Implementing Green Extension: the experience of DTEAP and LURAS

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Partners for Green Extension

- Extension services are the responsibility of the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP). Formerly DAEC and NAFES.

- The Swiss Government (SDC) has supported the development of extension services in Laos since 2001 with two projects:
  - Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) 2001-2014
  - Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) 2015 - ongoing
Rationale for GE

Four reasons why DTEAP is implementing **Green Extension** with the support of LURAS:

1. Government Policy for Agriculture Sector
2. Negative impacts of some farming practices
3. Evidence from success cases
4. International trends in extension
1. Government Policy

“Developing clean, safe and sustainable agriculture”
2. Negative impacts

Pesticide Briefing Note

“Almost everyone is exposed. Recent blood tests of nearly 1,000 school children, farmers and consumers showed that few – only 4% - showed no sign of contamination”
3. Success cases

**Organic Markets**
There is growing awareness among consumers in Laos of the issue of food safety. This is creating more demand for organic vegetables and fruits. Farmer markets have been launched in a number of provinces.
4. International trends

**New Extensionist**
“need new capacities to respond to the new challenges such as declining water availability, increasing soil degradation, and changing and uncertain climate and markets”
LURAS approach to GE

- The general principles of **Green Extension** must be adapted to the needs of different groups of farmers, and match the objectives and priorities of different projects.

- The LURAS approach to GE has been described as “Community-Led Extension and Action Research” (CLEAR)
Let’s be CLEAR!

- **Community Led:** Local people contribute to the planning and management of activities
- **Extension:** A service that helps rural people acquire the knowledge and skills
- **Action Research:** People work together to collect data, analyse their options and make decisions about issues that affect their lives
CLEAR purpose

- Farmers learn most of what they know from other farmers.
- In Laos there is a long tradition of sharing: labour, seeds, food, knowledge.
- CLEAR brings together traditional wisdom and modern science, making commercial farming less risky, more profitable and more sustainable.
CLEAR activities

- Farmer-to farmer learning (F2F)
- Community based NRM
- Participatory media

- Community managed facilities
- Eco-schools
- Farmer networking
Focus on F2F

Some of the F2F activities in Phase I of LURAS:
1. Tea processing exchange
2. Coffee production skills development
3. Rice seed producer groups
4. Fodder and cattle raising exchange
5. Women Weaving groups
6. Community Irrigation management exchange
Agroforestry tea F2F

- Conducted need assessment with tea producer groups of Phousan mountain area facilitated by PAFO & DAFO. Result show that priorities for extension are:
  1. plantation management (e.g. pruning)
  2. processing quality
  3. market opportunities
- Farmer representatives of 4 groups from Phousan area had study visits to farmer groups in PHL and OUD in March 2017
- PAFO/DAFO Pek district facilitated F2F follow-up training at village level to share the lesson from the study visits
Farmers from Phousan area in Xieng Khouang visited Phonsaly and Oudomxay to learn new techniques.
Focus on tea F2F (continued)

- Knowledge applied by farmers after they return

- Changes in processing facilities (paid by farmers) led to improvements in quality and better market opportunities
Focus on tea F2F (continued)

- Women farmers have become trainers for Phousan tea!
Agroforestry coffee F2F

- Need assessment with coffee producer groups of Keosaeth village cluster in Khoun district facilitated by PAFO & DAFO. Results showed similar extension priorities as for tea:
  1. plantation management, eg soil fertility
  2. processing quality
  3. market linkages
- Farmer representatives of 5 groups from Keosaeth cluster visits CPC in Pakse in October 2017
- PAFO/DAFO Khoun with back-stopping from LURAS facilitated F2F training at village level to share the lessons from the study visit
Coffee F2F (continued)

- Keosaeth farmers stayed with CPC farmers in Champasack
Coffee F2F (continued)

- Knowledge applied by farmers after they return
Coffee improvements

- Existing coffee gardens have been improved: pruning, soil fertility, shade management etc.
- Nurseries have been established to expand production to more than 40 villages
- Processing centre has been constructed and is now managed by farmers
- Purchasing contract has been negotiated with private sector, giving organic and social premiums to producers
- Farmers have started their own research to help them identify further ways to improve yield
- Keosaeth farmers are training other farmers in XK
Lessons learned about F2F

- F2F exchanges and visits are effective when well targeted and answering practical issues
- F2F require good facilitation process:
  - Needs assessment before the exchanges
  - Careful selection of participants
  - Good communication with host organisations and trainers
  - Follow-up meetings in the community
  - Integrate with other CLEAR activities, eg. community led
- Without affirmative action, women may not be selected for F2F activities outside their community. But the cases of tea and coffee in Xieng Khouang show that it is possible for them to participate... and become expert farmers!
Challenges for F2F

- Until now, the cost of these activities depends on projects.
- In future, it is hoped that farmer organizations will play an important role in organising F2F activities, using their own resources.
- Combining F2F with action research will improve the local relevance of the learning process, but this requires good facilitation. LURAS has produced guidelines for helping farmers conduct agro-ecological experiments, but are field staff willing to become ‘new extensionists’?
Conclusions

- In Phase I of LURAS, the CLEAR approach to Green Extension focused on F2F activities. This has produced immediate practical benefits to the farmers involved.
- The project team is also learning. Our evaluation shows that to achieve a significant impact, GE must concentrate on priority issues and take a systems approach rather than supporting too many piecemeal activities.
- A systems approach to GE should combine F2F with action research and land use planning, and these methods should address technical, organisational and marketing issues.
Thank You!