An Evaluation of the Legumes for Pigs Project Development Alliance

A report for the management team of the ACIAR Project 'Forage Legumes for supplementing village pigs in Lao PDR'

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Executive Summary

The Legumes for Pigs Project Development Alliance ('the Alliance') has been in existence since 2006 as part of the ACIAR/CIAT Legumes for Pigs project. It involves the Legumes for Pigs (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 Alliance aims to create direct links between research and development in pig production systems in northern Laos, utilising NGO projects to scale out the L4PP forage legume technology.

This study was initiated in 2008 to evaluate the effectiveness of the Alliance as a scaling out mechanism including the benefits and constraints of such alliances and suggested strategies for improvement. The study was based on interviews with eleven staff and six project leaders from government and the three participating NGOs.

Benefits

Features of the formation of the Alliance and dissemination of the Legumes for Pigs technology particularly valuable to participants 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, and
- the participatory approach used.

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 concentrated focus at the village level,
- financial support,
- community development expertise,
- ability to involve the poorest villagers, and
- ability to reach remote areas and work with ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, Government staff offer technical advice and extension planning and reporting expertise at a broader level and contribute an overview of the Lao agricultural situation.

Participants believe that working together as an Alliance can provide;

- efficiency gains in planning and the allocation of resources,
- sharing of knowledge, skills and ideas, and
- increased impetus in working towards the common goal.

Constraints

A number of factors were perceived as limitations or constraints to the Alliance including;

- differences in educational levels of government and NGO staff,
- a general lack of staff with appropriate education and experience,
- regular staff turnover,
- attitudes such as parochialism and an emphasis on ranking, and
- different priorities.

Systemic constraints also affect the functioning of the Alliance, such as the government system which creates disincentives to the free sharing of information. NGOs are constrained by factors such as inflexible budgets and project schedules, as well as bureaucratic procedures and onerous reporting requirements. Another constraint is the remoteness of project villages, with attendant difficulties of communication –for both information flow and in the case of disease outbreak, time and financial impost due to the travel required for monitoring, staff training and fieldwork, and the different cultural outlooks and needs of remote ethnic groups.

Outcomes

Participants articulated outcomes of the Development Alliance 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, and
- increasing the sustainability of the L4PP technology.

Recommendations for Improvement

Ideas from participants for improving the functioning of the L4PP 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, promoting staff friendships and facilitating greater understanding between the partner organisations was a major feature of participant aspirations. Suggestions included;

- organising study tours of NGO and government sites,
- creating a map of projects and activities,
- planning together at NGO management and national government level,
- pooling of data and sharing results and reports,
- 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.

1. Introduction

The livestock sector in Lao PDR is currently moving from subsistence to market based livestock production. Increased smallholder livestock production offers opportunities to increase household income, reduce labour requirements, and reduce environmentally damaging practices such as shifting cultivation (ACIAR, 2006).

New production systems using forage technologies have been developed, and various vehicles such as government extension agencies and bilateral/multilateral projects used to scale out adoption amongst the villages of northern Lao PDR.

One such vehicle has been the Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance; a partnership between Non Government Organisation development projects and a livestock research based project. The Legumes for Pigs Development Alliance has operated since 2006 in four provinces of northern Lao PDR, extending forage technologies to villagers producing pigs on a small scale.

Using a Development Alliance as a scaling out mechanism has not previously been tried in this context, and evaluation of the process provides feedback which may be of immediate value to the Legumes for Pigs project, and in the longer term become a source for future Alliances in the field.

Evaluation of the L4PP Development Alliance has been undertaken by the ACIAR funded 'Extension Approaches to Scaling Out Livestock Production in Northern Lao PDR' (EASLP) project, primarily due to its possibilities as a vehicle for scaling out livestock technology.

The aim of the study has been "to evaluate the effectiveness of the formation of an alliance between research and development agencies as a strategy for maximising the uptake of forage legume Stylo for pig production in northern Lao PDR".

2. Background

The establishment of a Development Alliance has been an activity of the ACIAR Project 'Forage Legumes for supplementing village pigs in Lao PDR', locally known as the Legumes for Pigs (L4PP) project. The project is managed by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture, Laos (CIAT), and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), Laos, and collaborates with partners including the International Livestock Research Institute, Laos, the Prairie Swine Centre, Saskatoon, Canada, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries, Australia. (Horne, 2006)

The L4PP Development Alliance was formed in 2006 with the aim of creating direct links between research and development elements of smallholder pig production systems in Laos. The Alliance brings together L4PP research scientists, government extension staff (both district and provincial) and Non-Government Organisation (NGO) development projects operating in northern Lao PDR (Horne, 2006).

NGOs were selected on the basis of their experience of, and commitment to work with, smallholder farmers in northern Laos. Of the four NGO projects selected as potential partners, three eventually participated in the L4PP Development Alliance. These were World Vision Laos (WVL) operating in Phokoun and Xieng Nguen, German Agro Action (GAA) in

Oudomxai and Phongsali, and Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) in Xieng Khouang. Each NGO, while having their own development aims and methodologies, were willing to commit to the L4PP project and contribute some of their own resources (Horne, 2006). While most employed field staff directly, some NGO staff were seconded from government positions on as short term basis.

The Alliance was to become a vehicle for scaling out the L4PP forage legume technology, assisting to deliver benefits for farmers. These benefits included labour savings in collecting feed and improved income from higher survival rates of young pigs and faster growth rates. NGO Partners would also feed back issues to researchers about on-farm factors influencing the adoption of forage legumes, creating an ongoing interactive cycle of research and development. It would create a learning environment focussed on on-ground improvements in pig production (Horne, 2006).

Initially, the L4PP offered NGO partners 30kg Stylo seed per year, written Stylo extension materials on Stylo agronomy, leaf meal production, seed production, practical pig management, other potentially useful feed resources and impacts from improved pig systems, formal training for field staff in Stylo agronomy, field mentoring by experienced livestock specialists, twice yearly review and planning sessions, cross visits to different stylo feeding systems, and access to research results. CIAT staff supplied seed and produced extension materials, delivered training and organised planning and review workshops and cross visits. Field support was provided by government extension staff at district (DAFO) and provincial level (PAFO) (Horne, 2006).

Further needs and activities were identified with participants. As a result, training has also been provided in other areas such as pig production, animal health and marketing.

3. Methodology

Semi-structured interviews, where interviewers follow lines of enquiry based on, but not restricted to, a pre-determined interview guide, were carried out with seventeen program participants over a two week period in July 2008. Two English speaking interviewers from Charles Sturt University (Australia) worked with two Lao translators, both of whom have knowledge of the agriculture sector in Laos. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed in Australia. Interview questions followed the interview guide as set out in Table 1 below.

L4PP NGO Alliance Interview Guide
1. How have you been involved with the Legumes for Pigs Project?
2. With your experience of this alliance process what has worked well, and what hasn't worked well?
3. What do you think of the overall process of government and non-government organisation working together?
4. How can government/ NGO partnerships such as this be improved?

Table 1: Interview Guide

Interviewees comprised two leaders of the CIAT Legumes for Pigs project, four leaders of the NGO Projects involved in the Alliance, six NGO field staff, and five government extension staff involved with the Legumes for Pigs project. The table below indicates the representation of interviews undertaken.

	Project Leaders	Field Staff
CIAT L4PP	2	
L4PP Provincial		3
L4PP District		2
NGO – World Vision	1	2
NGO - CRWRC	1	1
NGO - GAA	2	3
Total	**6**	**11**

Table 2: Partner Representation in Interviews

Quotes within the text of this report are, for reasons of privacy, attributed only to Government (G) sources – which includes CIAT and L4PP staff – or NGO (N) sources. Individuals are numbered (G1- G7) and (N1- N10).

Interviews were conducted with staff from the provinces of Xiengkhouang, Luangprabang, Phongsali, and Oudomxai; all of the provinces in which the L4PP NGO Alliance is present.

The roles of CIAT staff interviewed included leadership and management of the L4PP project, project co-ordination, training and extension of the technology to NGO staff, government staff and farmers.

Government staff interviewed were livestock extension specialists involved in provincial and district level planning and delivery of L4PP extension activities, communicating with NGOs, data gathering and reporting.

NGO Project leaders interviewed oversaw the L4PP project as a small part of their overall development programme. NGO field staff similarly included the L4PP as a part of their overall development role within their NGO project. Field staff roles range from livestock development including fisheries, poultry, pigs and cattle, to horticulture, forage extension, animal registration, grassland survey and regulation (in the case of government seconded staff), distribution of donated livestock and introduction of micro-credit systems.

All Field Staff interviewed were involved with the L4PP at a local level. All had attended at least one L4PP training session. All but one had also attended L4PP workshops where sharing experiences, evaluation and planning were undertaken.

NGO Project Leaders had attended some workshops and training sessions, although participation was less due to other commitments. All maintained contact with the project via meetings with their field staff, phone and email.

4. Findings

4.1 What worked well

In response to questions relating to positive aspects of the L4PP Alliance, participants articulated successes on a number of levels. NGO participants noted aspects such as the low cost of participating in the project and the support provided by CIAT in helping with initial implementation, setting up village learning activities and follow-up with farmers. The major themes common to all participants were the technology itself, the provision of supporting materials, the extension methodology, and the creation of a strong network.

4.1.1 Stylo technology

Positive productivity and livelihood impacts
The L4PP Stylo technology has been very successful for farmers. Both government and NGO field staff have seen "progress every day" (G2) in target villages, with increasing areas of stylo production, increasing numbers of farmers using stylo, increasing pig production and improvements to management systems. They see that the technology has enabled a more manageable pig production system. This has improved the lives of villagers through increased income and by saving time previously used in forage collection. NGO field staff also pointed out other benefits for villages, such as the health benefits of having cleaner villages (as pigs are now housed) and a greater understanding of animal diseases;

> "…we saw also the village (was) cleaner than before, because…
> they advise (farmers) to keep pig in the pen. Before, villagers they
> don't know how disease occur(s) in the village with the animal
> health. Now villagers they know. Also they, some farmers, ate the
> pigs that died, but now (they) never eat." (N8)

Easy to implement
The technology was praised as being such an easy technology to implement; well suited, easy to grow, easy to harvest, and easy to use: "Is very simple for growing stylo, and feeding as well." (N2)

An inspiration for field staff
Seeing the successes of Stylo in their villages has enthused NGO staff, who had not known legume forages before. CIAT project leaders pointed out that NGOs have in the past undertaken many activities with little real impact, because they didn't have the technologies. This technology has real impact.

4.1.2 The extension approach and CIAT support

A successful combination of staff training methods
In terms of their own learning, NGO field staff found the combination of "in the room" and "at the scene" (N9) provided by CIAT training courses, workshops and cross visits highly valuable. CIAT staff felt that introducing the technology, step by step, also introduced the extension methodology to NGO field staff, in a non-intrusive way.

> "Just step by step to helping them to (understand) how to work
> with the farmer to introduce the forage technology, or how to
> improve the pig production system. And so they don't feel that
> they (have) already (been) introduced to learn new methods." (G6)

Farmer to Farmer learning and Village Learning Activities

All participants including the CIAT project staff identified farmer-to-farmer learning activities such as demonstrations, model villages and cross visits, combined with the Village Learning Activities (where villagers are assisted to devise, carry out and measure productivity trials) as major factors in the success of the project.

> "What was really important…we measure the weight of the pigs.
> And in these villages that we measure, they see: one month pig
> traditionally raise and one month pig with stylo – (they) can see the
> difference" (N4).

CIAT staff felt that the Village Learning Activities are useful as a tool for staff and villagers to evaluate new technologies and compare them to current practices. Using this tool encourages the learning environment for villagers and creates demonstration sites. Field staff have seen that demonstrations and well set up trials make all the difference for farmers: "…when the people have seen, they explaining. 'Oh, is true. Feed stylo is good for pig'." This translates to very quick adoption, especially regarding stylo growing and livestock management:

> "…when we have demonstrate to show the farmer, the farmer is
> more interested…. If they have the project to show…everybody
> will 'More, more, more!'" (G3).

NGO field staff stated that they are now confident that they could continue to scale out by themselves using these methods, along with district government staff.

A Wholistic package

Another positive aspect identified by NGO staff is the wholistic nature of the approach, with farmers learning all aspects from growing stylo to feeding, housing and watering of pigs, animal health issues and marketing. They feel that this approach is a very positive one for farmer learning:

> "I see one village farmer he express himself that he really happy
> for this L4PP. Like he has a lot of pigs (now). Before that he had
> some pigs, but very thin and not so good health. After we introduce
> him to help what pig house…how to feed stylo…we promote the
> (water) tap… his activity grow – going well." (N2)

CIAT provided seed and technical materials

NGO project leaders, as well as NGO and government field staff commented on the provision of technical documents and manuals by CIAT. They were described as well presented, good quality information relating to the planting, management and use of Stylo. NGO field staff also felt that the provision of seed for initial plantings contributed to the success of the project in their villages. "… we have the stylo, we have the material, we have the guidelines, the rules …" (N4)

From the CIAT perspective, the production of these materials proved a drain on resources, as technical information has been needed in areas over and above the original intention of Stylo agronomy:

"I do know that there is scope for so much more… it's not just stylo or legumes…but it's all these other things…Biosecurity for example, which is a big issue." (G7)

The fact that CIAT has physically relocated to Laos, and can draw on a local network of expertise, has enabled them to produce materials and provide training in areas beyond those originally intended.

The participatory approach
Staff at all levels appreciated the cycle of participatory planning, taking action, and discussion and evaluation of the action. Government field staff cited the participatory approach where staff were able to identify areas of need, plan training and attend once organised by CIAT:

"An example: (CIAT are) running the workshop here on market chain… If we find an opening and we want to know something, have knowledge on the market chain, so…we plan and just submit to (CIAT) and (they) organise this workshop for them" (G5).

Both NGO and government field staff commented particularly on the opportunity to discuss issues and plan together.

Linking Research with Development
At another level, CIAT project leaders described the success of linking research and development, where the two way flow of information drives research, creates a learning environment and concentrates the development effort.

"It really creates a better learning environment, but also a sort of development environment where people do put more emphasis on the pig production, or livestock production, in their project, and try to do really well." (G7)

4.1.3 Creating a strong network

A forum for all staff
A recurrent theme, particularly from NGO field staff, related to the strong network created by the project. The L4PP workshops created a forum to share knowledge between staff ranging from highly experienced staff to younger and newer staff. They learnt from the positive experiences of others, shared and discussed problems, and planned together.

The workshops were a place to bring the latest ideas from college to staff who were educated long ago;

"…she is the new specialist directly from college, but colleagues complete this was long time ago and have more experience, so they share each other, but this thing that she pass the college, which things the colleagues doesn't know she also help to explain to the colleagues. They share together, and they participate to plan together…" (N8)

Importantly, staff felt welcome to participate and developed new friendships with local colleagues whom they may otherwise have never met. "He three years already working for (the NGO project), and he never met government staff like this before" (N6).

Overall the project engendered staff confidence in their newfound network. NGO staff felt happy to call local District or Provincial staff, could approach CIAT for help with other problems, and also felt confident to call on staff from other NGOs.

Opportunities to share with partner organisations
NGO staff also appreciated the opportunity to share experiences with other NGOs. Some adopted practices from other NGOs for their districts as a result:

> "…after taking staff to train with L4PP then they experience from advice. And not just that, they also share the experience with another NGO who had different experience, and they use those experience and adopt to the conditions in this district" (N5)

From the CIAT perspective, the project has provided a platform for the exchange of experiences at the management level, with NGO leaders becoming linked with the network by attending workshops and planning sessions. One GAA project leader noted the enjoyment he felt at sharing with other foreigners (project leaders) with a Lao focus, and the excitement of seeing the project operating in other places in Laos, as well as how the other NGOs operate.

> "It was nice to have a Laos subject which speak production, and go out and meeting together, without some other subject of discussion. It was very nice opportunity to share, not only pig experience, but all experience" (N4)

4.2 Benefits of NGO and Government Partnerships

None of those interviewed had previously experienced a partnership between government and NGO such as the L4PP project. While the NGO participants had some experience of working with other NGOs such as CARE and JeSuisse in different contexts, their involvement with government projects has only been on an informal basis. Similarly, some government staff have had some small contact with NGO projects before in the course of their work, but never as a formal partnership.

All participants were appreciative of the complementary qualities L4PP partners brought for the improvement of the lives of Lao villagers. Within that general consensus, staff from the different sectors had varying perspectives on what each partner offered.

4.2.1 The contribution of NGOs

NGO's bring a different approach to development
From the CIAT perspective, NGOs were focussed, committed, and keen for new experiences. They brought different ideas and methodologies on how to work with communities. The NGO approach was seen as valuable for the impact of the L4PP project, as NGOs demonstrated to government staff that it was possible to achieve much quickly, with a concentrated effort.

> "NGO staff are very focussed and usually very committed, so they are working very hard… I think it shows government staff that if you work really concentrated on something you can achieve a lot in a very short time, and I think the NGOs have done that". (G7)

NGOs focus on working with poor communities

CIAT leaders noted that the NGOs focused on poor communities and poor farmers, and brought a range of tools and activities to work with them. This was in contrast to the government extension approach, "because we only work with livestock, and the poorest farmer in the village, they don't have any livestock" (G6) Government field staff noted two NGO strategies of particular benefit to the project; livestock assistance programs and micro-credit systems, both of which enable poor farmers to participate.

> "…some colleague come to help the farmers to raise pig, and they will receive piglet from the NGO… at the same time they teach and educate them (about) the raising" (G4).

NGOs offer new opportunities to scale out

NGOs were seen to use the knowledge they gained through the L4PP project to train more staff, including government extension staff, in their project areas. One Project Leader pointed out that

> "…government staff just learn from us, from NGO, but before they not believe about the food for pigs is such good, and the people… need … the legume for pigs. (This was) after they came from the (cross-visit) with the other NGO". (N1)

As well, they were able to scale out the technology to more villages than L4PP project staff alone would have been able to cover.

> "…the strong part of the Alliance is that the NGOs… reach more farmers in the villages, because you know we are the research project – we don't have much fund to work with farmers, so the NGOs can help us to take the technology to more villages, to more farmers."(G6)

NGO staff are enthusiastic, competent and confident

Government field staff appreciated the enthusiasm, dedication and eagerness of the NGO staff. They acknowledged that NGO staff brought their own extension knowledge and indeed "are very expert" (G2). They felt that once NGO staff were trained in the L4PP technology, they were competent, confident and capable of expanding the technology:

> "(we) didn't have to hesitate for them, because they start to gain to know the …situation, the pig, about the point of stylo feeding. They thought that those NGO's staff can do implementation well" (G5)

Importantly, they feel that NGO staff are keen to work with them, citing instances where staff have asked for help with technical issues.

NGOs work closely with single villages and can respond quickly

NGO project leaders feel that their projects are very important at village level as they can concentrate on single villages, while DAFO staff need to spread their attentions much wider. NGO staff work very closely with farmers, "so villager is like a friend, and really do something together" (N2). Due to this close contact, NGOs can also respond quickly where government response may be slower.

NGOs have financial resources
NGOs also feel that they offer a financial contribution, providing start-up credit for villagers, purchasing piglets for poor farmers, and compensating DAFO staff for work done, thus improving their pay level.

4.2.2 The contribution of Government staff

Government staff have the power and technical resources
NGO Project Leaders believe that the particular contribution of government staff is in their power to organise meetings and draw on a wide range of technical knowledge: "…the good thing is they can organise meeting or give advice to people in what area. They have the power…. "(N2).

NGO Field Staff also commented on the broader powers of government staff, for example in having disease control programs and the power to set up quarantine procedures. They appreciate that government staff know the law and are available to help when problems arise:

> "Between government and NGO staff, work together is good,
> because the staff government … know the law of the government for
> animal production, like when some people who like to sell the
> animal, …the staff government they make the certificate for them."
> (N9)

Field staff spoke of their strategy of always visiting villages along with government staff, as government staff provide a legitimate entry point for villages.

Government staff work at a broader level
NGO Project Leaders feel that government staff are in a position to have more of an overview of what is going on: "They work with many NGO so they can get information from each…" (N2). Government Field Staff also felt that their contribution lies in working at a broader level than NGO staff, particularly in planning, following up activities and reporting on a district and provincial level. They pointed out that

> "NGO staff, they learn what the projects are only, but the
> government staff (has) been working (at a broader level), because the
> government staff (has) been to more than the NGO staff". (G3)

They believe they bring expertise, experience and knowledge, and are able to respond according to NGO need.

4.2.3 The perceived benefits of working together

Working together results in more than what individual partners bring
Participants at all levels agree that the benefits of working together go beyond what individual partners can bring to the project. There are efficiency gains made through mutual planning and budget allocations for activities. There is the strength and impetus of working towards the shared goal of improving the lives of Lao villagers. There is the goodwill and willingness to help each other which comes from mutual understanding and closer contact.

Opportunities to compare, adopt and adapt different models
There are also benefits springing from the nature of the Lao development context, such as the knowledge of their own geographic area and cultural traditions that partners bring to the

project. The different NGOs also have different development models, the advantages and shortcomings of which can be evaluated by the different partners.

A good example stressed by GAA staff, CIAT leaders and government field staff is the GAA model. GAA employ government staff rather than their own technical people. The government staff plan, budget and implement the project, bringing their knowledge of government strategy and procedure plus their government technical resources and combining this with the NGO budget and methodology. Staff are given the training, encouragement and opportunity to develop their own ideas, be creative and take responsibility. They receive thorough on the job training in responsible participatory development, with training provided on facilitation, running group meetings, running cross visits etc. According to field staff

> "Working system of GAA… these are good things for them. GAA let the government staff… plan the job plan, budget plan also, and they bring the plan and the budget to implement… with villager". (N7)

Combining complementary skills and methodologies
On a practical level, field staff pointed out that working together also takes advantage of the different skills and knowledge that NGO and government staff bring; they can discuss local issues together and solve problems in different ways. Visiting villages together, this complimentary knowledge can help solve problems much faster than if field staff face problems alone. "…working together is good, is better, because NGO activity (and government activity) is the same. Come together to share, is better". (G1)

4.3 Limitations and constraints affecting the Alliance

4.3.1 Conflict due to different levels of staff education and experience

According to NGO project leaders, the staff profiles of government and non-government partners are markedly different. NGO staff are usually higher educated (having a degree or doctorate) than DAFO staff. Of DAFO staff, "Seventy percent have no experience and just finish a middle degree." (N3) On the other hand, DAFO staff are usually older and more experienced than NGO staff.

This creates difficulties with activities such as staff mentoring, when working relationships are affected by perceptions of credibility and worth. NGOs are aware of these issues and encourage team spirit so that staff can work well together. For example, the CRWRC system encourages team spirit by having weekly, monthly and annual team meetings, and six monthly self and peer evaluation sessions for all staff. For CRWRC, "…it is going on well because we have good co-operation. We have a team staff here and we have value each other" (N2)

4.3.2 Staff attitudes

The Top Down approach
NGO leaders find that staff attitudes create difficulties to NGO and government staff working well together. Foremost is the "top down" (N3) working style of government staff, which they feel renders staff unmotivated, unable to take initiative and unwilling to take responsibility for development activities. Government staff working with NGO projects have to "unlearn" this attitude, which takes "about one and a half to two years, depending on the people" (N3)

An emphasis on ranking
NGO leaders also point to the government system's emphasis on "ranking" (N4). This causes friction as NGO and government staff compete for perceived levels of rank. A factor causing perceptions of rank to assume importance for staff is the difference in pay levels between NGO staff, contract staff and DAFO. One NGO project leader points to the contract staffing system in particular as being unfair. Contract staff often leave the projects after years of work with little pay and little 'rank', and no way to get into the government system. He advocates on their behalf and has successfully placed several ex-GAA staff in government roles. The NGO projects have various methods of compensating DAFO staff for working with them, such as paying per diem, or "some present" (N2).

The emphasis on rank also permeates to farmer selection activities in the villages. NGO project leaders find that government staff will often choose the village headman or the richest farmer, rather than those who are most in need or have the most interest. (N3)

'We are the Experts'
Another attitude interfering with the participatory development process of NGOs was that government staff have been told "you (are) the experts" (N3), so acknowledging farmer knowledge means they lose face. Thus they are not keen to facilitate farmer-to-farmer learning. After two years of persistence, GAA's government staff learned that using farmer-to- farmer learning also brings them kudos for facilitating, meaning that they are now more motivated to find opportunities, "and now it's becoming an extension feature" (N3).

Parochialism
NGO leaders also cited parochialism and preciousness over levels of knowledge impeding staff learning from each other, with the example that "some guy" from a remote province like Oudomxai couldn't possibly have anything to teach staff from Luangprabang! (N3)

4.3.3 Staffing Issues

Staff turnover means new training is required
Staffing was raised as an issue by all sectors, chiefly in terms of staff movements necessitating retraining of new staff in the L4PP methodology. In some cases, when staff with the technical knowledge have left, project activities have been discontinued: "(Staff leave and) they replace with government staff people who don't know the technique to go with him, and so the activity hasn't had the continue" (N6).

Few staff have expertise in livestock
Government field staff also noted that NGO field staff are more likely to be trained in areas other than livestock, such as agronomy or horticulture, and therefore had to rely more on DAFO staff for livestock related advice. From their perspective, NGO staff often find themselves spread too thin amongst the wide ranging activities of their NGO; stressed by the need to be the expert in too many areas. Says one field officer "he cannot do well at three things; pig raising, poultry raising and fishery" (N7). NGO staff also see a need for the government Livestock section to employ gender specialists, as livestock raising is a gender related task in Laos.

Difficult to find qualified staff
For NGO leaders, finding local people with the right experience and education is a constant problem:

"…we are competing around staff. Even two (of the same NGO)
projects we are competing. Huge problem, not getting people in
time, the right people. Its impossible…some organisations (are)
sitting around for a year or two…" (N3).

NGOs compete fiercely for the few qualified staff, and are often forced to hire young staff
from other provinces. This causes problems with local staff and villagers, as they lack
credibility.

Few appropriate training opportunities
NGO leaders feel a real lack of training opportunities "in Lao, for Lao people, at the Lao
level" (N3). They are always seeking training opportunities and have used LEAP, study tours
to other projects, training by TV set, and the CIAT training of course. They find that
NAFES/NAFRI training is too expensive.

4.3.4 Differing priorities

Both government and NGO field staff pointed out difficulties stemming from their different
priorities. NGO staff complain that government staff, tending a large area and with meetings
and reporting duties, are often unable to respond when NGOs need help. Government staff
complain that NGO staff, with their diverse roles, have "many, many work to do" (G1) and
often try to implement L4PP activities too late in the season.

While NGO staff are focussed on their villages and their project, government staff feel that
government staff who work for NGOs must remember their position and not think only of the
short term NGO project. Absorbed in their NGO project, they risk neglecting their
government network and consideration to the broader picture. "He must have the point… not
to work with the NGO always, you must continue to (be) the government staff in the period".
(G4)

4.3.5 Systemic constraints

A number of constraints were voiced that lie with the systems within which participants
operate.

The L4PP project parameters
CIAT project leaders found that the project itself, with the focus on legume feeding for pigs,
was narrow compared to what interested people; production systems, animal health,
biosecurity, and feeding livestock generally. The project has its own aims, objectives and
operational requirements which it must fulfil, and is unable to meet all of the needs which
have emerged. "I think it's a challenge us researchers always have when you start working
with development, because they are not just interested in one little thing…" (G7)

Disincentives to free sharing of information
Project leaders also described the government system as creating disincentives for the free
sharing of information. Because departments (NAFRI and NAFES) can sell training and
technical information, there is a disincentive to share with NGOs, as well as the fact that other
people can't afford to pay for the information. One NGO project leader described the training
as "Horribly expensive for Lao people, (and for my project), my budget is very limited…"
(N3)

Lack of government budget to support NGO works

Government field staff pointed out a lack of government budget for the project, which means that staff cannot go out to villages when NGO staff request assistance, nor can government staff provide funds such as NGOs do for the purchase of livestock for the poorest farmers.

Bureaucratic processes

NGO staff at all levels found their own bureaucratic processes a hindrance to participating as they would like. NGO project leaders described a lack of staff coupled with an inflexible budget, time consuming and onerous project approval processes, and a constant need for monitoring and reporting which placed an excessive and stressful burden on staff and leaders. An example given was

> "…I put in a budget amendment, for change of budget, and the (NGO) hasn't approved it yet. So this is the situation. I am basically already using it. This has been the problem for the last four or five months…" (N3)

Another NGO's staff had difficulty implementing the L4PP methodology as "(Our NGO) do have (their own) policy; they want to explain (the process) this way because they have (a) different idea…" (N5)

4.3.5 Working with ethnic minorities in remote areas

Remote areas are too expensive

The Alliance presents distinct opportunities in introducing the L4PP technology in remote areas. While government projects tend to service more populated provinces, NGOs specifically target remote areas and ethnic minorities. By working together, "(NGOs) learn (technology) from us, we learn from them how to work in those (remote) villages." (G6) However, though NGOs have taken the technology to remote districts like Oudomxai, CIAT project leaders haven't had the resources to follow up there, relying on staff reporting back during meetings and workshops. "We need to see the progress to be able to offer appropriate advice; sometimes by the time they come to us it is too late." (G6)

Budgetary constraints also affect NGO staff in remote districts, who find that the cost of attending L4PP training and planning meetings is prohibitive, and that government staff have neither time nor budget to visit remote villages when assistance is required.

Communication is limited

NGO field staff often live and work in isolated villages, with no electricity or communication technology, little access to outside news, and no way of knowing if disease outbreaks have occurred in other parts: "… (the NGO project) were getting the newspaper, but arrive about four or five days late, but now no more, they don't get from this paper" (N8). When the unexpected does occur, they have limited sources of information to consult for help.

Ethnic minorities are not interested in a market economy

Some NGO project leaders find that working in remote areas, where other projects have not 'trained' staff and villagers in a 'handout' attitude, is much more successful in terms of working with a participatory approach. However, they have encountered difficulties with ethnic minority villagers who are not able to "see the future" (N4) in this type of technology. They have their own cultural needs (preferring, for example, fatty pigs to the muscled pigs raised on stylo) and traditional systems, and find the time taken between planting stylo and

harvesting pigs too long. Moreover, in remote areas there is little economic exchange; markets are far away and the people don't have "this economic thinking" (N4).

4.4 Outcomes of the Alliance

4.4.1 Building a network

For CIAT staff, the network between NGO field staff and government staff is now very strong and well organised. Of all the Alliance outcomes, this is "the more powerful thing that we have achieved with this project" (G6).

Functional evidence of the network is found in the now regular meetings and cross visits between the NGO partners, where they share experience and knowledge, and regular meetings between NGOs and their district staff for sharing, discussion and planning. NGO project leaders spoke of maintaining email contact and sharing information, technical manuals and training opportunities with each other. NGO field staff, as stated earlier, are enthusiastic with the new relationships and confident in the support of the network, while government field staff are happy with the new communication channels formed.

4.4.2 Building the capacity of staff

At the field level, staff have gained knowledge in both technical aspects and extension methods. CIAT staff feel that the capacity building for field staff, particularly government district staff has been effective "because we have responded to their needs and provided training with experts where they need it" (G6). None of the NGO field staff had previous experience of Stylo, and with the introduction of the technology they "gain knowledge from nothing and have knowledge to help farmers and villagers"(N8). They have also learnt extension skills and now feel better equipped to work with and support farmers.

NGO project leaders noted other aspects of capacity building, with the project "opening the eyes" (N4) of their staff to a whole new technology, and giving them greater confidence in their role and responsibility within their programme. NGO leaders also feel that the alliance has built capacity of DAFO staff in terms of understanding how NGOs work. They have found DAFO staff more motivated to learn, to be more involved and work harder. They have much more knowledge, more confidence, and understand how to "promote the village" (N2).

From the CIAT perspective, yet another layer emerges as they see NGO staff leaving and moving to other Lao NGOs. "Knowledge moves with people" (G7), and these staff use their L4PP knowledge and implement it in their new environment. In this way CARE Sayabouri has been brought into the L4PP project, bringing more NGO staff to receive training.

4.4.3 Increased project impact

As the example above indicates, the Alliance has certainly increased the impact of the L4PP technology. According to CIAT leaders, it has been a major part of the scaling out strategy;

> "…. By the end of the project we have to work with 1000 farmers,
> but now we already work with nearly 1200, and sixty percent of
> those farmers (are) from the NGO. I think this will be a new
> experience for any government project…" (G6)

More staff trained

Several other factors have contributed to this expansion of impact. One is the movement of trained NGO staff to new areas with different NGO projects. Another is the training of government staff in new areas by different branches of participating NGOs.

More demonstration sites

Further factors lie with the NGO ways of working, for example participating NGOs have set up their own trial sites, demonstration farms and model villages, for use in both farmer training and cross visits with other NGOs.

> "After attending the training course, they have the knowledge how to plant the forage and they… do the trial site in two villages – to try to build up the champion farmer. Then they have to do the different learn from the trial. Then they use that trial to be the technical points, to show the farmer, to bring farmers to see, and to look at how the farmer, they have the trial" (N1).

Villagers trained in basic skills

The NGOs also work very closely with villages so that villagers become low level extension agents; model farmers, village veterinary workers, and village health workers:

> "What we do have is village veterinary workers who have been trained and supplied with equipment, responsible for all the vaccination and curative medicinal stuff for animals…"(N3).

The NGO then buys vaccine and the trained worker is in charge for that village.

4.4.4 Increased sustainability

Participants at all levels felt that the Alliance increased the sustainability of the L4PP technology.

Farmers self-sufficient in seed

Indicators of sustainability lie with project farmer's ability to successfully harvest their own Stylo seed, or alternatively being able to source seed from outside the project themselves. While the L4PP project is still supplying seed, it is only used for new farmers, old areas produce or source their own:

> "…this now is very good, because from the first year they give a big volume for farmers, and reduce volume in year two, and this year is smaller amount. They giving to new farmer only. (They would have some to sell, only) just for two or three years they collect seed and expand their area" (G5).

[Outside seed sources include Thai seed companies]

Farmers adapting technology

Further evidence of sustainability is farmers taking ownership of the technology. For example NGO staff reported that Hmong people in their projects have adapted the Stylo technology to cattle, buffalo and chicken feeding: "Using the stylo not just for pigs, they experience, but Hmong people they use for cattle, especially for fighting bulls. And chicken, they use" (N5). Hmong people have expressed interest in growing other grasses and are not only saving Stylo seed, but other grasses such as Guinea and Mulatto.

4.5   Improving the Alliance: Lessons learnt and future ideas

4.5.1 Improving the presentation of the technolog*y*

More Technical Materials
A whole range of extension materials have been developed through the L4PP project. These have generally been well received, with many positive comments from participants on the quality of the materials.

NGO project leaders would like more technical materials produced for villagers. These need to be simple, presented in Lao language, using pictures and a few simple steps. They do not necessarily need to be produced by CIAT; CRWRC for example are producing their own technical materials and have had staff training by literary experts from Thailand in doing so.

Field staff from both government and NGO also expressed a need for more hard information, especially on pig feeding and pig management. They stress that technical information must be presented in Lao, ideally in different form according to the recipients, be that field staff or villagers. Different methods suggested include TV training showing case studies and posters summarising basic steps.

Additionally, NGO field staff feel that technical information should come from government staff as a matter of course, and that NGOs should not have to pay for this knowledge. They suggest that NGO, district and provincial staff should share technical information at regular meetings.

More local Demonstration Sites and Champion Farmers
NGO project leaders and staff, and government field staff agree on the importance of good, local demonstration sites and effective champion farmers. NGOs are unable to send farmers on cross visits because distance makes it too expensive, and need more local sites available for farmers to "see for themselves" (N2). When sending people out to villages, they feel that champion farmers have more credibility than staff alone. Ideally, government and NGO field staff work together to set up, and then follow up, an extensive network of demonstration sites and champion farmers.

4.5.2 Training

Participants suggest a number of training topics which will help meet farmer needs and contribute to the sustainability of the project. NGO staff also stress the need to provide training closer to participating projects.

How to Produce Extension Materials
Training for staff in producing quality extension materials including technical posters, documents and TV presentations, and case studies.

Business Skills for Farmers
Training for farmers in business skills, alongside technical knowledge, will give them greater understanding of what they need to do to expand production, ensure that their business is viable, and make the best use of their increased productivity. Project leaders feel that this will engender greater ownership of the technology and therefore make the project more sustainable.

Livestock Production
Training for staff and farmers in general livestock production. Specific topics of interest include pig management, pig breeding, feed formulation, managing feed gaps, and animal health especially diagnosis, treatment, and vaccinations.

Extension methods
Several government field staff suggested providing extension training to NGO staff, particularly on techniques to engage farmers initially.

4.5.3 Strengthening networks

Quarterly Project meetings
The networking aspect of the project is highly valued by all participants. All who have attended the six monthly L4PP meetings appreciated the contacts made and the opportunity to share with other organisations with a common focus. NGO leaders and field staff suggested that these meetings be held quarterly to strengthen relationships between participants and allow more detailed planning.

Monthly meetings and joint activities at District level
CIAT staff recognise the importance of providing a framework for networking at a more local level; concentrating on the people, rather than trying to institutionalise the approach within organisations. "Its people who make the networks, and its people who take the information, and its people who can do the training and so on. Its not organisations as such" (G7). Forming alliances at a managerial level does not necessarily translate to district level.

The main suggestion for strengthening district networks is to institute monthly district meetings for NGO and government field staff to report progress, share information, discuss issues and plan together for both district extension activities and staff training needs. Planning together at a district level would allow staff to respond to, and schedule around, the local seasonal needs of farmers. From joint planning would follow joint staff training, and joint field visits to villages. All field staff emphasised the need to prioritise working together, to schedule and commit to working together, and to give more time to joint activities. Ultimately this will be to the greater benefit of farmers;

> "In the end all the government staff and the NGO they join together, because you are the improve of your working activity with the farmer…." (G4)

4.5.4 Facilitating greater understanding between partners
NGO participants in particular would like to see activities which facilitate a greater understanding between the partner organisations, both government and NGOs. Such activities could include;

- regular meetings between NGO management and government to explain the latest technology and how to extend,
- study tours for government staff to NGO sites,
- government representatives attending NGO exchange meetings,
- government and NGOs pooling data and results in order to develop a comprehensive picture to scale out to other projects,
- creating a map of which NGO is where, and what their activities are,

- organising cross visits with other NGOs to promote successful models (of how the NGO actually works with government and villages),
- planning together at an organisational level, rather than following separate agendas.

4.5.5 Expanding the L4PP project

Scaling out to more sites and other NGOs
NGO project leaders, field staff and government staff believe the project should be scaled out to more of participating NGO's sites and to other NGOs, so that the L4PP technology can benefit farmers throughout Laos. World Vision leaders suggested partners gather, share and use statistical evidence to present to other projects. They have already produced a Powerpoint presentation on their involvement in the L4PP project, which they have distributed to other Lao World Vision sites.

Another suggestion from NGOs for scaling out is to expand the focus to include other livestock, for example cattle to involve Hmong people, and smaller livestock such as chickens and goats to involve women producers.

Forming Alliances
The L4PP Alliance process has revealed a number of elements important in setting up such partnerships. For CIAT, the experience has emphasised the need for careful matching and selection of potential NGO partners. Those initiating the project need to understand the NGOs objectives in the field prior to inviting them into an alliance, in order to be able to offer them what they need. The project must have something to offer that will have a real impact for their villages.

There are also lessons in engaging the selected NGOs. Project leaders need to have regular contact, with something to share with them. Partners need to plan together; agree on what will happen, how to work together, and what to focus on.

One NGO project leader stressed the importance of maintaining the balance of membership in the partnership, regarding both numbers and types of NGO partners. He felt that too many would make meetings difficult to co-ordinate and impersonal for participants, while too few would limit the knowledge exchange. NGO partners should be similar in size and objectives and have things to learn from each other. The balance of the L4PP Alliance was felt to be "just right" (N4). He would like to keep smaller NGOs rather than including the huge projects like ADB, and maintain a smaller structure overall.

Retaining the Research and Development Focus
From the CIAT perspective, the Alliance has been a small but important part of the larger Legumes for Pigs project. Within this broader framework, the development platform is one element amongst a number of essentials. It is vital to retain the research element, as "This is where the greatest gains come, to bring in new ideas…for research and extension and development to gain" (G7). The Project leader would like to bring in more researchers, to stimulate the research element.

Important also is ensuring that government staff are members of the partnership, and in order to have funds to do so, they need to be attached to a project. This could be achieved by linking in more effectively with larger bilateral projects.

5 Conclusion

The L4PP Development Alliance has been operating since June 2006 – two years to the date of this research. Our interviews with participants from NGOs, government extension staff and CIAT reveal an overwhelming positive response to the Alliance and the benefits it brings, both to its membership and ultimately to the farmers of northern Laos.

Its success as a scaling out mechanism for Stylo technology is undeniable from the perspective of participants, and will no doubt be supported by comprehensive field data. All participants report positive uptake of the technology in their districts, alongside indicators of 'ownership' by farmers – such as seed production and adaptation to other livestock – which ultimately achieve sustainability for the project.

The major benefit of the Alliance lies with the networks forged where previously none existed. Lack of understanding, isolation and wariness between government extension staff and NGOs, has been replaced with an atmosphere of sharing, learning together and striving towards common goals. The enthusiasm engendered in field staff bodes well for both the scaling out of appropriate technologies and for the broader environment of development in Laos.

Participants articulated constraining factors which may be expected given the broader Lao context. Government working with NGOs will invariably involve different cultural perspectives and operating systems which require attention to ensure synergy. Within the Alliance, Lao nationals trained within a stratified bureaucracy are working with Lao and non-Lao people trained in participatory development.

Behind each participating organisation lies a large bureaucracy with its own constraints and requirements. The priorities of each organisation differ as do the aims and goals of staff and the ethnic groups with whom they work. Educational levels and livestock experience of staff vary widely. Projects are operating in remote areas which are difficult and expensive to access, where communication is poor, and where livestock marketing opportunities are few. The farmers with whom the projects work are busy families, committed to a full seasonal calendar which they must fulfil to provide for their basic needs.

These constraints and the lessons learned through participating in the Alliance are reflected in the suggestions made for improving the Alliance. Training and improved technical materials will increase the technical competence of staff. More frequent meetings and joint activities such as cross visits will improve relations between grassroots government and NGO staff. Management level interactions and joint planning, data collection and sharing will enhance inter-organisational relationships.

Because the L4PP technology and the Alliance have been so successful, participants wish to see the L4PP project scaled out across Laos. The process thus far provides salient lessons in both scaling out and forming alliances. One is that scaling out need not be driven by the originating organisation; NGOs are more than capable of scaling out to their other sites, including setting up networks and training government staff, with the right technology, methodology and support.

Another lesson is the importance of taking a participatory approach; ensuring that partners are part of a joint planning, acting and review cycle, and that activities are planned to maximise relationship building between individuals and organisations. In this process, care must be taken to ensure a balance of membership, with partners of similar size, with similar aims and

methods of operating. While linking with large bilateral projects is desirable in terms of broadening access to funds and information, current partners may be particularly reluctant to become subject to the bureaucratic constraints this may entail.

The results of this evaluation suggest that perceived constraints to the current Alliance be articulated, acknowledged and discussed by partner organisations, with consideration given to any possibilities for leverage within the relevant systems, prior to engaging in expansion of the L4PP project. Emerging strategies, combined with the suggestions for improvement put forward by current participants, will provide opportunities for this and other projects to build on this exciting approach to livestock extension in Lao PDR.

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6. References

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