

“... Sustainable rural development must be closely linked to the empowerment of farming families. If rural women and men are to become change agents rather than a target audience, they need to have more opportunities to make decisions for themselves. The twin principles of ‘voice and choice’ must be at the heart of any serious effort to promote demand-driven and pluralistic service provision ”



QUICK FACTS

Location:
National, with a focus on Oudomxay and Xieng Khuang

Project Start:
December 2014

Current Phase:
Phase 1: 2014 -2017

Budget for Current Phase:
Approx. 5 M Swiss Francs

Main partners:

- * Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC)
- * Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF)
- * Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- * SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation)
- * Lao Farmer Network
- * Selected Non-Profit Associations

Major Donor:

- Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC)

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THE PERSPECTIVES

Support for farmer organisations is a major feature of LURAS, as a means for improving collective action and the bargaining power of smallholders.

Cooperation is not new to rural people in Laos. As part of traditional subsistence farming, community members have often worked together. But they became wary of joining formal groups after the experiments with collectivization in the early years of the Lao PDR. In recent years, however, as small farmers have shifted towards growing cash crops, they have begun to recognise the benefits of cooperating in marketing their produce. Traders also benefit from dealing with groups rather than individuals. As a result, there are now hundreds of groups involved in contract farming or set up under various development projects. A smaller number of farmer associations have started to provide a range of services for their members and train other farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has adopted the principle that these organisations should have voluntary membership and self-determined management, meaning that external authorities will respect the right of members to devise their own rules, set their own goals and monitor their own performance.



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LURAS



“Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service ”

“ Our vision is a rural society in which the rights and well-being of small farmers has been secured; a society where work is both dignified and healthy, and which yields a fair and sufficient return; a society where women and men of all ethnic groups have secure access to productive resources and equal access to the services they need; a society that allows farming families to make informed choices and work together in order to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. ”



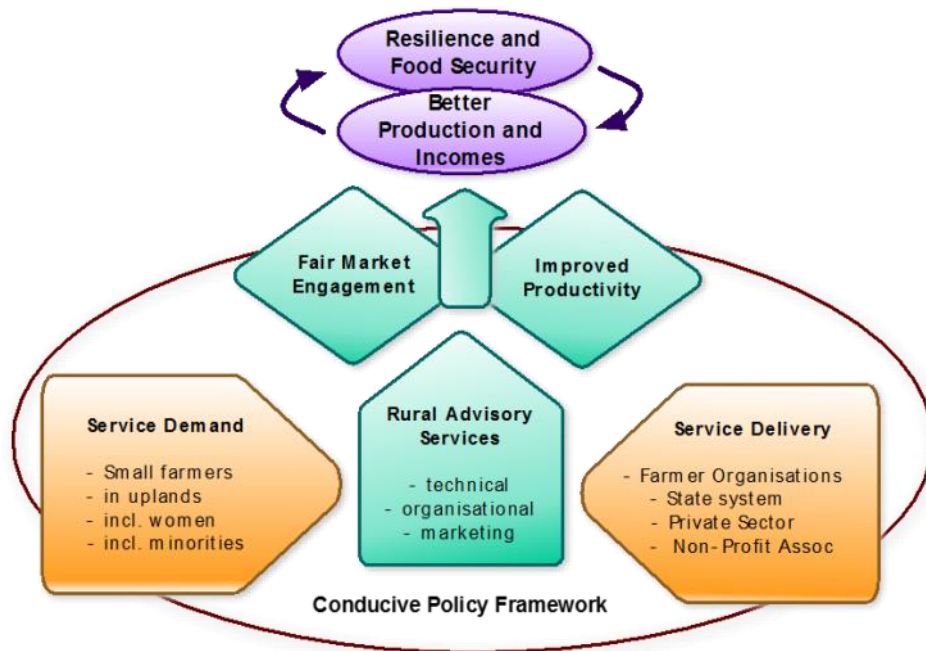
HOW LURAS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Service Demand: Through farmer-to-farmer learning, collective action and improved bargaining power, Farmer Organisations will be able to demand better services and facilitate fairer market engagement for their members.

Service Delivery: Through improved networking, human resource development and the adoption of accountability and incentive mechanisms, a range of State and Non- State Actors will deliver services that are more responsive to the demands of small farmers, and more relevant to market opportunities.

Conducive Policy Framework: Through capitalisation of experience, lesson learning, information-sharing and enhanced dialogue, policy makers and planners at all levels will make decisions that are favourable to the livelihoods of small farmers.

As a result of all of the above, small farmers in the uplands, including women and members of ethnic minorities, will receive services that enable them to improve their productivity, food security and incomes.



THE CONTEXT

Laos is a nation of smallholder farmers with over 75% of the workforce employed in the agriculture sector. The on-going transformation of the rural economy has created both winners and losers, while bringing smallholders into contact with a much wider range of service providers.

In light of these trends, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has recognized that the role of government extension workers must change, and that greater pluralism in service provision is needed. The private sector is now playing a much greater role in providing farmers with information, inputs and market access, while farmer organisations and non-profit associations are also emerging as potential service providers.

THE PROJECT

LURAS is implemented through a partnership between the Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC), Helvetas and SNV.

LURAS is a successor to a number of earlier projects. Between 2001 and 2014, DAEC and Helvetas were partners in implementing the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP), which was improving capacity of the government to deliver better services to farmers across the country.

LURAS also builds on the experience of 'Smallholder Agricultural Market Development in the Uplands (SADU)', and 'Enhancing Milled Rice Production Project (EMRIP)'. This last project involved collaboration between HELVETAS and SNV, the two organisations that are now providing technical assistance to LURAS.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

Outcome 1: Upland small farmers with better productivity and incomes

- Sustaining past RAS success during project start-up
- Scaling up service provision by Farmer Organisations
- Scaling up service delivery to women and disadvantaged groups

Outcome 2: Self-reliant farmer organisations (FOs)

- FOs that expedite market engagement for small upland farmers
- Good governance norms established by and for FOs
- Networking among FOs is taking place, incl. peer learning
- The voice and bargaining power of small farmers has been raised

Outcome 3: Demand driven inclusive services from State and Non-State actors

- DAEC has the capacity to perform mandated roles re FOs and agribusiness
- RAS innovations that improve accountability have been tested
- Capacity for promoting women in RAS has been improved
- Sustainable and fair service delivery by private sector

Outcome 4: Policy framework is conducive to small holders

- Policy makers and RAS managers have access to needed information
- Platform for policy dialogue exists, incl. State, private sector and CSOs
- Agribusiness code of practice has been developed