Project annual report

Project

Extension Approaches to Scaling out Livestock Production in Northern Lao PDR

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Progress summary

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 and four key activities under objective 2.

Objective 1 is to adapt livestock extension approaches to eleven targeted poor districts in northern Lao PDR. Following introductory cross visits held in 2007 involving 220 farmers and 24 staff from 6 districts, 16 district staff were selected from three districts and trained in how to conduct more advanced cross visits aimed at the specific interests of women pig farmers and Hmong cattle producers. Twelve Hmong farmers from Koun district were taken to Nonghet district, near the Vietnam border, to learn about cattle fattening and marketing techniques from more experienced Hmong cattle fatteners. Twelve Lao Loum and Thai Deng women farmers from Huaphan province visited pig producers in Pak Ou district, Luang Prabang province to learn about intensive piglet raising and fattening techniques. The project team then trained and mentored all 24 district extension staff in following up those 48 farmers who attended cross visits in September 2007 (24 farmers) and July 2008 (24 farmers). Data on changes in livestock numbers and management practices, forage area, and net profit from livestock sales has been collected by district staff every 4 months during the reporting period.

The same 24 livestock staff were also trained in how to write farmer case studies using interviews, digital photos and a document template. Sixteen farmer case studies were developed (10 men and 6 women) from various ethnic backgrounds (3 Hmong, 4 Khamu, 2 Lamaid, 1 Thaideng, 6 Lao Loum) and enterprises (4 cattle, 2 buffalo, 10 pigs). The case studies will be used as an extension tool within districts to create further awareness of the potential for increasing livestock productivity. Research is underway to use digital story software to enhance farmer learning based on case studies and recommended technologies. Guidelines have been drafted on how to write case studies and how to conduct cross visits for use by government and NGO livestock programs in Laos. These guidelines will be modified for particular ethnic groups such as Hmong and Khamu, based on current research into extension approaches for working with ethnic groups in upland areas. Livestock extension approaches will be adapted to five new districts in conjunction with the Livestock Development Project following training of 48 new staff in extension theory and methods in January 2009.

Research was conducted on the role of development alliances between government extension and NGO projects as an extension approach for scaling out livestock technologies (in this case the use of legumes for pigs). The findings have been published as CSU report, presented as a paper at the Innovation Asia-Pacific Symposium in Nepal and incorporated into implementation of ACIAR project (AH/2004/046). A journal paper was published in *Agriculture and Human Values* on strategies for scaling out agricultural technologies based on project findings.

Objective 2 is to evaluate the cost effectiveness of a range of capacity building techniques for extension staff. Interviews were conducted with 15 program managers, 20 district livestock staff and 10 district managers by Viengxay Photakoun, Masters JAF at Charles Sturt University. The findings determine which capacity building methods are used, their relative effectiveness, the factors influencing effectiveness and how capacity building methods can be strengthened. Thirty district staff were also asked to rate 10 capacity building methods according to their relative effectiveness (from 1 to 5) in improving knowledge and skills across a range of livestock management areas. The most common
methods used were training workshops, on the job learning, staff meetings and cross visits or study tours. Strengths and weaknesses of each method have been documented with quotes from managers and staff. These findings will be applied to a multicriteria analysis as relative indicators of benefits and compared to relative costs of using each capacity building method.

Capacity building of livestock extension staff is also being evaluated using competency self assessments against key technical and extension competencies. An assessment was carried out by the project research assistant and two mentors of 24 district extension staff who started in 2006. Changes in competency levels will be monitored over time in conjunction with capacity building methods used. An opportunity exists to measure competencies of new staff who started in 2008 and track their progress over the next two years in conjunction with the Livestock Development Project.