

“ Extension can be defined as a system of communication that is designed to affect the knowledge of rural people in a manner that supports the achievement of development policies. ”



QUICK FACTS

Location:
All provinces; Lao PDR

Project Start:
Phase I in 2001

Current Phase:
Phase IV 2008-2012

Budget for Current Phase:
5 Million Swiss Francs

Main partners:
-Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF)
-National Agriculture & Forestry Extension Service (NAFES)
- HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Laos
-Development projects & local organizations.

Major Donor:
Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC)

Contact:
+ (856-21) 740 253
leap4@laoex.org
www.laoex.org

helvetas.laos@gmail.com
www.helvetas-laos.org

THE PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of agricultural extension is often seen as ‘technology transfer’ or, more broadly, to provide technical training and advice to farmers.

The Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) is discovering that helping farmers to make new connections may be just as important as new technology. Emerging from years of isolation, these farmers are benefiting from connections with local government, with research and education institutions, with markets and sources of credit, with civil society and the media, and - above all else – with other farmers. Supported by LEAP, extension workers who previous saw themselves as ‘solution givers’ are now playing important roles as process helpers and resource linkers.



“Laos Extension for Agriculture Project”

“ The objective of the LEAP project is to contribute to the development of a decentralized, participatory, pluralistic, & sustainable agricultural extension system that is capable of benefiting poorer households and communities, and reaches male & female farmers equally. ”



WORKING AREA

The Lao Extension Approach (LEA) is a framework for implementing extension activities in Lao PDR that was endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 2005. The LEA has a single inclusive vision which is expressed in the phrase “Extension for Everyone”. It is not always easy to implement this vision, but continuous efforts are being made to turn slogan into reality.

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

As a result of these efforts, the involvement of women, ethnic minorities, and poorer households in extension activities is gradually increasing.

There is still a long way to go, but the vision of “extension for everyone” remains strong.



THE CONTEXT

In almost every country of the world there are organizations carrying out activities that can be called ‘agricultural extension’.

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

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

THE PROJECT

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 in Laos, a Swiss NGO.

The project spans 4 phases, with Phase I beginning in 2001, and Phase IV ending in 2012. In Phase IV, LEAP will give more attention to 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”.

ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

- The LEA has been adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry as the **official extension approach for the Lao PDR**
- It has been introduced across the country, in **all 18 provinces**, and adopted by a number of other projects, with the result that approximately **20,000 farmers** have been reached, contributing to **significant production increases in value and quantity** (over 80% for rice) helping to alleviate poverty & combat food insecurity.
- Various initiatives promoting gender equality, including supporting in the **Lao PDR a first National Conference on Women in Agriculture**, and the development & adoption of a National Code of Conduct on Women in Agriculture by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Innovative and successful **decentralized participatory village development planning** project implemented with inter-cooperation between farmers, local government agencies and local civil society
- **Farmer to farmer extension** activities being implemented are recognized and are being commissioned by other projects for training hire in several districts
- Hundreds of **extension tools, media and materials in Lao language** produced and disseminated across the country to all district and provincial agricultural & forestry extension offices, as well farmers and relevant stakeholders.
- **Access to information** initiatives including nationwide SMS news service, online discussion groups & library repositories, ICT repositories, and call center pilot activities focusing on agriculture and development are supported.