

Organized by



Workshop information note on
Connecting the last mile: best practices in rural communication to improve farmers and farmer groups' access to information on agriculture and natural resource management

To be held at Lanxang hotel
July 31 – August 1, 2007

Background

The Government of Lao PDR is focusing its efforts on reducing poverty by opening up the rural economy and working at the village cluster level. This has a number of implications for farmers who are making the transition from subsistence farming to market oriented farming. On the one hand, farmers who are entering the market economy need better access to improved agricultural techniques and practices as well as market information. On the other, the opening up of the economy has increased competition for natural resources and land. This has placed some rural farmers in a disadvantageous position as they have limited access to information and ability to negotiate their claims to resources.

In order to support farmers and farmer groups to cope with the rapid changes taking place, a number of organizations and projects (Government, NGOs, Private Sector and Community Groups) are emphasizing the need to improve information and communication channels between and among key actors in the Lao Agriculture and Knowledge Information Systems¹ (central, province, district, farmers and traders). There are a number of innovative communication initiatives that have been tested out in Laos but have not been widely shared.

This workshop is being organized to identify appropriate rural communication² and information practices in Laos as well as develop an agenda for improving how information is generated and communicated to the local level for agriculture and natural resource management. The workshop will focus, in particular, on identifying best practices in two-way communication in order to identify processes where farmers and farmers' groups are actively involved in the definition and production of their own information.

Objectives and Outcomes

The objectives of the meeting would be to

- Share best practices and lessons learned in rural communication that are appropriate for the Lao context
- Establish a network of organizations working in the agriculture and natural resource sector interested to improve communication and information processes to the district and village level
- Develop an action plan for generating content in specific areas related to agriculture and natural resource management (land rights, technical information, market information)

By the end of the workshop it is expected we will have:

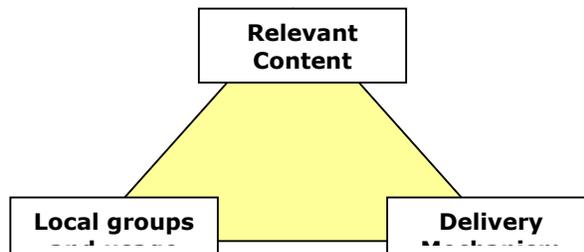
- Identified best practices, innovative ways to improve rural dissemination and communication and constraints in current information systems

¹ In an agricultural knowledge and information system people and institutions are linked together to promote and enable mutual learning and generate, share and use agriculture-related technology, knowledge, skills and information. The system integrates planners, farmers, agricultural educators, researchers and extensionists and the private sector (support and input services, traders) (FAO 2004)

² By rural communication, we mean to focus attention on communication and information processes at the local level. This includes both dissemination of information to rural areas and most importantly creating communication processes where farmers and village groups are actively involved in creating and defining their own content.

- Established small working groups of organizations interested in different aspects of agriculture and natural resource management to:
 - Develop a list of initial areas of what information is needed and what information is available
 - Develop strategies for generating content both at the national level and provincial and district levels
 - Action plans for continuing work the
- Understood role of actors at different levels and how they can work together
- Summary report on lessons learned and next steps (possibly a video??)
- CD of all presentations and learning at the workshop

Key issues and themes the workshop will address



The workshop will look at three key areas of rural communication:

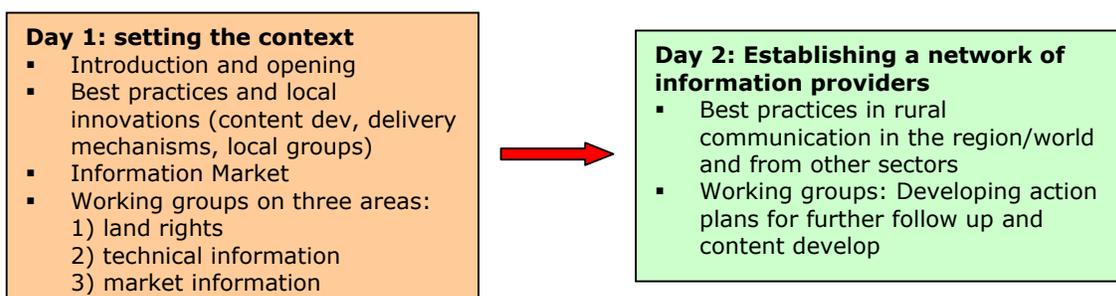
- *Content generation*: how to develop content on different areas (land rights, technical, market) focused on long term campaigns or issues and short term information. How to understand needs of farmers and farmer groups.
- *Delivery mechanisms*: what types of communication mechanisms have been used in Laos and what were the lessons learned. This includes use of computers, radio, TV, theatre groups, posters, telephones, SMS messaging, cell phones, etc
- *Formation of groups to spread messages*: use of production groups, youth groups, theatre groups, listening groups to develop local information systems.

The workshop will also address with the following questions:

- What content is being produced? What are the key lessons and challenges in developing content at different levels?
- What are innovative ways to disseminate information: what new communication tools can be used (radio, telephone, computers, etc)?
- How can we create feedback channels between different levels and see communication as an interaction between different actors rather than just a process to hand over information to farmers and farmer groups?
- What is the role of actors at different levels (national, provincial and district)?
- What current village/district level content (if any) is being produced?
 - Who is developing/generating it and why? Are actual users, farmers, etc. generating content themselves? If so can this be relevant to others (information and practice?)
 - If this "bottom up" content is not being generated, why not? How can this be changed?
 - What is the difference between "bottom-up", village/ district level content and "top-down" or "expert" generated content?
 - What is the value of local/village knowledge in agricultural information and what is being done to capture it? And, how do you tell what is useful, working and replicable content at the local/farmer created level. Then, how do you put these efforts alongside the "Content Development" questions of national level and "agency" or "expert" developed content?
- How to reach different ethnic groups and using ethnic languages?
- What is the role of farmer groups, youth groups listening groups or community based groups in using, generating content or providing feedback?

Workshop Process and Agenda

The workshop will be held over two days and be comprised of a combination of presentations, information markets and small working groups. The workshop will use interactive methods to ensure active participation of all those attending. The general flow of the workshop is shown below:



Who should participate?

The workshop is targeted to those working on rural communication, in the agriculture sector. It is expected that 100 participants will attend. Community groups, youth groups or farmer groups are also encouraged to participate. Participants are also encouraged to contribute to the information market in terms of video, plays, displays and other interactive ways to show what you are doing.

This could include:

- Extension agents, researchers and development practitioners, local NGOS or representatives of IGOs, etc
- Government agencies, mass organizations, and distributors of information: Radio, TV, newspaper, Women’s Union, Lao National Front, STEA, etc
- Local farmer groups, associations, youth or theatre groups
- Private sector

If you would like to attend please fill out attached form.

If you are interested to participate, please fill in the registration form or contact the following

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