



Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Extension Approaches for Scaling out Livestock Production in
Northern Lao PDR (EASLP) Project

Capacity Building for Lao Extension Staff



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Capacity Building for Staff in Lao Extension Organisations

What is capacity building?

Capacity building is improving the knowledge and skills and attitudes of individuals, organisations, and communities to achieve their goals.

Why is capacity building important for extension?

Capacity building is important for extension in Laos because government extension staff work closely with farmers. They need to take on roles as facilitators helping farmers to identify their main problems and opportunities. They need to transfer new technical knowledge using extension methodology to individual farmers and farmer groups, and help farmers access market systems. They need to learn with farmers and exchange knowledge and experience with them. So, extension staff need to have capacity in social and technical aspects of their work.

Methods of Capacity Building

There are a number of methods that can be used for capacity building of extension staff. All have strengths and weaknesses as follows:

- **Workshop training** allows extension staff to gain new theoretical knowledge and share their experiences with each other and trainers. However, workshop training is expensive and quality of delivery depends on having good facilitators and experts.
- **On-the-job learning** is highly regarded as a complementary method to workshop training as it enables staff to put theory into practice and create mutual learning between extension staff and farmers.
- **Cross visits and study tours** also creates learning in the field, particularly between extension staff as they compare farming systems to their own districts. However, they are expensive to run and require good organisational skills.
- **Staff meetings** create opportunities to share experiences and plan together. They create an environment to present the progress, outputs and outcomes of activities, get feedback from the field and together solve problems and make plans. They need to be structured and held regularly with managers present.
- **Mentoring** is seen as crucial for new district staff including volunteers and contract staff in their first year of project implementation. Younger staff are less experienced and need mentors who have more experience to give advice. It requires experienced and qualified mentors.
- **Village Learning Activities and Farmer Field Schools** allow farmers to learn from each other in a structured course or experiment. Staff can also learn by facilitating and observing these activities. However, staff need to be very experienced and good examples in the field are needed.
- **On-site-training** allows staff to learn practical skills and technical information in the field with trainers. It needs good trainers and facilitators.
- **Using the Internet and reading documents** introduces staff to new information but in Laos is difficult to access. Information needs to be applied in the field.
- **Formal study** allows staff to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications. However, it requires funds, time and support from managers and families.

How to design and use a combination of capacity building methods

A combination of capacity building methods is recommended to spread the cost, optimise learning at strategic development phases and take advantage of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each method. Project and district managers should combine at least five capacity building methods. Suitable methods may link together as follows:

Year 1:

Provide an initial workshop at the beginning of project implementation and then one every six months. Follow the initial workshop with specific topic training and then allow district staff to work directly with farmers. Regular mentoring and staff meetings are also important in the first year. Provide at least one cross visit or study tour.

Year 2:

Provide workshops every six months with NGOs or other stakeholders within districts in order to exchange experience. Allow district field staff to work most of their time in on-the-job learning. Use local mentors approximately every three months. Use national mentors every three and six months and allow them to attend the regular staff meetings within districts. Train staff in how to run cross visits based on farmer needs. Involve district managers and governors in meetings and field visits.

Years 3, 4 and 5

Continue workshop training every six months and on-the-job learning throughout each year. Allow district field staff to attend regular staff meetings every month and follow up using local mentoring, depending on activities. During this time project managers should provide one study tour for district staff to broaden their knowledge.

It is recommended that managers allow district staff to spend at least 15-20 days per month doing on-the-job learning. The exact times will depend on the activities and season of the work.



Factors that need to be considered



Selection of representative and motivated extension staff

District extension staff should be a balance of male and female staff and from different ethnic groups, especially, Hmong, Khamu, Akha, Muser and other ethnic groups.

Effective extension requires competent and motivated extension staff that can assist farmers from different ethnic groups, varied wealth status and roles with the farming household.

The provincial and district managers should select competent extension staff to work in remote areas and Kumban development. More women and ethnic group representatives are needed to provide a balance and help to overcome cultural and gender issues in working with women and ethnic farmers. Managers should invest in a range (gender, age and ethnicity) of district extension staff that are active, enthusiastic and responsible because they return benefits to farmers and organisations quickly.



Building effective teams

In order to meet common goals and make teamwork successful, managers can create teams that include: (a) senior and younger staff, (b) men and women, (c) ethnic minority and LaoLoum staff, and d) staff with complementary skills.

Senior and younger staff. This combination builds capacity of new volunteers and contract staff. The senior district staff can give advice to new staff. Younger staff need to be encouraged to respect the experience of senior staff despite their limited formal education, and listen to their advice.

Men mixed with women staff. This team is particularly suited to working in the field with farmers. The men staff work closely with men farmers and women staff work with women farmer groups. Women staff can be responsible for close villages, while men staff can be responsible for villages that are far away from the office because they can more easily stay overnight.

Men and women from ethnic minorities mixed with women or men LaoLoum staff. Working with ethnic group farmers requires district staff of the same gender and ethnic group. Men staff find it difficult to work with women farmers from ethnic groups due to cultural barriers. Women staff of the ethnic minority can work closely with the women farmers, and men with the men farmers.

Mix staff with good theory and good practice.

Some district extension staff have good communication skills or technical knowledge but they do not know how to apply these to real farmers' situations in the field. On the other hand, some district staff are too shy to give recommendations or share ideas with groups in the

meeting room or offices but they have good practice with farmers. By mixing both people in one team they can learn from each other and use their skills in the appropriate situation.

Clarify roles and responsibilities in the team.

Team members need to be very clear about their responsibilities in order to avoid overlaps of activities. Before the team to go into the field, the team members need to discuss the objectives of the field visit with each other and clarify their roles.

Managing conflicts in the team

Members within teams should respect each other and understand very clearly the team's purpose. Managers can contribute to reducing conflict within the team by providing equal opportunities to team members.



Rewarding equally

Giving equal opportunity to district staff stimulates their motivation for their work. This means supporting them to attend training, cross visits and study tours and providing positions which make good use of their skills.

Managers should find government and foreign scholarships to support district and provincial staff to study both within and outside Laos. They can then select staff that are active and successful in their jobs to go and study. They should also consider long-serving district extension staff before more recent employees for rewards.

Forming partnerships

Partnerships between government agencies and the non-government sector can successfully embed beneficial technologies into rural development programs for the poor. Government projects have developed good approaches for expanding technologies, but they may not have either the budget or the community development skills required for extension staff to conduct activities in the field. On the other hand, NGOs have staff, budget, and know how to work with poor households. They need technical knowledge and skills to build the ability of local people to develop their communities. The strengths and needs of both organisations thus complement each other.

Managers need to clearly understand the aims, objectives and operating philosophy of NGOs operating within their districts. They should stimulate the involvement of NGOs, donors and private sector organisations as much as possible. Managers can link government and NGO staff together to attend regular meetings and exchange ideas and information.

