

Green Extension: the challenge of ownership and accountability



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ບໍລິການ-ສົ່ງເສີມກະສິກໍາຮອບດ້ານ ບສກຮ
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Let's start with some history

- ◉ Organic fertilizers were being promoted by Lao experts working with Quaker Services Laos (QSL) in the **1980's**.
- ◉ By **1991** a number of NGOs established the Sustainable Agriculture Forum (SAF).
- ◉ In **1992**, UNDP/FAO start Farmer Irrigated Agriculture Training project (FIAT), which trained more than 6,000 farmers and produced 10 extension manuals
- ◉ **1993** saw the first iteration of a Lao Uplands Conference. The meeting at Nabong produced more than 20 papers, incl “Extension Experiences for Introduction of a System for Sustainable Upland Agriculture”
- ◉ In **1996** Laos joined the FAO Regional Programme for IPM, which introduced the Farmer Field School approach.
- ◉ **2001** was another milestone: first trials of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), and establishment of the National Agro- Ecology Programme (PRONAE) to promote Conservation Agriculture (CA).

Sustainable development?

- ⊙ By 2002 – **15 years ago** - MAF and the development partners had already introduced organic agriculture, SRI, IPM, CA etc.
- ⊙ We had already trained trainers, produced extension manuals, held conferences and created networks.
- ⊙ The practitioners in XK concluded that they know what to do.
- ⊙ It is reasonable to ask: do we still need more extension projects? More research? More training? More policy briefs?
- ⊙ What is clear, however, is that *something* is needed
- ⊙ Despite 30 years of capacity-building, the problem of the ‘toxic landscape’ has got worse in recent years
- ⊙ This raises the question: are we going about this in the right way?

The problem with *'my project'*

- ⊙ Development projects have undoubtedly helped build extension capacity in Laos, but they have also hindered the establishment of an extension system that delivers a reliable and regular service to farmers.
- ⊙ Some of the problems with project-driven agricultural development:
 - My Farmers: Fragmented and uneven implementation; gaps and duplication; cherry-picking; lots of pilots which fail to reach critical mass
 - My Approach: Donor and NGOs obfuscation; branded implementation; constantly reinventing terminology and methodology; limited local ownership
 - My Schedule: short projects focus on delivery, rather than an iterative approach that addresses systemic problems; a lot of time spent on 'inception'; staff turnover
 - My Budget: Start-stop funding; delivery mechanisms that align with existing hierarchies and patronage networks; it's a business... jobs, contracts, assets
 - My Success: Upward accountability; hyping the outcomes and limited self-criticism; weak coordination during planning and very little collaboration in implementation.

Who owns what?



Who works for whom?

- ⊙ Lack of ownership is often used as an explanation for lack of success:
 - Farmers lack ownership of the groups they joined (set up by projects)
 - PAFO/ DAFO staff lack ownership of the methods they use (introduced by projects)
 - National staff lack ownership of the strategies they implement (written by projects)
- ⊙ But ownership goes together with accountability. Are farmers working for the Government or *vice versa*? Are field staff supporting projects or *vice versa*?
- ⊙ For decades extension has been criticized for having a top-down approach, but this is intrinsic to the design of most development projects.
- ⊙ Despite the widespread use of participatory approaches, projects are still based on an expectation of behavioral change that complies with what had been decided at a higher level (as stated in a logframe, policy, manual etc.)

Surely we can do better!

- ⊙ I'm hoping the participants of the conference will have ideas on how we can do a better job of promoting sustainable agriculture.
- ⊙ One alternative to project-driven development is the **program-based approach** (PBA). Experience in Laos has not been great, maybe because so-called 'programs' have actually been monster projects.
- ⊙ Laos also has experience with the development of **farmer networks** and farmer-to-farmer learning. Is this an avenue for scaling-up green extension? Could farmers provide services to each other? Would the withdrawal of project support help to strengthen ownership or bring an end to F2F activity?
- ⊙ In other countries, there has been experiments with **voucher schemes** that allow farmers to buy services, thereby changing the direction of accountability. A further step in this direction would be **direct cash transfers**, although it's not clear how this could help farmers make an agro-ecological transition.
- ⊙ And then we have the **private sector**. What role can they play? Do companies simply want to sell inputs and buy produce, or can they do more to support the development of farming systems that are productive, healthy and fair?

Looking for big ideas

For the remainder of this session:

- ⊙ Get in groups of three and discuss any of the following issues for 15 minutes:
 - How can we maintain green extension services after projects are completed?
 - Are there any alternatives to projects that should be given more attention in upland agriculture?
 - What would encourage local authorities to prioritise sustainable agriculture, and allocate the necessary resources?
- ⊙ Write down one big idea on a card, in English or Lao.
- ⊙ Cards will be collected. Selected cards are read out in the plenary.
- ⊙ All cards will be posted on a board. Participants have the chance to rate the big ideas during lunch.



Thank you