



Working Group on Agricultural Information Management (AIM) Minutes of 2nd Meeting March 9, 2006



1. Background to meeting

At the first AIM meeting it was decided to meet regularly (at least every 2 months) as well as initiate a process to carry out an information assessment. Since this first meeting, a task force comprised of staff from NAFRI-NAFES have been developing the concept and approach for carrying out such an assessment. The task force has met twice and produced 1) an initial concept note and 2) a draft questionnaire.

In addition to this, the AIM group was approached by the CIAT/SADU Project to see how its Agro-enterprise Manual could be mainstreamed within both institutions and the manual could be produced through NAFRI. Since there are few institutional mechanisms (both formal and informal) for projects at NAFRI and NAFES to share information, this is one emerging and interesting role that AIM can play.

With this in mind, the 2nd AIM meeting was held (see Annex 1 for agenda & participants).

2. Presentation on information and communication assessment

Jitprasong presented an overview of the joint information and communication assessment (the full presentation is provided in Annex 2). In summary, there are three main parts to the information and communication assessment:

- Part 1: Inventory of technical information & materials being produced
- Part 2: What capacities exist and how do organizations relate to one another
- Part 3: What are the information needs of different users (focus on province and district staff and production groups)

While each part of the assessment is important, it was proposed by the task force that the survey should be broken into three steps rather than done all at one time. It was felt that the questionnaire as a whole would be in fact quite ambitious and would take some time. It was also proposed that the first part (focused on inventory of technical information and materials being produced) take priority and that such an assessment first be carried out in NAFRI and NAFES before trying to get information from all organizations working in the agriculture and forestry sector.

The presentation left off proposed some key discussion points.

- In general do we agree with scope, focus and overall approach to the survey?
- What can those participating in survey expect to receive in return?
- Discussion on part 1:
 - Are questions appropriate and focused?
 - Should we focus on materials or also on technologies and approaches?
 - Who will take lead from both NAFRI and NAFES
- Part 2 & 3
 - Are questions appropriate
 - Given time constraints what are options for how this can be done

2.2 Discussion on information and communication assessment

- It was generally agreed that we should begin with part 1 and then proceed with part 2 and part 3. However, it was also explained that in fact the three parts of the questionnaire are for three different target groups and we will need to plan accordingly. This needs to be made clear in future revisions (both how they are different and how they are linked).
- There was concern that we need to remember the purpose of the survey. It is not to just collect information but the vision is to improve how information is received and disseminated at different levels and how we can help PAFeC carry out their tasks more effectively. Another long-term objective is to establish a district and provincial level capacity in information.
- Along these lines, it was felt the survey is interconnected and only by doing all parts will we be able to reach this vision. We need to understand different levels and how they interact. Thus, we need to start with the first part but also keep in mind where we are going and the other steps as well.
- It was also felt that the survey should produce some tangible products as part of the output. It was recommended that a CD of all the information collected be produced and sent to all the PAFeCs. This CD and list of materials could be the standard list of materials that each PAFeC has. In this sense it could be similar to the wisdom bag which was made for DAFEEOs.
- It was felt that this type of product could be the basis for the 3rd part of the survey (information needs). If PAFOs/DAFEEOs could use the CD as a baseline it would be also easier to understand what information gaps there are as well.
- It was suggested that once the survey is carried out, a “returning-results” workshop be organized where findings (as well as the CD) could be presented and questions from Part 2 and 3 could be discussed by the participants.
- The issue of the private sector came up and where it fits into all of this. It was felt that this is an important link that should not be forgotten especially when we begin to look at linkages between actors at the district and province levels.
- In regards to the questionnaire, there were some specific comments:
 - Each part should be prepared separately and include better information on outputs and vision/rationale for survey.
 - That both a hard copy and digital version of the survey should be provided to interviewees
 - We should focus on “What is being produced that is relevant for the provincial and district levels”. This should be the criteria to select materials that will be included in the survey.
 - That asking about technologies is too NAFRI specific. We should have questions which are relevant to both NAFRI and NAFES
 - The questions about how to improve linkages are relevant but should be rephrased and made in a more quantitative manner so it can be analyzed more effectively.

3. Overview of Small Scale Agro-Enterprise Development for the Uplands (SADU) Project Approach

Ounkheo Phattamavong had requested to make a presentation at the meeting to see how the approach that CIAT has been testing could be mainstreamed and how the materials could be produced on the approach.

The Agro-enterprise approach was first developed in South America and was adapted to Lao conditions. The project started in 2003 and was tested in both Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang. Instead of working village by village, CIAT used a territorial approach, working with a cluster of villages. They set up a committee of villager representatives. CIAT works with this committee to prioritize products, analyze market chains and determine possible actions in a participatory manner.

There are a range of actors involved in the agro-enterprise approach, including: traders, small rural producers, local government staff, and facilitators of the process.

In stakeholder meetings, villagers and local entrepreneurs selected peanuts as the most promising crop and identified ways to improve product quality and quantity. The response was impressive. Within one season, all five villages in one cluster were able to double their production of peanuts. They were able to delay selling to get a better price for their products and started to deal directly with larger traders in town. Some farmers started setting up their own peanut shelling units. A local machine maker started a new enterprise by making peanut shelling machines. These are good examples of the emergence of new business development services.

Other products which have been identified include: livestock, passion fruit, Broom grass, and Po sa

The agroenterprise approach provides many good lessons learned:

- There is a need to change mind set of all actors involved to get them to see the benefits of working together.
- Working with village clusters to select products gives sufficient market impact
- Linking villages with traders ensures rapid expansion of production through better understanding of market demands and production constraints
- Rapid expansion of production created a demand for improved technologies

Some of the key topics and issues that still need to be addressed include:

- Less subsistence and more commercial concentration
- Using the Zonal approach
- Participatory and institutionalization and internalization
- Extension with market orientation: understanding both local production and market perspectives
- Scaling up and sustainability

Mentioned this is the last year of the project before a 2nd phase and they are wondering how to institutionalize the approach and scale it up. It was suggested that in May-June 2006 there would be an opportunity for NAFRI and NAFES to participate in training workshops which will be held in Luang Prabang.

3.1 Discussion on Agro-ecological enterprise manual

- There was general consensus that the approach is quite interesting and could be of great value to NAFES. The issue is how to scale it up both at the district level and at the national level.
- There was discussion that this is the first time for many in NAFRI and NAFES to be exposed to the approach and there is a need to ensure that these lessons and experiences are constantly fed back into both systems.
- In regards to the manual it was felt that this needed to be provided to NAFRI and NAFES once a version is ready for revision and comments. It was reiterated that the manual does not need to be perfect since no approach is ever perfect and that it should be provided quickly so that others can test and use.
- Once manual is ready for dissemination, capacity of staff will follow.
- It was also suggested that the 3 districts in Xieng Khouang act as a model site where others can visit to learn more.
- NAFES is interested in this approach and there is a need to discuss more and find way to get experience in using. It was felt that CETDU should definitely be involved in mainstreaming this within NAFES and that SADU should approach CETDU to see how it can be incorporated into its training as well.

4. Key decisions and action points

4.1 Information Assessment

What	When	Who
Send out revised Questionnaire for part 1	By March 17	NAFRI
Comments and revisions and collect list of organizations/centers/divisions to send the questionnaire to	By March 24	NAFRI/NAFES
Testing out questionnaire by LEAP and LSUAFRP	March 27 – April 20	LSUAFRP/LEAP
Send out questionnaire with letter from DGs of NAFRI and NAFES	April 20 – May 20	All projects, divisions, centers at NAFRI and NAFES
Analyze and compile results (prepare presentation and CD)	May 25 – Mid-June	Task force
Present to key people from NAFRI, NAFES, PAFES, MAF	Late June/early July	AIM Group

4.2 Agro-enterprise Manual

- It was agreed that there is a need to find mechanisms for such manuals to be shared between NAFRI and NAFES in the future
- It was also decided that when CIAT/SADU feels the manual is ready for comments that it be presented to the AIM group again so it can be reviewed by NAFRI and NAFES and the next steps discussed.
- It was recommended that CIAT/SADU work with CETDU to incorporate lessons into its training approach.
- It was also recommended that CIAT publicize this case more and share the results. This could be done by making the current villages “models” so that other farmers, projects or field staff could visit.

4.3 Next meeting

- NAFRI will send out minutes of meeting by March 17.
- NAFES should prepare for the next meeting (since it will be at NAFES this time). It was agreed that:
 - The next meeting could take place in the last week of April. An agenda should be developed beforehand.
 - There could be a focus on web-site development at this workshop
 - There is a possibility of another manual presentation from LSUAFRP on the Agro-ecological Analysis and Zoning Approach
- NAFRI also provided some new materials that had been produced to NAFES. It was agreed this could be a regular feature of such meetings.

4.4 Other business

- There is a request by IRRI to make a presentation regarding the Rice Knowledge Bank and/or about rural radio process. This will be confirmed
- NAFES has produced the Extension for Everybody booklet and will provide NAFRI with as many copies as they need.
- LSUAFRP has produced two new materials, a LSUAFRP Information Resource CD and the Socio-economic Report on Corn production and marketing in Oudomxay.

Annex 1: Proposed Agenda and list of participants

1. Introduction and welcome (Vayaphat)

- Update on key activities being carried out by NAFRI and NAFES (new materials, reports, issues that can be shared).

2. Concept for carrying out information and communication assessment

- Presentation and discussion on draft proposal for joint information assessment

3. Discussion on how AIM working group can act as mechanism to facilitate new methods and materials being produced by NAFRI for mainstreaming into NAFES (and vice versa)

- Presentation by SADU/CIAT/NAFRI on Field Facilitator's Guide for Starting Agro-enterprise development process in Lao PDR (Ounkeo CIAT)
- Discussion on how to proceed with approach specifically and role of AIM in general

4. Wrap and action points for next meeting

Participants

NAFRI		NAFES	
Khampay Manivong	Head of IMD	Somxay Sisanonth	Head of ESU
Vayaphat Thattamanivong	Deputy of IMP	Chipasong Chalath	Deputy Head, ESU
Bandith Ramangkoun	Deputy Head, IMD	Niphonxay	Deputy Head, PMU
Khanhkhram Oun	Publications section	Thitpachan Inthilith	ESU staff
Phetsamone	Publications section	Phanomphay	PMU staff
Dueansavanah	ICT	Andrew Bartlett	Adviser (LEAP-CTA)
Michael Victor	Adviser (Info serv)	Andrea Schroeter	Adviser (LEAP-TA)

Annex 2: Overview of proposed information and communication survey: A joint assessment between NAFRI and NAFES Information Services

Purpose of the survey

- To better understand what information capacity and materials already exist
- To better understand the information needs of province/district staff and production groups
- To develop a joint plan of action between NAFRI and NAFES for producing materials and sharing information.

Expected outputs of Survey

- An inventory of what is being produced (and by whom) as well as categorized by major AEA's or commodity groups?
- An inventory of current capacities and resources related to information production within major organizations and recommendations for further capacity development (NAFRI, NAFES, PAFcC, MAF?)
- A map of linkages between different organizations and the levels.
- A better understanding of the information needs of different users as well as the gaps in information currently being produced.
- A common workplan for NAFRI and NAFES so that materials can be produced both separately and together.

Focus of Survey

- Part 1: Inventory of technical information & materials being produced
- Part 2: What capacities currently exist and how do organizations relate to one another
- Part 3: What are the information needs of different users (focus on province and district staff and production groups)

Overall design of survey

- Each part of survey should be done separately and not be done as a whole
- Will need a combination of approaches
 - for part 1 could send out through mail as well as do some key interviews
 - for parts 2&3 need to be done through semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups
- Will need a committed group from NAFRI and NAFES to compile and analyse data

Part 1: What is being produced?

- Focus on technical information being produced for extension (from research) and extension materials for province/ district staff and production groups
- Since starting with NAFRI/NAFES should also ask how communication/sharing between NAFRI and NAFES can be improved.

Issues:

- What kind of information are we collecting (research, extension, etc?)
- Should we also include technologies currently being tested?
- Focus on NAFRI and NAFES first and then on MAF - and outside agencies.

Part 2: Capacity and linkages

- What activities are different organizations currently carrying out in regards to information?
- What skills, capacity do different organization have to produce information?
- What communication linkages exist between different organizations and how can they improved (farmer groups - district - province-national)

Issues

- This part is a bit more qualitative than part 1 and will need to be done through semi-structured interviews and is a study in and of itself
- How many organizations/PAFeCs would constitute a valid sample?
- How can this be carried out with limited staff?

Part 3: Information needs of Users

- Assess information needs of PAFeC, district staff and producer groups
- Understand how they currently use information and what their current information sources are.

Issues

- Would need to use a range of PRA tools at village and district level
- How many provinces, districts, villages would constitute a valid sample?
- Again, who and how can this be done given time?
- Could part be done at provincial/national extension meetings?

Overall Decisions made by group concerning survey

- Survey should be carried out in three parts and in stages
- First priority is to assess what is currently being produced and what technologies, methods and approaches are currently being used. NAFRI and NAFES and then outside.
- Still unsure how to carry out parts 2-3 given limited resources.

Workplan for carrying out part 1

Part	Revisions	How	When	Target Group
What is being produced	1. Address of people filling out form 2. Revise final questions to focus on NAFRI-NAFES and how they can better cooperate	1. Revise format 2. Test at LSUAFRP and LEAP 3. Send out with letter from DGs 4. Send and Collect 5. Analyze 6 Present at AIM	1 – 3 Before Pi Mai 4. Pi Mai till May 13 5. May 15 – 30 (2 day meeting of working group 6. At June AIM meeting	Start with NAFRI and NAFES (projects, centers, divisions) 2 nd step MAF, Line agencies, projects and INGOs (could be done in July August)
Capacity/ linkages		Could be done with students during this year		
Info Needs		Could be done with students during this year		

Issues for discussion

- In general do we agree with scope, focus and overall approach to the survey?
- What can those participating in survey expect to receive in return?
- Discussion on part 1:
 - Are questions appropriate and focused?
 - Should we focus on materials only or on technologies and approaches?
 - Who will take lead from both NAFRI and NAFES
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