Progress summary (July 2009 to June 2010)

The aim of this project is to research the scaling out of best practice extension and capacity building methods for livestock production in northern Lao PDR. During the reporting period, the project focussed on four key activities in relation to objective 1 (1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5) and two key activities under objective 2 (2.5 and 2.6).

Objective 1 is to adapt livestock extension approaches to eleven targeted poor districts in northern Lao PDR.

The project continued to develop specific extension tools to assist extension staff working with farmers in 5 northern Lao provinces. These tools include operational guidelines for working with Hmong, Khamu and Akha people, particularly on how to communicate and behave with village leaders, women and families. The guidelines were discussed with district and provincial livestock staff from 4 districts in Huaphan province in September 2009, and then distributed to LDP, LEAP, NAFRI, LPAFC, NGOs (World Vision, CRWRC and GAA) and other NAFES projects in November 2009. Interviews were held with village leaders from 12 ethnic villages in Luang NamTha, Oudomxay and Luang Prabang provinces in April 2010 which verified information in the guidelines.

Sixteen farmer case studies developed by staff in 2009 from Koun, Phonexai, Viengthong and Viengxai districts were distributed in brochure form to all LDP target districts and partner projects along with guidelines on how to make and use case studies and run cross visits. These guidelines were modified for particular ethnic groups such as Hmong and Khamu, based on the above research into extension approaches for working with ethnic groups in upland areas. Follow up phone calls revealed that staff still need mentored guidance in running cross visits and developing case studies. The guidelines are not enough on their own. Organisations using the guidelines need to embed them in training and provide follow up mentoring.

Interviews with 25 farmers who had attended cross visits in 2007 and 2008 (including 9 women) were held in November 2009 to assess the relative influence of cross visits on farmer motivation, decision making and livestock production. Farmers were from poor to medium wealth families and represented five ethnic groups. Results showed that the cross visits were instrumental in stimulating farmer motivation to take action. Follow up advice by district staff enabled implementation and was a major influence identified by farmers. Other influential factors included wanting to increase income and reduce shifting cultivation according to Lao govt policy, attending training courses in animal health, and the positive influence of family members. All farmers had made significant progress with fattening chickens, ducks, pigs, goats, cattle or buffalo. Incomes ranged from 3 to 29 million kip over the last 2 years since the cross visits. Farmers had been able to invest in more animals, house construction, hand tractors, paddy rice stocks, rice field land, motor cycles, furniture, school, clothes and medicine. Over 100 other farmers (including poor families) had started improving livestock production after talking to the cross visit farmers, demonstrating the flow on effects of farmer to farmer learning.
Another development has been staff training in making digital stories on livestock production techniques and farmer case studies. Digital stories are an audio-visual tool presented on CD or DVD, in the farmers own ethnic language. A training workshop was held in September 2009 to teach EASLP, LDP and CIAT staff how to make the stories. The project team have since developed a range of 13 digital stories showing examples of pig, poultry, goat, cattle and buffalo production by women and men farmers from poor to medium wealth families. These stories have been tested with 3 ethnic villages in Luang Prabang province and distributed to district staff and partner projects, to use with their farmers. Technical instructions on planting forages and dealing with pig diseases have also been produced. Guidelines on how to make digital stories for livestock production have been distributed with requests from 2 ACIAR projects to run training events in 2010.

**Objective 2 is to evaluate the cost effectiveness of a range of capacity building techniques for extension staff.**

In November 2009, Viengxay Photakoun completed his Masters thesis on “The role of capacity building for livestock extension and development in Lao PDR.” This research examined the range of capacity building methods being used for livestock extension staff in northern Laos, including their relative effectiveness from the perspectives of project managers, district head and district extension staff themselves. The research found that the main capacity building methods used were workshop training, on-the-job learning, mentoring, staff meetings and cross visits or study tours. The research concluded that each capacity building method has advantages and disadvantages, so designing and using a combination of methods works best. A recommendation was to provide workshops at project implementation and then every six months, followed by specific topic training according to staff and farmer needs, plus encouraging district staff to work directly with farmers. Mentoring and staff meetings are also important in the first year with at least one cross visit or study tour per year.

The research also examined factors contributing to effective capacity building. Influential factors included the role of managers in selecting representative (gender and ethnic minorities) and motivated staff, encouraging teamwork, providing equal opportunities and rewards for staff (being fair), facilitating exchange between government and NGO staff, and having good examples in the field to learn from. Guidelines for Lao agencies on how to build capacity of extension staff were produced and distributed in May 2010. Further research on the cost effectiveness of capacity building methods will be conducted in 2010.

A digital story on evaluating capacity building methods was presented at the 5th International Australasia Pacific Extension Conference in November 2009. A paper summarising the research was published in *Extension Farming Systems Journal* Vol 5 Issue 2 in April 2010. Two additional papers were presented at the 2009 APEN conference, and are published in the *Extension Farming Systems Journal* Vol 5 Issue 1. Two papers have been accepted for presentation at the International Lao Studies Conference in July 2010 and have been submitted to the *Journal of Mekong Societies*.

A digital story on how to scale out agricultural technologies was produced and distributed to partner projects and organisations. A new project website has been created. All guidelines, reports, papers and digital stories are available at: [http://www.csu.edu.au/research/ilws/International/EASLP/index_easlp.htm](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/ilws/International/EASLP/index_easlp.htm)