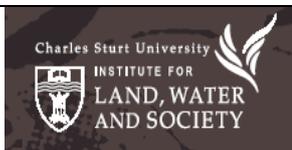


Extension Approaches for Scaling out Livestock Production in Northern Lao PDR (EASLP)

ACIAR Project ASEM/2005/125



Extension ideas for working with Lao Hmong people



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Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity



Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
National Agriculture and Forestry Extension
Service

Extension ideas for working with Lao Hmong people

The NAFES publication 'Extension for Everyone' outlines a set of strategies for helping ethnic minorities. These include providing appropriate outreach extension services through the recruitment of ethnic minority staff and by training all staff to respect local knowledge and culture.

The following observations are taken from current literature on the cultural aspects of Hmong people which may affect interactions with extension staff, and may assist extension staff working with Hmong people. They particularly highlight the complex cultural factors which need to be taken into account when attempting to work with Hmong women.

1

The Hmong people use Hmong language as their first language. Many Hmong villagers are also literate in Hmong script.

Extension Message: Use Hmong extension officers, speaking Hmong language, to work with Hmong farmers. Delivering extension in Lao language will put the whole extension effort at a vast disadvantage. Utilise Hmong script as well as Lao script in extension materials.

2

The priority for Hmong people is always the benefit of family and clan, not the individual.

Extension Message: Focus on how the change has potential to benefit the whole family/clan. Emphasise a co-operative approach.



3

Decisions about what agricultural activities to undertake are made by male elders.

Extension message: Engage clan and family elders in establishing the need for and desirability of the change: without their support it will not happen.

4

Women are usually responsible for livestock, especially smaller animals (chickens, pigs, goats) and share in agricultural labour.

Extension message: Train women in animal husbandry techniques for smaller animals.



5

The eldest male relative is responsible for the welfare of the family, and makes decisions regarding who will undertake which activities

Extension message: Talk to the eldest male relative about the need for change and to allow women to undertake training. Introductory materials may need to be developed for elders, showing women undertaking the tasks that would be their domain.

6

Hmong people have strict rules about marriage, mixing and even talking between men and women of the same clan.

Extension message: Elders may not allow women to attend activities if they think men and women of the same clan may be allowed to mix. Offer women-only activities, or make sure names are circulated to allow elders to check clan relationships, or encourage elders to talk to each other about who will attend. Women may not be able to travel far from their village.

7

Hmong people learn best in a group. They learn by seeing, touching and doing.

Extension message: Plan group learning experiences (eg. workshops, field days, village experiments) with hands on activities (eg. co-operative problem solving, devising and construction on-farm). Be sure to use pictures, photos, charts, graphs, maps etc in learning materials. Less talk, more action!



8

Hmong people maintain traditional gender roles.

Extension message: Initial extension talks are best between a male extension officer to the male elders. Once the elders have agreed to allow further activities meetings should then match gender and power relations. For example, a male elder can talk with a female or male extension officer, but only a female extension officer should talk with a female farmer.

9

Hmong people view professionals as being in a position of honour, deserving of respect. They expect a business-like transaction with specific directions.

Extension message: Behave professionally- be frank, reliable and honest. Do exactly as you say. Keep promises and meeting times. Do not be too animated or too casual. Show respect to elders and clan leaders. Be well organised – have clear and relevant supporting materials and instructions.

10

In a learning situation, Hmong people may be overly polite, saying yes even when they don't understand. This may be showing respect for a professional (may view asking questions as doubting the teacher's ability) or responding to a perceived power difference.

Extension message: Plan carefully- use the most appropriate staff for the audience, make sure people are comfortable and not feeling intimidated by others, and ask questions that cannot simply be answered with Yes or No

11

Hmong people continue to use traditional health practices. Physical illness may be treated by a herbalist who may mix western medicines as well. Illness and bad luck like the death of livestock is often believed caused by evil spirits. Surgery is forbidden as cutting allows good spirits to leave and evil spirits to enter.

Extension message: Acknowledge traditional beliefs and try to work with them. For example promote practices such as vaccination and de-worming as a necessary addition to them, or in keeping with them.



12

Points to remember when entering a Hmong village:

- Behave in a friendly and respectful way – don't be bureaucratic.
- Do not touch objects used for rituals such as musical instruments.
- Observe house gates/doors for symbols (for example crossed bamboo sticks) showing that outsiders cannot enter at this time (family members may be sick or there may be a ritual being done).
- Wait until you are invited to enter a house, and only sit in the place your host indicates is for you.