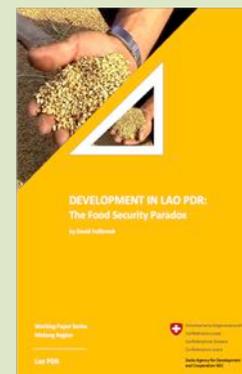
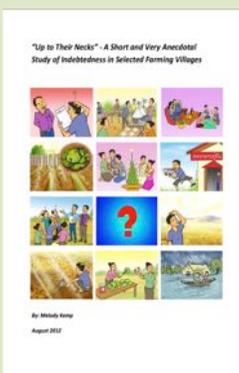
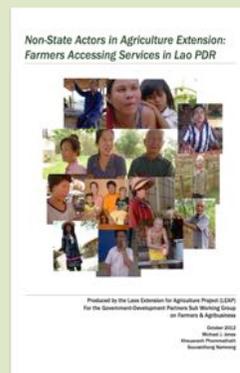


10 Years of Supporting Policy Dialogue for Farmers and Agribusiness

Somxay Sisanonh, Dep DG, DAEC
SSWG-FAB meeting,
13 May 2016



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Delegates of the conference agreed to rank identified issues and the top 5 priority issues are:

1. Policy for low interest loan for reasonable period (point No. 5)
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3. Learning new production techniques (point No. 9)
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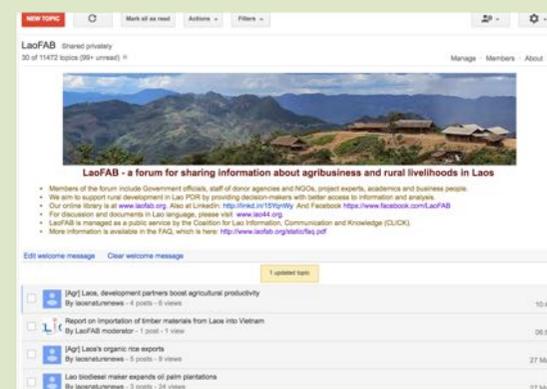
Farmers' Statement

A workshop of Farmer's Organization engaged in commercial agriculture production in Northern Laos was organized by Sub Sector Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness (SSWGAB). The objectives of the workshop were to share lessons and experiences, establish a network amongst FO and identify key issues as faced by the FO on commercial agriculture production. Above statement is the output of the workshop.

Electronic file of the statement is available @ www.lao44.org and www.laofab.org

Farmer's Conference on Commercial Agriculture

19-20 June 2016, Luangnamtha, Lao PDR



Overview



- ⊙ Introduction to the Working Group
- ⊙ Completed Studies
- ⊙ Information Services
- ⊙ Capacity Building for Advisory Services
- ⊙ The emergence of Lao Farmer Network
- ⊙ Outcomes for Different Stakeholders
- ⊙ Concluding Remarks



Origins



- The creation of a Sub-Working Group on Agribusiness (SWGAB) was proposed at the Agriculture Sector WG meeting in February 2006.
- NAFES and SDC agreed to Co-Chair the new group and the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) was appointed as Secretariat
- Inaugural meeting of SWGAB was held on 24th May 2006, attended by NAFES, SDC, MOIC, NERI, ADB and GTZ
- Since 2007, the group has organised at least two meetings per year.



Objectives



- ⦿ The original ToR stated that the SWGAB would “*oversee a capitalization process in order to synthesise the lessons that have been learned in recent years regarding agribusiness development in Lao PDR*”.
- ⦿ At the inaugural meeting, the members of the group agreed to focus attention on the interests and needs of smallholders.
- ⦿ The ToR was renewed in 2015. The group is now known as the Sub-Sector Working Group for Farmers and Agribusiness (SSWG-FAB)
- ⦿ The purpose is unchanged, ie. to identify lessons regarding agribusiness development and smallholder services.
- ⦿ The latest ToR states: *Based on these lessons, the SWGAB will identify alternatives and opportunities for promoting the development of agribusiness in a way that will empower smallholders, including policy options and capacity-building priorities.*



Completed studies



- In the past ten years, the Secretariat of the Working Group has commissioned and disseminated the results of 17 policy studies:
 - 2006 – Agribusiness literature review and prioritization of topics for further study
 - 2007 – Contract Farming in Lao PDR: Cases and Questions
 - 2008 - Agriculture and forestry service delivery at the village cluster (kumban) level
 - 2009 – Aid effectiveness in agricultural extension
 - 2009 – Development in Lao PDR: The Food Security Paradox
 - 2009 – Input Chains: Case Studies from Oudomxay and Attapeu Provinces
 - 2010 – Farmer Bargaining Power in the Lao PDR: Possibilities and Pitfalls
 - 2010 – Farmer’s Voices



Information services



- Two online discussion groups have been maintained by the Secretariat of the Working Group: LaoFAB (English language) was launched in Nov 2006; LaoLink (in Lao language) was launched in Mar 2007.
- The two platforms have a combined membership of more than 5,000 people. Approximately 30,000 messages have been posted in the past 10 years.
- Two digital libraries have also been established. The LaoFAB repository contains more than 2,500 documents (in English) on agriculture, rural development and natural resource management, including training manuals, value chain studies, academic papers and presentations.
- Lao44 and holds the world's largest online collection of development-related materials in the Lao language, with more than **** documents, and more than 300 videos.



Capacity building



- ◎ A number of capacity-building initiatives have been closely linked to the activities of the SWGAB, for example:
 - A task force was created at NAFES in 2009 to bring together projects involved in Agribusiness Advisory Services (ABAS). A series of meetings was held to share materials and practical experience.
 - In 2012, building on the SWGAB studies on contract farming, LEAP produced extension materials on the theme of 'Think before you Sign', including posters, videos and radio spots in three languages: Lao, Hmong and Khmu.
 - In March 2016 the first meeting of the 'FOCUS Group' took place in Oudomxay. This sub-group under SSWG-FAB brings together stakeholders involved in capacity building for Farmer Organisations. A second FOCUS meeting will be held in the South later this year.
 - The latest activities at DAEC also include a partnership with SMEPDO to conduct ToTs on the Business Planning and Management.



Farmer conferences and LFN



- ◉ The first Farmer Conference was organised in Vientiane in August 2012, attended by representatives of 33 FOs from 15 provinces.
- ◉ The second Farmer Conference was held in Luang Namtha in June 2013, attended by 28 FOs from 8 Northern provinces.
- ◉ These conference resulted in 'Farmer Statements' that were widely circulated.
- ◉ At the third conference in January 2014, representatives of 17 organisations decided to create the Lao Farmer Network (LFN).
- ◉ In the past two years the LFN committee and secretariat have carried out many workshops to strengthen the network, in collaboration with DAEC and with support from the LURAS project.
- ◉ LFN provides a voice for farmers in the process of lesson-learning and policy dialogue. For example, LFN has raised awareness about the problems of farmer indebtedness, which has produced a positive response from some authorities.



Outcome for Govt and DPs



- ◎ SSWG-FAB is the only working group under MAF that has been active for 10 years.
- ◎ The group has a reputation for producing interesting reports, conducting stimulating meetings and maintaining useful online information services.
- ◎ As a result of these activities, government officials and development partners are better informed about what is happening with agribusiness in Laos, especially the challenges affecting smallholders
- ◎ In some areas (eg. contract farming, farmer organisations and farmer debt) the SSWG-FAB has played a leading role in lesson-learning and policy dialogue.



Outcome for small farmers



- ⦿ The strategic principle that the Co-Chairs and Secretariat of SSWG-FAB have adopted for promoting the interests of small farmers can be summed up in the phrase ‘Voice and Choice’.
- ⦿ Starting 10 years ago, the SSWG-FAB started raising awareness of issues affecting smallholders making the difficult transition from subsistence to commercial farming. Through the LFN, these farmers can now speak for themselves.
- ⦿ By organising meetings in the provinces, producing videos and using the internet, SSWG-FAB has succeeded in engaging a larger number of people in lesson-learning and policy debate.
- ⦿ These activities help everybody become a decision-maker, not just a small group of government officials and foreign experts in Vientiane. Campaigns such as ‘Think Before You Sign’ have helped many thousands of farmers understand agribusiness options.

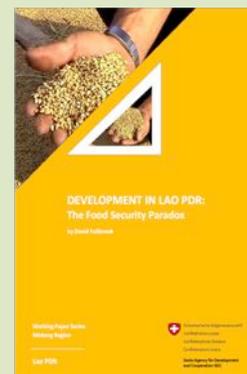
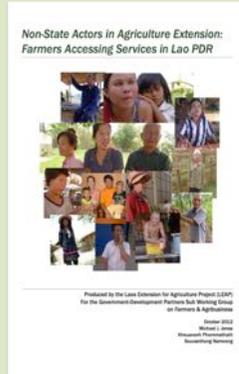
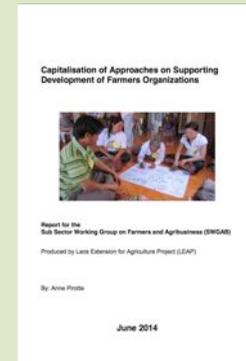
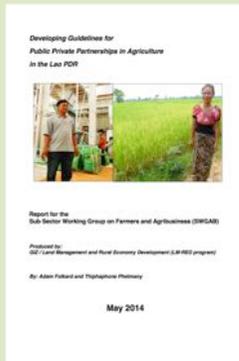


Concluding remarks



- Policy dialogue does not automatically lead to better policy implementation, but the SSWG-FAB has provided decision-makers with cases, analysis and opinions, from multiple sources for the past 10 years.
- We have shown that it is possible to ask difficult questions and take innovative approaches to finding the answers.
- Many challenges continue to affect agribusiness and smallholder farmers in Laos, which means that the job of SSWG-FAB is not yet completed.
- We are grateful to everybody who has joined us in this learning process over the past decade. Together we can continue pushing the frontiers of dialogue, engaging with more people on more issues.





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19-20 June 2018, Luangnamtha, Lao PDR

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