

“ 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 V 2012-2014

Budget for Current Phase:
1.3 Million Swiss Francs

Main partners:
-Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF)
-Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC)
- HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
- Select rice millers
-Development projects & local organizations.

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

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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.



LEAP



“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 Laos Extension Approach (LEA) is a framework for implementing agriculture 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 and demand driven.

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.

MAF strategic direction of the sector is to ensure successful and gradual transition from subsistence into commercial smallholder production. The aim is to contribute to reduce rural poverty by creating employment opportunities, transfer modern technologies to increase production, channel agriculture production inputs and finance, and facilitate linkages to regional and global value chains

THE PROJECT

The Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC), with technical assistance from HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

The project spans 5 phases, with Phase I beginning in 2001, and Phase V ending in early 2014. 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 MAF as the **official extension approach for the Lao PDR** and supported **development of Agriculture Extension Strategy**.
- It has been introduced across the country, in **all 18 provinces**, and adopted by a number of other projects, with the result that more than **20,000 farmers** have been reached, contributing to **significant production increases in value and quantity** (over 80% for rice) helping to alleviate poverty & ensuring 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 extension planning** and result based M&E implemented in collaboration with farmers organizations, local government agencies, private sector and local civil society
- **Improve bargaining power** of farmers by organizing farmers in more than 300 self-directed farmers organizations, community learning centers and community managed facilities. Facilitate learning, enabling fairer engagement with markets and farmer to farmer extension. **Organised in the Lao PDR, a first Farmers’ Organisation Conference** and produced **Farmers’ Statement**.
- Hundreds of **extension tools, media and materials in Lao and local languages** 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 & repositories, ICT programs, and call center pilot activities focusing on agriculture and development are supported.
- **Influenced policies** by organising studies critically analysing issues for the **viability of smallholder farmers** in its role of as the Secretariat of the **Sub Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness (SWGAB)**.