New Team Members
The EASLP project team welcomes our new NAFES project leader, Boualy Sengdala, and research assistant Hongvilay Keuthphannavong. With a full complement of team members, we have settled in to fulfilling our project objectives. Our progress has also been reinforced this year through a closer working relationship with the Livestock Development Program (LDP), managed by the Department of Livestock and Fisheries.

Activities since June 2008
This year we have continued to adapt and evaluate livestock extension approaches in the northern districts of Viengthong, Vienxai, Koun and Phonexai, which now operate under the LDP program. Activities have included building staff skills in organising cross-visits, then running farmer cross visits to Nonghet and Pak Ou. We have also monitored farmer learning and progress with livestock since the cross visits by funding monthly visits by district staff.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of capacity building methods for livestock extension, we have researched a development alliance approach as a mechanism for building NGO and government staff capacity in scaling out livestock technologies. Masters student Viengxay Photakoun also continues his work evaluating the capacity building approaches used by government and NGO extension programs for livestock production.

Evaluation of 2007 Farmer Cross Visits
Follow up visits have shown that 12 months after the cross visits, participating farmers have doubled their forage areas from 15,949 m² to 31,114 m² and increased livestock numbers. Cattle numbers increased by 16 head, buffalo by 26 head, goats by 71 head, pigs by 43 head, and poultry by 439 head. Increases in forage area were greatest amongst cross visit farmers in Phonexai district. These farmers have taken up goat fattening in numbers ranging from 2 to 22 head at any given time, as well as increasing their pig, buffalo and cattle numbers.

Cross visit farmers from Koun, Viengxai and Viengthong district have been more conservative, preferring to fatten small numbers of livestock and slowly increase their forage area. This is most likely due to land, labour and cash flow constraints. Case studies being developed by district staff across a range of household wealth status should explain variances in the capacity of farmers to improve livestock production and indirect livelihood benefits.

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The cross visits have created a critical mass of farmers with basic knowledge, skills and
experience in livestock production. This information has since been disseminated widely through regular village meetings and family networks, assisted by ongoing support by district extension staff. Capacity to implement livestock production in these districts has increased to such an extent that EASLP can now use this source of expertise and focus on new districts. A report is available from Boualy Sengdala or Jo Millar.

2008 Cross Visits – Pak Ou & Nong Het
Two farmer cross visits were held in July 2008, involving a total of 24 visiting farmers, 9 government extension staff and 1 student.

On 3-4 July, 12 farmers (3 women, 9 men) from Khoun district were taken to visit cattle fattening farmers in Nong Het (Xiengkhouang). The second visit on 13-14 July took 11 farmers (11 women, 1 man) from Vienxai and Viengthong (Huaphan) to see pig production in Pak Ou (Luangprabang).

Project staff Boualy Sengdala, Hongvilay Keuthphannavong and Neuakhom Theppanid planned the cross visits with local DAFO and PAFO staff, using methods refined from the 2007 cross visit experiences.

Host farmers were chosen for their active involvement in forage for livestock technologies and their willingness and ability to share their methods. Visiting farmers learnt about techniques in planting, transplanting, weed control, fertilising and cutting different forage grasses and legumes, how to best harvest, treat and mix forages for feeding cattle, buffalo and pigs, improved breeding, housing and feeding systems, animal health practices such as vaccination and parasite control, and piglet nursery systems from birth to weaning and feeding.

Feedback sessions were conducted in small groups who presented what they had learnt, what they would do on their return, how cross visits could be improved and future training needs. Discussion facilitated by Neuakhom Theppanid strengthened farmer understanding of what they had seen and heard. Suggestions from farmers included allowing 2-3 days for cross visits to have more time to talk to more farmers; having at least 2 visiting farmers from each village; and involving poorer households and more women.

The 2008 cross visit farmers will be visited every 3 months during 2009 to monitor their progress.

Evaluation of the Legumes for Pigs Project Development Alliance

The aim of this EASLP study was to evaluate the effectiveness of NGOs and government working together in partnership as a way to scale out new agricultural technologies. The Development Alliance created by the ACIAR/CIAT Legumes for Pigs Project provided a case study to evaluate this strategy. The Legumes for Pigs Project (L4PP) Development Alliance was created in 2006 to provide research and development in pig production systems in northern Laos, utilising NGO projects to scale out the L4PP forage legume technology. It involved the L4PP project staff and staff of Laos government extension agencies working with development partners World Vision Laos, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) and German Agro Action (GAA) in four northern Laos provinces.

The study was based on interviews held in July 2008 with eleven staff and six project leaders from government and the three participating NGOs. Here is a summary of the findings.
What worked well
Key features in the formation of the Alliance and dissemination of the L4PP technology were:
• the provision of seed and supporting technical materials,
• the extension methodology of farmer to farmer learning and village learning activities,
• the creation of a field staff network.
As a result of the Alliance process, participants have a greater understanding of the capacity and limitations of different partner sectors. For example, NGOs are perceived as offering:
• a focus at the village level,
• financial support,
• community development expertise,
• ability to involve the poorest villagers,
• ability to reach remote areas and work with ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, Government staff bring technical livestock and extension expertise, legitimacy and knowledge of laws, and a broader overview of the Lao agricultural situation.

Participants believe that working in partnership provides;
• efficiency gains in planning and the allocation of resources,
• sharing of knowledge, skills and ideas,
• increased impetus in working towards the common goal.

Constraints
A number of factors were found to limit the Alliance including staffing and training issues, and differences in attitudes between NGO and government staff which created difficulties in working together.

Broader constraints included disincentives to the free sharing of information between government and NGOs, the bureaucratic procedures and reporting requirements of NGOs, and the remoteness of project villages.

Outcomes
The Alliance was found to have a range of positive outcomes, such as:
• building a strong and well organised network, particularly of staff in the field,
• building the capacity of staff to extend technologies and work together,
• increasing the impact of the project,
• increasing the sustainability of the L4PP technology.

Recommendations for Improvement
Ideas from participants for improving extension capacity included:
• improving the range and presentation of technical materials,
• sharing technical information between government and NGO staff regularly,
• jointly setting up a comprehensive resource of champion farmers and demonstration sites, and
• training staff in the production of extension materials, business skills, and livestock production.

Strengthening networks as well as promoting staff friendships and understanding between the partner organisations were high priority areas. These may be improved through:
• organising study tours of NGO and government sites,
• pooling data, sharing results and reports and creating a map of projects and activities,
• planning together at NGO management and national government level,
• holding quarterly L4PP project network planning meetings,
• holding monthly district field staff meetings to share progress, discuss issues and plan together.

All participants wish to see the project scaled out to new villages and districts in current project provinces, to other branches of current NGOs and by creating new alliances with other NGOs in Laos.

The full evaluation report is available from the contacts on page 4 of this newsletter.
Update: Evaluation of Capacity Building for Livestock Extension in Laos

As reported in our last newsletter, the preliminary results of Mr Photakoun’s initial fieldwork showed that project managers use a wide range of capacity building (CPB) methods for livestock extension staff. These include workshops, mentoring, monthly meetings, on-site-training, in-service-training, on-the-job learning, Village Learning Activities (VLA), Farmer Field School, cross visits and internet. The most common methods used were workshops, on-site-training, and on-the-job learning.

Project managers said that workshops were used to strengthen existing knowledge on livestock development. This method allows the participants to present outputs from their project and receive constructive, critical feedback. Participants can exchange knowledge and experiences at workshops (eg livestock feed requirements). The disadvantages are that workshops cost more money and need good facilitators.

On-the-job learning involves learning from experience. Extension staff gain skills through conducting work in the field by themselves and with farmers (eg planting forages). The weakness is that not all problems are easily dealt with by this method. For example, control of infectious diseases such as Bird Flu cannot be dealt with by on the job learning as it requires outside expertise.

On-site-training provides learning using real life examples. Interviewees found it increases staff confidence in solving farmer problems and improving livestock systems. The disadvantages are that it needs good examples at the sites which may not be present in some districts. For example, the Legumes for Pigs project used their own pig feeding trials to demonstrate pig husbandry techniques to livestock staff.

Mr Photakoun conducted his second field work from 17th October to 6th December 2008. The aim was to rate the effectiveness of each CPB method against a range of knowledge and skills required for livestock extension. Face to face interviews were conducted with 10 District Agriculture and Forestry Offices Heads and Deputy Heads. Semi-structured interviews and a structured survey to rate methods were conducted with 30 livestock extension staff, nine of whom were women.

The livestock extension staff interviewed work closely with farmers, and are employed by one of the following projects with interests in livestock development.
- Capacity Building for Smallholder Livestock Systems Project (CBSLSP)
- Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC)
- Food Security Project (FSP)
- Forage and Livestock System Project (FLSP)
- Livestock Fund for Small Holder Project (LFSP)
- Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP)
- Legumes for Pigs Project (L4PP)
- Livestock Development Project (LDP)
- Nam Ngum River Basin Development Project (NRBDSP)

These projects operate in five provinces (Vientiane, XiengKhuang, Luangprabang Luang Nam Tha and Phongsali). It is expected that analysis of this data over the coming months will yield detailed insight into the utilisation and effectiveness of different capacity building methods for livestock extension staff.

Activities planned for 2009

In the coming year EASLP will start working with the new Livestock Development Project districts across 5 northern provinces. We will be providing extension training workshops to all new LDP district staff in January and February, with workshops in Luang Prabang, Luang Nam Tha and Huaphan. The training will be provided by staff from NAFES, CSU, provincial and district offices.

Extension training will be followed up with mentor visits to each district and six monthly provincial meetings to reflect on staff learning and experiences in extension. This will provide support, monitor staff capacity development and identify training needs. We will then provide further training as needed.

We will continue to monitor farmer progress in our 2007 and 2008 districts through farmer case studies. These will be developed by district staff as part of their extension training.

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