



Starting the agro-ecological transition among Hmong farmers in Nong Het, Xieng Khouang

Laut Lee and Nongnut Foppes

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Introducing ourselves



Nongnut Foppes

- Founder of Xao Ban Group
- Studied in Thailand, Netherlands
- Thai national, living in Laos for 25 years, mother of 2 daughters
- Expert on dairy production and local food processing



Laut Lee

- Independent farmer/entrepreneur
- Authentic Lao farming tourism experiences (formerly with Living Land)
- Partnership with Xao Ban
- Lao National, Hmong ethnic, father of three daughters and one son



Introducing the Xao Ban Group



Enterprise Profile

- Registered since 2004
- Producing yogurt 5000 liter/month
- Also producing: fruit juices, jams, bread spreads
- Providing employment for 25 staff
- Buying ingredients from over 50 local households (inclusive business)



Enterprise Philosophy

- Green Business
 - Safe and clean production
 - Quality Control Systems
- Social Enterprise
 - Employing marginalized people
 - Social fund helping rural communities
- Inclusive Business
 - Buying from local suppliers
 - Strengthening their standards





The farmers: Hmong in Nonghet, Xiengkhouang

Strengths

- Hmong culture values hard work, thrift, community collaboration
- Transition from very poor to wealthy within 10 years through maize farming
- More wealth has created better living conditions (electricity, mobile phones, health, sanitation)
- People are eager to try new out new livelihood options





The farmers: Hmong in Nonghet, Xiengkhouang

Challenges

- ▶ Malnutrition remains widespread among children
- ▶ Indoor pollution from wood ovens threatens women
- ▶ Girls remain uneducated
- ▶ No employment options for young people, depression





The landscape

- ▶ Maize cultivation dominates the landscape
- ▶ Not sustainable on the long term
 - ▶ Chemical pollution from herbicides
 - ▶ Soil fertility losses
 - ▶ Erosion
- ▶ Forests and forest products becoming less available
 - ▶ Conversion to maize fields
 - ▶ Depletion of wild fruits
- ▶ High altitude (1,000-1,200 m) good for high value temperate fruits





The market

- Maize dominates the economy
 - Easy to grow, sell
 - Price is coming down
 - Production not sustainable
- Maize buyers come to the village
- Villagers have difficulty to access value chains for other products
 - Remote location, bad road
 - No connections to traders and transporter





The agro-ecological transition

1. Moving from unsustainable agriculture to sustainable horticulture
2. Producing temperate fruits and oil seeds for niche markets
3. Using local products for better nutrition
4. Restoring/protecting forests





Products with niche market potential

Temperate fruits

- ▶ Local cultivated fruits: local pears, plums, peaches and apricots
- ▶ Local wild fruits
- ▶ Exotic fruits: strawberries

Oil Plants:

- ▶ Sesame
- ▶ Perilla
- ▶ Sasha Inchi



Local wild fruits:

- ▶ *Chie Ta Dai*, wild variety of "Loquat" *Eriobotrya* sp.
- ▶ Wild berries
- ▶ Mushrooms
- ▶ Chestnuts





Xao Ban trust building approach

- ▶ Getting to know each other through partnerships with aid projects: Helvetas-UDIN, TABI
- ▶ Building trust by visiting farmers, buying their products, discussing their plans in their own language
- ▶ Setting up a local road-side collection unit
- ▶ Employing young Hmong people
- ▶ Partnering with the Xieng Khouang Vocational Training School
 - ▶ to build capacity for new crops (strawberries)
 - ▶ To disseminate good agricultural practices (organic)





Outlook for the future

- ▶ Provide a stable income to horticultural producers by buying their products
- ▶ Develop new products for urban markets (jams, dried fruits and mushrooms)
- ▶ Develop nutritious foods for local markets (healthy snacks, micro-packaging)
- ▶ Introduce smoke-free stoves to improve indoor environment
- ▶ Develop culinary tourism:
 - ▶ Homestay, collecting, cooking and tasting wild foods with villagers, sharing good life
 - ▶ Experience the landscape, cherry blossom season, bicycle tours





THANK YOU!