

Evaluation of capacity building for forage and livestock production in Laos

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Introduction The Lao Government wants to alleviate poverty by encouraging rural communities to expand their agricultural production through cash crops, fruit trees and raising livestock instead of shifting cultivation (Nielsen & Chanhomphou, 2006). Livestock is an important activity for upland households and farmers get more than 50 per cent of their income by selling animals (Wilson, 2007). Extension staff are needed in each district to assist farmers in growing forages, feeding, breeding, controlling diseases and marketing. However, the knowledge and skills of government livestock extension staff is lacking in quality and quantity (Stur, Gray & Bastin, 2002). Their ability to learn technical and extension skills is critical and is influenced by the capacity building methods used in Laos for livestock production. This study will evaluate capacity building of livestock extension staff across five provinces in northern Laos (Xieng Khuang, Houa Phane, Luang Nam Tha, Bo Keo and Luang Prabang). The following research questions will drive the research:

1. What strategies and methods have been used to support capacity building of livestock extension staff in upland areas of Laos?
2. How effective have these strategies been in delivering positive outcomes for livestock development?
3. What factors influence the effectiveness of capacity building of livestock extension staff?
4. How can the capacity building of livestock extension staff be strengthened?

Methods The methodology is based on the principle that "An evaluation of a capacity building effort should be ... useful, accurate, feasible, and sensitive to its context and to the needs of its stakeholders" (Horton, 2003: 104). The aim of the evaluation is to help Lao government stakeholders improve their capacity building processes.

In broad terms, two types of information will be gathered in an evaluation of capacity building for livestock extension. They include:

1. Primary information-conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in livestock development programs (Questions 1 and 2); more in-depth interviews with District of Agricultural and Forestry Extension Office (DAFEO) staff who are working closely with farmers (Question 3), including personal histories of people who have field experience with capacity building for livestock extension; and a stakeholder workshop to explore Question 4.
2. Secondary information-a review of reports or publications, files, and information that already exists in written organisational records from the government and NGO sectors in Vientiane and other provinces, especially in the northern part of Laos.

Results and discussion Research field work will take place in early 2008, so preliminary results will be presented at the IGC-IRC Congress.

References

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