



# Notes from the workshop to introduce the NAFRI/NAFES Agriculture Information Management Working Group

Held on May 15 at NAFES



## 1. Introduction

In 2006, NAFRI and NAFES established the Working Group on Agriculture Information Management (AIM). This was based on the recognition that there is a need to improve the flow of information between NAFRI and NAFES as well as ensure that information produced is reaching and meeting the needs of farmers and extension staff.

The purpose of AIM is to improve extension staff and farmers' access to agriculture and forestry related information and knowledge. It will not only work at the national level but more importantly establish linkages to other levels (provincial and district) as well as develop knowledge/information management capacity of staff at these levels.

Earlier in 2007, the working group developed a working strategy concept and workplan. The plan and project were recently approved by both directors at NAFRI and NAFES to initiate the a project to establish the group. This is the first inter-agency working group established between NAFRI and NAFES to promote improved coordination.

This report provides an overview of the workshop that was held on May 15 as well as the key outcomes from the discussions.

## 2. Purpose and process of the workshop

This workshop was held to introduce the AIM working group to key stakeholders and see how the group can be a conduit to improve information between projects and program operating within NAFRI and NAFES. More than 50 participants from projects, centers and divisions affiliated with NAFRI and NAFES attended the meeting (see Annex 1 for participants and agenda).

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Present the AIM concept to key stakeholders and receive feedback on the concept and strategy
- Introduced key activities that NAFRI and NAFES Information Services are providing
- Provide ideas on how projects and organizations can contribute to AIM.

An innovative process was used to introduce the participants to the different activities being carried out by NAFRI and NAFES. Participants were broken up into groups and asked to visit six different stations on the different products and services. At each station, they were given a short introduction to the activity and then asked to provide comments and suggestions.

In general participants enjoyed the process in that they were able to get an overview of all the activities in a relatively short period of time (they were allowed 10-15 minutes at each station). One participant commented that this process was very much appreciated since it was quick and provided an opportunity to see all activities and provide feedback on them.

## 3. Introductory Presentation: Overall AIM concept and Plan

Mr. Khamphay Manivong presented the overall AIM concept and plan (See Annex 2). AIM is a partnership between the National Information Center for Extension (NAFES) and the Information Management Division of NAFRI.

It was stressed in such a rapidly changing environment such as Laos, information is increasingly important to farmers and extension agents. Farmers need up-to-date and accurate information on new agriculture techniques, market information and factors affecting their harvests (pests, disease, weather, etc). Extension agents are increasingly be requested for a range of information but they have little available to them. AIM was established to deal with these challenges.

It was reiterated that AIM will not only work at the central level, but also at the district and provincial level. It is the vision of AIM to create a network of information/knowledge management specialists at all levels to improve the follow of information and communication.

The group works around the following areas:

- Information Management (LAD, NALiS, collection of materials, etc)
- Production and dissemination (material development, repackaging, working with different media and communication channels)
- Facilitating learning and sharing: workshops and learning processes
- Technical advisory services: directory of expertise, call center, etc.
- Providing advise and support to projects and centers on producing and disseminating materials

It was also explained that AIM acts a facilitator of information rather than as a gatekeeper. The benefits of this are:

- AIM can help projects and centers better package and more widely disseminate their materials & information
- AIM will ensure that information, lessons and experiences are institutionalized rather than projectized. It will act as a repository of lessons learned, new methods and techniques
- Aim will help to ensure integration with other projects and avoid duplication so that projects know what others are working on.
- Develop network of staff at different levels to ensure efficient use of resources

It was explained that this is the first year for collaborative activities to take place and the AIM group encourages all projects, centers and units at NAFRI and NAFES to actively participate and contribute to the group.

#### **4. Information Market**

Below is a description of the key outcomes from the six stations in the information market. The six activities presented were:

1. The Lao Agriculture Database
2. The Lao Uplands Sourcebook
3. The NAFRI Newsletter and Extension Today
4. Introduction to NAFES Cooperation with LNTV to produce technical videos
5. The Lao Wisdom Bag
6. The Lao Language version of the Lao Farmer and Agribusiness Discussion Group (Lao Link)

#### ***The Lao Agricultural Database & Lao AGROVOC***

LAD is the first on-line system to collect agriculture and forestry reports and materials related to Laos in both the Lao and English Languages. Currently LAD includes more than a 1,000 records with almost 500 digital files. The database includes research results, surveys, training and extension materials, working papers, as well as policy and strategy reports. The Lao AGROVOC is based on AGROVOC which is the common thesaurus used by FAO for agriculture and forestry terminology. It contains more than 15,000 agricultural related terms.

Three questions were asked:

- What benefits in your own work do you see for LAD and Lao AGROVOC?
- Do you want to be a part of a network? If so, how can you contribute? What can be improved in LAD and how can we improve cooperation?

Many participants saw the benefits of LAD and Lao AGROVOC as one way to collect information and materials on technical matters. This is an important tool for researchers, extension agents and students who are interested Lao related agriculture and forestry information. However there were some concerns that the searching should be easier and similar to web searches.

In terms of improving the LAD system, it was felt that there should be more promotion of the LAD through different mechanisms including:

- Promote through the NAFRI and NAFES newsletter or through other media channels so that different actors know about it
- Every month or so an email should be sent out to users letting them know what information has been added. This can attract users to use the database.
- LAD and Lao AGROVOC should be put on CDs so that provincial and district staff can access where there is no internet

In terms of cooperation it was felt that there is a need to make partnerships with other organizations such as NAFES and NGOs so that they can directly contribute and add their own information. This will also get more people to use the system. A priority should be made to train staff from different organizations to be able to index and add information. This is important in terms of creating a network of information staff who can contribute to LAD.

### ***The Lao Uplands Sourcebook***

The Lao Uplands Sourcebook is a compendium of lessons and experiences in Uplands development and natural resource management. It is comprised of 71 articles and has contributions from more than 20 organizations in Laos. The English version is packaged in two volumes, the Lao version has been split into 5 smaller sized handbooks for easy use.

Participants were asked 3 questions:

- What do you think are the most useful aspects of the sourcebook?
- How can the sourcebook be used in your own projects or work?
- How can similar materials be made in the future?

Most participants responded positively to the sourcebook. Participants felt it was a valuable resource that captured lessons and experiences quite effectively. However, there was concern that it took a long time to produce and future efforts should have a quicker turn around time. There is a need to use the sourcebook to stimulate interest in constantly changing information such as on markets.

In terms of how it can be used, it was important to make sure all provincial and district staff had access to the book. In addition, participants suggested that it be repackaged for different media such as radio, TV or even put in the newsletter.

Finally, participants suggested that future efforts ensure that the needs of farmers and extension agents are first assessed. It was also suggested that writeshops be used in Lao Language where materials are finished within 2-3 weeks. It could also be possible to involve farmers in both the development and testing of the materials.

### ***NAFRI Newsletter and Extension Today***

Both NAFRI and NAFES produce newsletters for district and extension staff. Both are valuable products to ensure different stakeholders are aware of both organizations activities as well as provide technical information to district staff.

The main questions asked were:

- Should we merge the NAFRI and NAFES newsletters? Why
- If you produced documents to province and district staff in past year, what was the content? What could you provide in the future?
- How can we share information in the future?

In regards to the first question, participants had a range of views. On the one hand it was observed that the target groups for both newsletters were the same and therefore it might be more effective to have one newsletter. On the other hand, each organization has its own newsletter to enhance its identity as well as ensure that information on each organization is getting out. In addition, the NAFRI newsletter is monthly and the NAFES one is quarterly so they have different types of information in them.

While it was agreed that each organization should keep its own newsletter it was recommended that there should be better coordination between them. For instance, since they come out at different times, more immediate information on workshops, etc could be sent through the NAFRI newsletter and less time bound information through Extension Today. In addition, there should be more cross sharing of information and coordination between the two.

In regards to what other projects are producing it was found that:

- FORCOM (JICA) publishes a newsletter in Lao/Eng for sharing as well as distributes a small newsletter to farmers for activity sharing and to introduce advanced techniques to them.
- HHRC and DED have provided vegetable leaflets for wisdom beg
- IRRI has produced a number of documents including: Gall midge resistant rice, Growing rice seedlings under plastic, mixed cropping systems, and recommended rice varieties for different areas and ecosystems.

In regards to getting contributions from others, a number of interesting suggestions were made, including:

- Should have mechanisms for feedback from readers
- Use "cross-channel" communication mechanisms such as print, radio, TV and web
- There needs to be better connections to the internet, whether between national level agencies (NAFRI/NAFES/MAF) or trying to connect all DAFFO offices to the internet are use web based information

In regards to sharing information there is a need to have a system which includes providing feedback to researchers from extension which can be used in the research planning process. This could be done possibly through workshops. It was also suggested to organize seminars on specific research topics. This should be conducted both at the central level and province and district levels to ensure cross sharing between districts and even village clusters.

### ***Introduction to NAFES Cooperation with LNTV to produce technical videos***

NAFES has established collaboration with LNTV to produce regular TV programs *(how many have been done so far and what time do they air)*

The Table below summarizes the responses based on the questions.

1. How can we improve our existing videos?	2. How can we cooperate with other organizations such as NAFRI or projects?	3. Are you able to support us to produce more videos?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience survey</li> <li>• Sell at bookstores or markets</li> <li>• Use video to produce case studies</li> <li>• Have translated subtitles in English</li> <li>• Provide guidelines to extension staff for how to use</li> <li>• Include graphics, cartoons and moving diagrams (more visual and less on language)</li> <li>• Place on websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore regional links-Thai TV, Vietnam to share programs and experiences</li> <li>• Distribute them to NAFRI for technical feedback, e.g. NRRP and IRRI review anything related to rice which ILRI and CIAT review livestock</li> <li>• Have Lao TV/radios broadcast market price, or up-to-date agri-information for 10min/day</li> <li>• Make an inventory at NAFRI as to what could be put on.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore private sector support. e.g. may be an egg marketing company that wants better quality supply from farmers</li> <li>• There is money for this if we prepare proposal (Lao-IRRI)</li> <li>• JICA can provide VCD for aquaculture techniques</li> <li>• URDP can provide techniques on agriculture in upland</li> </ul>

### ***The Lao Wisdom Bag***

The Lao Wisdom bag was created as a mobile library to better distribute and manage information at the district level. The agriculture wisdom bag has been developed to hang on the wall in District or Provincial offices. The unusual design attracts the attention of both staff and visitors. It can also be folded and carried on the back of a motorcycle to a new location.

The material in the bag consists of books, booklets, VCDs, leaflets and fact sheets. Those items cover basic issues on agricultural technology and extension methodology. The contents of the bag cannot cover all necessary information nor replace a library; it should therefore be complemented with information relevant for the specific region. But it can be a starting point for creating a collection of accessible materials.

Some of the key issues raised in terms of the wisdom bag included:

- Projects would like to contribute to the wisdom bag. It was also suggested projects should be required to provide materials each year for inclusion. This could be in their agreement with MAF.
- More emphasis should be placed on producing materials for farmers or showing how extension staff can use the wisdom bag to make farmer materials. It was also requested that a similar version be developed for the village cluster level.
- There was concern over the sustainability of producing the wisdom bag. Particularly when materials have to be regularly purchased
- The bag should have a title tag for each pocket of the Wisdom Bag
- Focal points at the district should be appointed so that it can be managed. In addition, all projects or levels should have a focal point to ensure that everyone regularly contributes.

### ***The Lao Links: Lao Language version of the Lao Farmer and Agribusiness Discussion Group***

LaoFAB was launched in November 2006 by the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP), in its role as the Secretariat of the GoL/Donor Sub Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness. LaoFAB is a forum for sharing information about farmers and agribusiness in Laos. The members of this forum include Government officials, donor representatives, NGO staff, project experts, and members of the business community.

Since most of the messages and activity has been by foreigners, it was suggested to establish a Lao version of Lao FAB called Lao Links. During the workshop, participants were asked the following questions:

- What level of moderation does LaoLink requires?
- Who want to volunteer to be a member or moderator of the LaoLink?
- What are potential topics for discussion ?

In terms of level of moderation, it was revealed most participants felt that membership should be controlled but members should be able to discuss freely. It was also interesting to note that some participants felt that it should be completely free as it would be good to diversity views

Control members and messages	Control member but not messages	Not control at all
25%	42%	33%

Surprisingly, there were no participants to volunteer to be a moderator. Some of the general comments included that there should be more promotion to get more members and that roles of moderators and members should be clarified.

In terms of potential topics it was suggested it be related to agriculture and forestry and content be practical so it is applied. Specific topics could include:

- Marketing, market price
- Contract farming of rice
- Village development funds/credit
- Rubber tree plantation
- English words on Agriculture

It was also felt that there should be a guidebook posted on the web so people can know how to access as well as get messages in Lao. In addition it was suggested that there should be some form of translation between Lao FAB and Laolink to ensure cross fertilization (this could be both ways).

## **6. Conclusions and final recommendations**

The meeting was closed by Mr. Kham Sanataem, Deputy Director of NAFES. He congratulated the members of AIM and stressed that this is an important channel for NAFRI and NAFES. He also urged projects and units under the two organizations should contribute and participate in AIM activities.

In general some of the key conclusions include:

- Products are very good and they should be updated regularly and other projects and units/centers/divisions within NAFRI and NAFES should contribute
- There is a need to find ways to get 'real-time' information on markets which is not covered in the current product spread
- There is a need for information on agribusiness rather than focus purely on technical information
- There is a need to get feedback from districts and farmers and not just feed information to them, i.e. communication is a two way process
- Need to build linkages and capacities at district and provincial levels to use and/or engage in such services.

The table below shows the key recommendations for each of the activities:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Lao Agriculture Database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote LAD through different channels such as newsletters and other media. Also send updates to users on what new information has inputted on a regular basis</li> <li>• Need to form partnerships with other organizations and projects for collecting information and training staff to be able to input and index new materials</li> <li>• Make searching and the interface more user friendly</li> </ul>
Lao Uplands Sourcebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribute widely to all provinces and districts</li> <li>• Repackage or cross-market through Radio, TV &amp; newspaper</li> <li>• Develop similar products but using a faster process which includes writeshops. It should also ensure that materials are based on extension and farmers needs and include farmers in developing and testing</li> </ul>
NAFRI-NAFES Newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should keep separate and avoid duplication</li> <li>• Should place time-bound news on NAFRI newsletter and more extension related material in NAFES</li> <li>• Should carry out regular reader surveys to improve</li> <li>• Put on website or distribute through other channels</li> </ul>
NAFES Cooperation with Lao TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out viewer survey</li> <li>• Have NAFRI review technical content and get list of potential materials from NAFRI to include on program</li> <li>• Make program more interactive and enjoyable and include market information or information on agribusiness</li> <li>• Sell in bookshops or in markets to get wider coverage</li> <li>• Provide guidelines to district staff for to use with farmers.</li> </ul>
Wisdom bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to provide guidelines to district staff as to how they can use with farmers. Likewise, how can such information be provided to the cluster level.</li> <li>• Focal points should be appointed at all levels (district, province and at projects) in order that it is properly used and that projects and other regularly contribute</li> </ul>
Lao Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a low level of moderation in order to ensure diversity of views. Members should be encouraged to share and some 'rules' or etiquette (Malayat) should be set</li> <li>• There should be more active promotion of it on Lao FAB or other channels</li> <li>• There should be some level of translation from Lao FAB to and from Lao LINK.</li> </ul>

## Annex 1: List of participants and Agenda

	Name	Organization	Position
1.	Kham Sanataem	NAFES	DDG, NAFES
2.	Khamphay Manivong	NAFRI	DDG, NAFRI
3.	Somxay Sisanonh	NAFES	Deputy Head-Ext Div
4.	Bandith Ramagkoun	NAFRI	Head of IS Unit
5.	Phonepaseuth	NAFRI	ICT
6.	Pome	NAFRI	Library
7.	Khankham	NAFRI	Production & dissemination
8.	Pasalath	NAFRI	LAD Coordinator
9.	Michael Victor	URDP/NAFRI	Information Advisor
10.	Joakim Lagerquist	URDP/NAFRI	ICT JPO
11.	Chitpasong	NAFES	CETDU
12.	Lena	NAFES	CETDU
13.	Bounthan	NAFES	CETDU
14.	Ketsana	NAFES	CETDU
15.	Thitphachan	NAFES	CETDU
16.	Chaluen	NAFES	CETDU
17.	Varth	NAFES	CETDU
18.	Khamphuey	NAFES	CETDU
19.	Andrew Bartlett	Helvetas/LEAP	CTA
20.	Andrea Schroeter	Helvetas/LEAP	TA
21.	Juliane	Helvetas/LEAP	TA
22.	Phouthasinh	Helvetas/LEAP	KMO
23.	Thongsavath Boupaha	NAFES	Deputy Head, Ext Div
24.	Yungthong	NAFES	Head of Nonteng Sta
25.	Bounphavanh	ADP	DNPC
26.	Ms. Oumalay	SUFORD	Technician
27.	Representative	FORCOM	
28.	Khamphone	SHDP	Staff
29.	Phetnakhone	SPFS	NFM
30.	Bouchine	RDTAP	NPD
31.	Boualy Sengdala	HIEFER	
32.	Manivong Theppeavong	NAFRI	Head Research Management
33.	Mattias Plewa	NAFRI	DED Adviser, HHRC
34.	Somphachanh, FRC	NAFRI	Deputy Director
35.	Carl Mossberg	URDP/NAFRI	Program Management Adviser
36.	Ian Christaples	URDP/NAFRI	Capacity Development Adviser
37.	Gary Jahn	IRRI	Regional Coordinator
38.	Andrre Chabe	CIRAD/NAFRI	
39.	Oliver Ribolzi	IWMI	Program Coordinator
40.	Akira Nagaoika	JICA	PSO/MAF
41.	Viengsavanh	JICA	PO
42.	Makoto	JICA	ARR
43.	Sengchan	NSC	Pep Director
44.	Michael Dougherty		Consultant
45.	Bounthavy	NAFRI	Technician
46.	Piewe	DED-NAFRI	Admin
47.	Chabanne	CIRAD/PRONAE	
48.	Maniphet	GTZ	KMO
49.	Sounthavong	PAB	



## Agenda

Time	Activity	Who
8:00 – 8:30	Registration - coffee	
8:30- 8:45	Opening and welcome ceremony	Annon
8:45 – 9:15	Introduction into overall AIM concept and plan	Khamphay
9:15 – 9:45	Discussion and feedback on overall AIM concept	Somxay
9:45 – 10:00	Introduction to process for stations	Bandith/Phout
10:00 – 10:15	Coffee Break	
10:00 – 11:45	Stations key activities that AIM is working on: 1. Introduction into Wisdom Bag 2. Introduction to Lao sourcebook 3. Introduction into LAD and Lao AGROVOC 4. Introduction into NAFRI Library and NALIS 5. Introduction to Lao Language Lao FAB 6. Introduction to NAFES Cooperation with LNTV to produce technical videos	Leela/Khampoui Bandith/Khankham Pasalath/Seuth Pome/Library staff Phout/Chaluen Bounthan/LNTV
11:45 – 12:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflections and comments on activities</li> <li>▪ Announcements from different projects</li> </ul>	Somxay and Khamphay
12:15 – 12:30	Signing Ceremony of AIM concept and plan & Closing	Somxay/ Khamphay
12:30	Lunch	