinces of Bokoe, Huaphan, Luang Namtha, Luangphabang and Xiengkhuan have been asked for feedback regarding making and using farmer Case Studies.

Staff reported that they had learnt a lot from interviewing farmers for the case studies. They had a better understanding of the family economy, the details of the techniques the farmers are using, measuring the inputs and outputs, the differences in production systems and the quality of animals before and after using backyard pastures, and what the benefits are for the farmers and their families.

In the past they had no way of explaining these details to other farmers. Now they can use the Case Studies to show farmers to introduce the new technologies and discuss the methods and advantages.

Regarding the presentation of Case Studies, staff have requested video, DVDs and posters as well as the leaflet form. They feel that video or DVD would be very useful in showing specific techniques in a way that all farmers can understand.

Extension approaches for Hmong and Khamu farmers

Understanding cultural differences is essential for extension officers to be effective when working with different ethnic groups. The EASLP project has recently developed a list of factors designed to help extension officers working with Lao Hmong and Khamu farmers.

Our research found important factors common to both Khamu and Hmong people, such as the need to work in their languages rather than in Lao language, to use visual extension materials and hands-on training techniques, to always be respectful and polite and maintain a professional approach.

For both ethnic groups, women are responsible for the smaller livestock (goats, pigs, poultry) and share in agricultural labour. This means that women need to be trained in new extension technologies relating to these livestock.

Both Khamu and Hmong maintain traditional gender roles in everyday living. This means that the village elders are male and the eldest male relative is responsible for the family. Thus extension officers must work with the men to gain their confidence and approval in order to be able to train the women. Such approaches as using female extension officers for training women, and having women only cross visits will assist this aim.

Khamu and Hmong belief systems remain strong and underpin many everyday decisions and activities. This means, for example, that the death of livestock may be attributed to evil spirits rather than disease or management practices. Extension officers should not try to deny these beliefs but find ways to work with them so that good practices such as vaccination and de-worming are accepted into the belief system.

These factors and others are included in the new EASLP Guidelines for producing Farmer Case Studies and planning Farmer Cross Visits, and a detailed paper for each ethnic group is available from the contacts at the end of this newsletter.
Update: Evaluation of Capacity Building for Livestock Extension

Following Mr Photakoun’s second field research of capacity building methods for livestock extension staff, a clearer picture has emerged of the value of the methods used, how best they may be combined, and how they may be improved.

Capacity building methods of greatest value to staff included workshop training, on the job learning, staff meetings, mentoring and field trips such as cross visits and study tours. Less common were farmer field schools, village learning activities, the internet and formal study.

Factors influencing effectiveness of capacity building include individual staff motivation; role of DAFO managers in supporting staff; opportunities for formal study; lack of government funding and having good examples in the field. Greater recognition and support for district managers is needed to enable them to build teamwork, motivate and mentor staff, and provide opportunities for ongoing capacity building. Capacity building methods can be strengthened by working in teams of different ages, partnering with non-government organisations and providing further study opportunities. Mr Photakoun’s research and recommendations will be published in full towards the end of this year.

Recent Project Publications

Stelling A, Millar J, Phengsavanh P and Stur W 2009, Establishing Learning Alliances for Extension: Key Learnings from Laos. Paper to be presented at the APEN conference in November
Millar J 2009, Adapting extension approaches to cultural environments in South East Asia: experiences from Laos and Indonesia, Paper to be presented at the APEN conference in November

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