



National Research for Development Forum on
Pathways for Sustainable Development in Lao PDR
| 17-19 December 2014 |

Summary Report and Recommendations

Organised by:





Table of Contents

Preface	3
Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
Plenary session: Keynote address	6
Government policies and priority research areas	6
Panel discussion	7
Research papers and themes	8
Summary of themes and parallel sessions	8
Theme 1: Rural transformation and livelihood change	8
Theme 2: Access, equity, gender, specifically in rural areas	9
Theme 3: Natural resources (land and water) and energy	10
Theme 4: Regional trade, integration and macro-economic policies	13
Theme 5: Migration and urbanisation	14
Theme 6: Climate change	15
Conclusions and recommendations	15
Research gaps	15
Recommendations for continuing to promote bridge-building between research and policy	16
Annex: List of Presentations	18

Cover: Researcher at work

Photo: LADLF

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this report are those of the author/s and do not represent the views of the Government of Australia or the Government of Lao PDR



Preface

On behalf of the National University of Laos (NUOL), I have pleasure in presenting an important message to the readers of this invaluable publication. As prescribed by decree No. 071/PM, dated 16 March 2009, part of the mission of the National University of Laos is to conduct scientific research and disseminate the results. As such, the National Research for Development Forum on Pathways for Sustainable Development in Laos, was organised at the National University of Laos, on 17-18 December 2014.

This report is the outcome of a forum co-organised by three institutions: the National University of Laos, the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), and the National Economic Research Institute (NERI). This is the first initiative for a national scientific forum to create a platform allowing Lao researchers from the National University and other institutions to disseminate their research results and exchange expertise between policy makers and researchers. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the donors who financially supported the forum, particularly the Australian Aid Laos-Australia Development Learning Facility (LADLF), the Centre for Development and Environment/University of Berne, CGIAR Research Programme on Water Land and Ecosystems, Village Focus International, the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the International Water Management Institute.

The forum has satisfactorily fulfilled its objectives, which include:

1. Establishment of a long-term platform for policy dialogue and identifying high quality sources of demand-driven research;
2. Strengthening the use of evidence-based research by key decision-makers (government, donors, private sector actors) and practitioners (provincial and district staff, NGOs, development workers, etc.);
3. Developing recommendations for further science-policy dialogue that can be used to enhance the 8th National Socio-economic Development Plan; and
4. Strengthening the culture of research in Lao PDR by providing opportunities for Lao researchers to improve their communication skills, conduct dialogues with policy-makers, improve their understanding of development priorities, and carry out more applicable and well-targeted research.

The forum is regarded as highly successful. I greatly appreciate the efforts of all parties in making it so. I strongly hope that with the success of this forum, you will continue to strengthen your support for Lao research and for future forums.

Your contributions are highly appreciated.

Thank you.

Vice President of NUOL

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phout Simmalavong



Executive summary

The purpose of this forum was to create a platform to allow Lao researchers and their partners to present and discuss research findings with relevance to Lao agriculture, natural resource management and rural development efforts.

The specific objectives of the programme were to:

- ◆ Strengthen the use of evidence-based research by key decision-makers;
- ◆ Allow decision-makers to voice their research for decision-making priorities;
- ◆ Improve dialogue between researchers and policy-makers; and
- ◆ Strengthen the culture of research in Laos.

The plenary session included keynote speeches were given by Dr. Bountavy Sisouphanthong, Vice Minister of Planning and Investment (MPI), and Dr. Phuangparisak Pravongviengkham, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

These speeches reflected on the relationship between the economy as a whole and the agricultural sector, the time horizon on which policy oriented research is appropriate to be undertaken, and the role of research in government policy in a more general sense.

This was followed by a panel discussion on the theme of the “Role of research for development in Laos”.

The panel included senior level officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Central Committee for Poverty Reduction and Rural Development, the Lao Women’s Union and Deputy Director of research institutions such as NAFRI, NERI and NUOL.

Six themes for the conference were:

1. Rural transformation and livelihood change (options for improving livelihoods in hydropower resettlement; extension and delivery);
2. Access, equity and gender (women and development; social safeguard in resettlement);
3. Natural resources (Land and water) and energy (agriculture trade and livelihood; resource development, food security and livelihood nexus in Lao PDR; impacts of concessions on

livelihoods and environment; land tenure and rural transformation);

4. Regional trade, integration & macro-economic policies (agriculture and cross border trade; export promotion competitiveness and macro-economic policies; the impact of regional trade on Lao PDR; achieving SDGs);
5. Migration and urbanisation (urban expansion and new labour markets); and
6. Climate change (forest and climate change; agriculture and climate change).

There were six key recommendations for continuing to promote bridge-building between research and policy:

1. Look for full understandings of trade-offs rather than “one-size-fits-all” solutions;
2. Promote multi-disciplinary research and dialogue;
3. The need for greater data transparency;
4. Continue to promote and facilitate gender-related research;
5. Continue to prioritise and develop the culture of research and dialogue in Laos; and
6. Continue to strengthen the mechanisms for science-policy dialogue.

The forum also identified some potential research opportunities/gaps to be addressed. More research is needed on:

- ◆ Labour migration within the country especially from the northern provinces – there is much study/research in the southern provinces (e.g. few studies on labour migration from Savannakhet to Thailand);
- ◆ Impact from transforming/gathering small villages to larger villages;
- ◆ Identification of gaps in a particular sector as most of the research only identified and concluded issues;
- ◆ Identification of effective coordination mechanisms to strengthen coordination between Government agencies or sectors, especially for the sake of avoiding duplication in research topic; and
- ◆ Provincial based research so that findings could be utilised at the provincial levels.

For more information, please go to
<http://www.research-forum.blogspot.com>



Introduction

As Lao PDR seeks to leave behind the status of Least Developed Country in 2020, research can play a critical role when it comes to producing knowledge that is beneficial to society. This is particularly true regarding understanding the impacts and potential trade-offs of different development scenarios as the country develops at a rapid pace.

The purpose of this forum was to create one such platform, allowing Lao researchers and their partners to present and discuss research findings with relevance to Lao agriculture, natural resource management and rural development efforts.

The specific objectives of the programme were to:

- ◆ Strengthen the use of evidence-based research by key decision-makers (government, donors, private sector) and practitioners (provincial and district staff, NGOs, development workers, etc.);
- ◆ Allow decision-makers to voice their priorities about research for decision-making;
- ◆ Improve the dialogue between researchers and policy-makers through the establishment of spaces that are conducive for discussing evidence-based research and emerging research priorities; and
- ◆ Strengthen the culture of research in Laos by providing an opportunity for Lao researchers to improve their communication skills, better understand development priorities and, moving forward, carry out more targeted research.

The forum brought together more than 250 researchers, policy makers, NGO representatives and development professionals. More than 57 presentations were made in 16 parallel sessions with 32 posters.

The forum was organised by the National University of Laos (NUoL) in collaboration with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the National Economic Research Institute (NERI).

A number of organisations supported the workshop including: the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Laos-Australia Development Learning Facility, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the CGIAR Research Programme on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the University of Bern's Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), and Village Focus International (VFI).

The forum was unique in a number of ways. First, the Vice Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry and Planning and Investment presented their own policy priorities and their view on how research could support various programmes and strategic measures of both Ministries (see next section). Then a panel discussion brought together key government departments and research agencies, and discussed some of the science-policy dialogue challenges and opportunities.

Through the 16 parallel sessions and subsequent working group meetings that followed, the forum demonstrated that a culture of research is taking root in Laos. The depth and breadth of work presented was possibly the most diverse the country has seen. All presentations were made in the Lao language; this fostered a range of intense discussions in various parallel sessions.

This summary presents an overview of some of the key points raised in the forum as well as overall recommendations.



Plenary session: Keynote address

Government policies and priority research areas

Key speakers

- ◆ Dr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, Vice Minister of Planning and Investment (MPI);
- ◆ Dr. Phuangparisak Pravongviengkham, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

These speeches reflected on the relationship between the economy as a whole and the agricultural sector, the time horizon on which policy oriented research is appropriate to be undertaken, and the role of research in government policy in a more general sense.

Dr. Bounthavy began by noting that MPI's National Economic Research Institute (NERI) is currently working on the creation of a strategic economic plan for the next 15 years. In contrast to the more traditional mode of 5-year plans, this longer "strategic" view opens the category of policy relevant research to a wide range of topics and suggestions. The research community would be wise to take note of this. Within this time horizon, one of Dr. Bounthavy's key points pertained to Laos's exit from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, an effort which has driven a great deal of policy-making over the last decade or so. Dr. Bounthavy suggested that LDC graduation would be essentially complete by 2020, transition conditions completed by 2025, and by 2030 Laos would have established the conditions toward being a middle high income country. Laos's development to each of these would, he emphasised, need to be evaluated not only on economic criteria, but social and environmental criteria as well.

Dr. Bounthavy then elaborated on three key issues which Laos's research community needs to attend to in the coming years: the "middle income trap", "Dutch disease", and the "dual economy". The first of these refers to the dangers of the Lao economy becoming stuck at the "mid" level as it emerges from LDC status rather than advancing further along the path to full development. The second and third refer to related problems that could cause this type of stagnation:

Dutch disease, which refers to rising prices and falling currency values due to the rapid influx of foreign currency (for example due to excessive natural resource exports); and the dual economy, which refers to the separation between the agricultural and industrial sectors as the latter expands and the former does not. Falling levels of consumption and growing rural-urban inequality are two manifestations of these problems, and can contribute to keeping the Lao economy at the "mid" level as Laos emerges from LDC status.

Finally, Dr. Bounthavy outlined a potentially greater role for research by pointing out that in the future, government planning will focus increasingly on outlining a vision and outcomes, leaving detailed planning to the relative sectors and institutions. Leaving this question of "how" up to individual sectors and institutions creates a significant role for research in contributing to the achievement of the vision and outcomes articulated at the policy level.

Dr. Parisak's speech focused on the strategic importance of the agriculture and forestry sector, even as Laos expands its economy in other sectors. He reminded participants of agriculture and forestry's historical role in Laos's development, and of the Party's corresponding embrace of the agriculture and forestry sector as a core area for ongoing economic growth. This pertains significantly to stability: even as Laos produces, for example, electricity for export, the country needs to continue to produce resources for its own consumption. Dr. Parisak gave the example of the 2008 food crisis, when rice prices climbed throughout the region and foreign countries came to invest in rice production in Laos: you can't eat money, he reminded participants.

Within the agricultural sector, Dr. Parisak highlighted questions of quantity versus quality in the area of production for both domestic consumption and for export. He put forward a proposal here: namely, that Laos focus on quality when it comes to export – he gave the example of exporting high-quality rice to Vietnam – but quantity when it comes to meeting domestic food production needs. Such an approach would provide a way to maintain Laos's competitive advantage in international trade (by avoiding direct competition with high-volume, lower-value producers, e.g. Vietnamese coffee), while also maintaining a significant level of food security at home.



Dr. Parisak also mentioned a few things about the tree plantation sector, which has been a topic of significant discussion and debate over the last few years. He mentioned 500,000 hectares as the combined area of rubber and eucalyptus, two crops covered under the concession moratorium of 2012, and suggested that these crops need to be concentrated better in specified areas so as to not compete with food production (this has been a lesson learned), and that in the future the government would promote household-scale plantations rather than large-scale concessions.

Dr. Parisak closed by highlighting 13 policies which the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry had developed which cover the spectrum of issues relevant to the sector.

These policies cover:

1. Agricultural land use and development;
2. Promotion and processing of agricultural products;
3. Finance, banking and budgeting;
4. Organic agriculture;
5. Biofuels;
6. Marketing, trade and investment;
7. Labour;
8. Knowledge assets, standards and measurement;
9. Research on and promotion of rice varieties;
10. Transportation;
11. Rural development and town planning;
12. Promotion of foreign direct investment; and
13. Nutrition.

The keynote speeches by Dr. Bounthavy and Dr. Parisak prompted a number of questions from the audience, including professors and students. A number of these questions were quite frank, and addressed the issue of large scale investments and food insecurity, trade-offs between immediate economic benefits, non-monetised and longer-term costs. One participant, for example, pointed out that Laos's high rate of economic growth was based largely on the destruction of the environment, while another asked when and how Lao people would benefit more from foreign investment in resource extraction. How, in short, can investment in Laos be made more sustainable?

Panel discussion

The panel discussion was organised on the theme of the "Role of research for development in Laos". The main objective of the session was to understand the role of research in policy development and hear from both research and development actors. The panel included senior level officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Central Committee for Poverty Reduction and Rural Development, the Lao Women's Union and the Deputy Directors of research institutions such as NAFRI, NERI and NUOL.

It was agreed during the panel discussion that research has played an important role in supporting the development of policies and understanding local realities. One lesson that arose was that it is important to set priorities jointly with policy making institutions. It was found that when priorities are set together, research is more relevant and will be used. Another point was that some ministries and departments conducted research on their own which is also an option. It was also pointed out that research organisations have been influential in helping develop strategies. For instance, NERI research results have been taken in consideration in the development vision toward 2030 and the 2016-2025 10th Economic and Social Development Strategy. NAFRI researchers played a major role in agricultural strategy development toward 2025. NUOL researchers have helped the National Assembly and Strategic Unit of Lao Revolutionary Party to conduct research on Sustainable Development.

The Ministry of Science and Technology representative emphasised that the National Assembly has a budget allocation for research and this budget has increased in recent years. However, better mechanisms are needed to efficiently allocate this funding to different research agencies.

The most effective formats of informing research results to policy makers could be the policy brief and discussion forums at different levels. The National research forum is one of the opportunities/platforms for policy makers and researchers to meet and exchange their information and needs. It was felt that NUOL is in a good position to organise such forums/platforms.



Research papers and themes

Summary of themes and parallel sessions

The fifteen parallel sessions were organised under six themes.

1. Rural transformation and livelihood change (options for improving livelihoods in hydropower resettlement; extension and delivery);
2. Access, equity and gender (women and development; social safeguard in settlements);
3. Natural resources (land and water) and energy (agriculture trade and livelihood; the resource development, food security and livelihood nexus in Lao PDR; impacts of concessions on livelihoods and the environment; land tenure and rural transformation);
4. Regional trade, integration & macro-economic policies (agriculture and cross border trade; export promotion competitiveness and macro-economic policies; impact of regional trade on Lao PDR; achieving SDGs);
5. Migration and urbanisation (urban expansion and new labour markets); and
6. Climate change (forest and climate change; agriculture and climate change).

See Annex for a full list of sessions and presentations – all the presentations can be found at the Forum Website (<http://www.research-forum.blogspot.com/>). In addition, there were more than 30 poster presentations.

Theme 1: Rural transformation and livelihood change

Session 1: Options for improving livelihoods in hydropower plant resettlement

This session presented research from a number of different case studies and research which focused on understanding how resettled communities were adapting to new livelihoods. The session also discussed the sustainability of livelihood restoration activities and compensation.

The session proposed that research should be systemic, multidisciplinary, and explore the many livelihoods aspects of populations affected by hydropower development projects. To make the livelihood restoration activities sustainable for affected populations, the effective method for compensation and livelihood restoration needs to take into consideration the duration of livelihood restoration activities. This aspect needs to be considered and extended over a longer period than currently proposed. The gap of research in this area reflects the social research of a dam's impact on population livelihood. It is recommended that the government continue to support the affected people after the project's livelihood restoration and compensation period.

One interesting discussion point raised was the validity of making national policy recommendations based on smallish case studies. On the one hand the methods used are hardly comparable since some used quantitative and others used qualitative methods. Some of the research focused on one aspect of livelihood making generalisations difficult. On the other hand the recommendations could be quite useful for concession companies and local government officials. Therefore thinking about what level of 'policy' recommendations could be made should be considered.



Session 2: Extension and delivery

The presentations in this session focused on research in terms of technology adoption in different contexts as well as the functioning of the extension system in different areas. An interesting conversation arose around the different concepts of “agroforestry”; and how these should be translated – both as terminology and conceptual understanding.

The main policy discussion focused around the need to provide proper support to farmers to adopt new techniques. When farmers express interest in using new technologies or farming practices, institutional support such as training, access to credit and inputs needs be provided. Currently the extension systems are still quite “supply” driven in providing technologies and practices which might not be appropriate to the local context. Farmers may need time for testing new techniques before making adoption or rejection decisions. Moreover, the scaling out of successful techniques should be selective as one technique cannot be suitable for all conditions and to all types of farmers. A good technique is an efficient technique. The research gap identified is how to support the extension work, officers and the extension approach.

Theme 2: Access, equity, gender, specifically in rural areas

Session 3: Social safeguards in resettlement

The presentations in the session focused on how resettlement is being carried out from consultation approaches to compensation mechanisms. The session discussed the problems of communication and information flows between development actors, populations, as well as all those affected by a hydropower development project. The actors may not understand well or have not enough information on the affected population and the affected population may not have enough information on resettlement policies, compensation and livelihood restoration activities. Therefore, it is recommended that both parties forge a better way to communicate and exchange information by establishing good partnerships with the help of the government and development agencies. Moreover, while Laos has laws and decrees concerning development project compensation, it needs to be informed and to enforce these laws. The relocation of people to different areas needs to take into account their long-term livelihood sustainability. Another recommendation focuses on the need to transfer lessons from successful examples of compensation from one area to another. The examples of Nam Theun 2 and Thuen Hin Boun are exemplary but these practices need to be applied in other provinces with other companies and local government agencies.

Session 4: Women and development

This session provided a deeper understanding of how development impacts, both positively and negatively, men and women. The presentations focused primarily on the impacts of different development processes and projects on women.

The presentations were from across a spectrum of sectors but some general questions and recommendations emerged. The session raised the questions of whether hydropower development, mining and rural development have made improvements in livelihoods as well as supporting gender justice, especially for ethnic minority women in



projects, and if those projects support gender equity and women's economic empowerment.

When carrying out consultations, ethnicity and gender do matter. It is important that consultation processes take into consideration local ethnic cultural practices and ensure that women are consulted and integrated for gender justice in development projects. This might mean having staff who understand local culture as well as women staff members. In all cases the importance of education and having women and girls specific programmes (whether in resettlement or maternal health care) arose.

The research gap is the particular difficulty faced by ethnic minority women who cannot speak Lao and don't express their opinions in front of their husbands.

Theme 3: Natural resources (land and water) and energy

Session 5: Agriculture trade and livelihood

These presentations focused on emerging commercial opportunities for farmers and how this is impacting local livelihoods. An important question arising from discussions was how to balance market oriented production with local food security. Research showed that farmers are under increasingly heavier debt as they invest in commercial agriculture and are at the mercy of highly unstable commodities, such as maize, rubber, etc.

Some of main discussion points included:

- ◆ As farmers move from subsistence to cash farming systems, the issue of safeguards arose. Are there ways of guaranteeing or stabilising prices so farmers can secure livelihoods? How can wages in commercial situations be more stable and fair?
- ◆ Concerns over the increasing use of pesticides were raised and the need to have better control on pesticide use was invoked. How can this come about?
- ◆ There is a need to better monitor how district and local authorities mediate contracts in order to reduce the risks that farmers take on and improve benefit sharing arrangements;
- ◆ Researchers should continue to document both successful and not successful cases of the impacts of commercialisation on local livelihoods and environment;
- ◆ Organise products and niche markets. Promoting high value products over large commodities should be a priority of the government. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry should continue to promote organic production and invest more intensively in this domain. The extension of organic production has to link with technical improvements, quality production and improving linkages to international market chains. The government should set up the security system for agriculture commercialisation so as to decrease negative social impacts;
- ◆ Another research gap identified was the lack of understanding of international markets in relation to Lao producing capacity and competitiveness. More cross border and macro-economic analysis is needed in this area.



Session 6: Resource development, food security and livelihood nexus in Lao PDR

This session brought together a body of research that is being carried out jointly by the National University and the University of Sydney, Australia in the Nam Ngum watershed. A second session was added to provide perspectives from other research that was being carried out in the watershed.

It was found that large-scale natural resource development does not always support livelihood change at the local level. Although the watershed had a number of large scale developments (mining, hydropower, irrigation), these often did not benefit the most vulnerable populations and there still were high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition leading to the stunting of children under five years of age. The research from CSIRO and MONRE showed that large scale irrigation does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction since large scale systems often benefit wealthier farmers. Smaller, marginal farmers often do not have access to the irrigation schemes or the ability to invest in taking advantage of them.

Participants suggested the need to better understand the links between social-economical characteristics of the households, livelihood patterns, topography, agro-ecosystems, child feeding methods and food insecurity of populations as well as the nutritional status of children. Participants also agreed that this was a good example of integrated research that could yield important policy recommendations applicable both in the Nam Ngum and in other high development areas.

The main policy recommendation was to better identify livelihood strategies and options that can be used in such situations. Companies and government agencies need to invest in such options. The development agency and government may need to create the conditions for different farmers to be able to adjust their livelihoods to the new socio-economic situation and know how to manage their resources.

Session 7: Impacts of concessions on livelihoods and the environment

Four presentations were on issues related to the impacts of different types of land concessions and the government policy of “turning land into capital”.

Many of the presentations showed that the promotion of private investment in the resource sector would result in short economic growth while it would have long-term impacts on the local people’s livelihoods and resources. The research revealed that the sectors concerned should have a stronger management system including the formulation of clear roles and responsibilities of each sector in the management, monitoring and evaluation of land leases and concessions. The research found the investment pattern in Laos did not really follow government policy; the investment decision is largely driven by investor preferences, and the question was raised on how to address this issue. If the policy of turning land into capital is to succeed, social and environmental safeguards need to be implemented and enforced in order to achieve the government’s 2020 development goals. The final recommendation is that the Government should consider revising the strategy on private investment which incorporates the emerging body of evidence and emerging lessons.

A number of other issues were highlighted particularly on improving access to land concession information . There are still serious gaps in data collection, analysis and synthesis. In addition, this is an area where research can play a role in assisting the understanding of impacts and evaluate the trade-offs, costs and benefits of different arrangements. Moreover, it was recommended that relevant laws and regulations need to be enforced.



Session 8: Land tenure and rural transformation

This session explored how land tenure is being transformed in rural areas through concessions and land titling processes. One of the main problems raised was the continuing land insecurity of most rural people. The main problems raised were those related to tenure insecurity for most rural people and how this impacts food security and local livelihoods. Based on the presentations, a major concern was that land concessions were not having the intended policy outcome of improving livelihoods and food security.

The research highlighted that the access to farming land and natural resources is still critical for rural people's livelihood affected by land concessions. One issue raised was that compensation mechanisms for leasing land were not fair and many rural people's traditional land was being taken away without fair compensation. This is leading to increased land conflicts and migration to bigger cities. While not directly related, the issue of over use of pesticides and chemicals was raised as this affects land and water quality as well as rural livelihoods.

One way to narrow the gap between titled land, de facto ownership and access (land tenure) is to systematically issue the land titles to individuals and communities as soon as possible. On the other hand, since this takes a long time, it is important to emphasise the acceptance of forms of land tenure without title at the policy level, and the establishment of institutions to address tenure conflicts in the absence of titles.

The discussion focused on the importance of securing land tenure for smallholders to ensure food security. Current policies that favour turning land into capital have affected the stability of food security and nutrition for smallholder farmers. More research is needed to find ways to improve land security which can act as models for different parts of the country.

Some recommendations from the session included:

- ◆ Existing research is clear in terms of relations between concessions and food insecurity and this needs to be integrated into policy planning processes;
- ◆ Programmes to improve communities and government officials' understanding of land laws and rights should be enhanced;
- ◆ The survey of land prior to giving concessions should be improved;
- ◆ Communities should have legal knowledge on land rights, and land laws should be based upon the basic rights of people;
- ◆ There should be a thorough examination of the land titling issue;
- ◆ There should be specific measures on land use or land concessions;
- ◆ Changes to the development of ladder farming in upland area or rural remote areas;
- ◆ Changes to grow other commercial/economic crops;
- ◆ There should be a new assessment of town plans by defining or re-planning the map;
- ◆ There should be strategic coordination or decision on which sector will be the major land user, and implement a monitoring and evaluation system (sector concerned);
- ◆ Any piece of land should be centrally registered. There should also be a staff inspection of the personnel working on this;
- ◆ Process and procedure of land titling (Articles 53-54); and
- ◆ There should be a new policy on land use, including national (macro and micro) management of land concessions and a renewal of urban plans, especially in cities with fast economic growth. All sectors should follow these rules and regulations.



Theme 4: Regional trade, integration and macro-economic policies

Session 9: Agriculture and cross border trade

The session discussed the problems of the trade monopoly affecting some agricultural products due to the small number of buyers and the policy of territorial allocation to individual traders for buying these products. Also discussed were the negative environmental impacts of market oriented production such as soil erosion, unfair negotiations between traders and farmers, problems related to product quality, the often high cost of transport, storage difficulties and limited demand.

The session recommended diversification of livelihood activities to ensure incomes and soil quality improvement, as well as ending the policy on territorial allocations to individual traders for buying the products.

The session proposed making comparison between maize production and trade in Houaphanh and Xayaboury Provinces to ascertain if the producers and traders face the same problems and have the same opportunities. Based on this comparative study, the government should be able to develop a more comprehensive strategy and plan for maize production, ease the export permit system to make it less burdensome and facilitate the access to market information, while negotiating with Thailand, Vietnam and China on quotas for exporting maize as well as Bong Bak (Yang bong). Adding value to products for export through processing is also a viable alternative.

Another research gap identified was understanding the levels of farmers' satisfaction of maize geared for market production (income, price, techniques etc.).

Session 10: Export promotion competitiveness and macro-economic policies

This session was one of the few focused on macro-economic policies. One of the main areas explored was the concept and concern regarding "Dutch Disease". Some economists consider Laos to have early stages of this disease as observed by the rapid increase of household expenditure, consumption and

government spending following resource exploitation and the flow of foreign currency into the country. To prevent "Dutch Disease" and increase exports, it is recommended in short term that the Government improve export competitiveness, stabilise the low inflation rate and secure stability during the inflow of investment capital. In the long term the Government should reinvest the income from high growth sectors in improving infrastructure and education, and enhance the competitiveness of the industrial sector. The Government should also decrease or eradicate the nontariff barrier in favour of capital import, establish a fund for the protection of natural resources and participate actively in the free trade process with its neighbours and developed countries in order to import new production technology with an eye to strengthening the industrial sector.

Session 11: Impact of regional trade on Lao PDR

Presentations in this session explored the impacts of regional trade, and particularly the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community, on Laos. A key question raised was how Laos could benefit from regional integration in terms of providing products and services and how to manage and prevent the negative impact from this integration. For the policy recommendation, it was suggested that the Government support the population in increasing local production and goods, improve services and infrastructure, train the private sector on business management practices and services, promote the clean and green concept to communities and farmers and enforce laws and regulations. One clear gap identified is the lack of research and understanding on regional integration. This could be a clear linkage to research and policy. Issues such as monitoring regional integration, carrying out foresight studies and understanding, trade-offs, the costs and benefits of regional integration are part of a new area of research that needs to be considered and receive investments.



Session 12: Achieving sustainable development goals

The research presented in this session was primarily comprised of desk studies on the concept and application of sustainable development in developing and developed countries. This was carried out at the direct request of the National Assembly to understand lessons and experiences from other countries and organisations (UNDP etc.) on the strategy and implementation of “sustainable development”.

The research was theoretical in nature and discussion centred on three areas. First, one of the main indicators of sustainable development is human capital. It was found that many countries that rose out of Least Developed Country status invested in human capital to create added value. For the social aspect of sustainable development, it is clear that the need to ensure food security and poverty reduction is the main target. The environmental aspect focuses on air pollution, biodiversity, chemical and chemical waste, clean water, land, land use and soil structure destruction, climate change etc. It was discussed in this session that instead of three areas of sustainable development, Laos would like to emphasise the fourth area which is political. It has been observed that for the establishment of a sustainable economic, social and environmental development strategy there needs to be clearly identified goals, outputs, outcomes and indicators which must cover all development work. It was also discussed that in current Lao law there is no framework/direction or statement toward sustainable development. Such a direction can only be seen in some development strategies such as those pertaining to agriculture. There were no clear policy recommendations, although it is clear that there should be more research on how Laos can achieve its Sustainable Development Goals and realise its vision to leave behind LDC status by 2020. This is an area of interest to the Government, donors and the development community. It was also suggested to work on or study the current laws so as to be able to make recommendations on how to include this concept.

Theme 5: Migration and urbanisation

Session 13: Urban expansion and new labour markets

This session highlighted the increasing interest and need to better understand urban and labour related issues. This entire sector is booming but little related research has been carried out since most development research is focused in rural areas.

As Laos moves to a service and industry based economy, vocational and technical training will become essential. The Government should develop a detailed educational training strategy to improve the quality of the labour market. This needs to be backed up by research into the key priority sectors.

Interesting research was carried out to understand the plight of factory workers. It was clear that better negotiation processes need to be established amongst labourers, factory owners and vocational training institutions in order to enhance the quality of labourers' working conditions and raise wages to adjust to the current cost of living so that labourers can live comfortably. The feminisation of factory work is an issue that has not been seriously examined. The research that was carried out brought up important questions as to the conditions for female labourers. It was recommended that factories and businesses better comply with laws regarding the living conditions, wages and social welfare of female workers. More research is needed on the impacts of increasing numbers of young female factory workers in the labour force. How does this impact education, remittances back to the rural areas and labour for agriculture?



Theme 6: Climate change

Session 14: Forest and climate change

This session looked at different experiences in implementing programmes concerning Reduced Emissions Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). Laos is one of the few countries implementing REDD+ activities which focus on community benefits sharing arrangements. The discussion from the presentations centres on the uncertainty of whether the communities can benefit from REDD+ schemes and how benefits could be shared with the communities. Alternatives such as Payment for Environmental Service Schemes were also discussed and are considered to have greater potential in Laos. More research is needed in this area.

Session 15: Agriculture and climate change

Forecasts show that agriculture in Laos will be affected by climate change. This session highlighted a number of research for development projects looking at improving the resilience of farmers to climate change. The session discussed new techniques that can be used in adaptation strategies and how Government and other agencies can best support farmers.

As discussed in the extension session, policy makers and extension planners need to understand that there is no magic bullet solution. Technologies and practices need to be appropriate to the agro-ecological and social economic conditions (labour, capital, equipment etc.). In addition, diversification strategies are important to allow farmers to lessen their risks by not relying on one single crop. Models and climate forecasting are important but such information has to be presented to farmers in ways they can use. One research gap identified was to do a comparative study between the old and new techniques, practices and even seeds to see which can be adapted to address climate change issues. It has been found in many areas that traditional seeds and practices are well suited for dealing with climate change.

Conclusions and recommendations

Research gaps

The forum also identified some potential research opportunities/gaps to be addressed. More research is needed on:

- ◆ Labour migration within the country especially from the northern provinces – there are many studies/research in the southern provinces (e.g. few studies on labour migration from Savannakhet to Thailand);
- ◆ Impact from transforming/gathering small village to larger village;
- ◆ Identification of gaps in a particular sector as most of the research only identified and concluded issues;
- ◆ Identification of effective coordination mechanisms to strengthen coordination between Government agencies or sectors, especially for the sake of avoiding duplication in research topics;
- ◆ Provincial based so that findings could be utilised at the provincial levels.



Recommendations for continuing to promote bridge-building between research and policy

(1) Look for full understandings of trade-offs rather than “one-size-fits-all” solutions

As Laos moves into the market economy, the development challenges become more complex. This calls for research that can provide policy makers with different options and help them understand the costs and benefits of different interventions. In Laos there are many politically contested issues such as relocation, hydropower development and land issues. There are many perspectives here. Perhaps research cannot provide the “definitive answer” but it nonetheless provides a key opportunity to better understand and discuss the trade-offs that are involved in various proposals and ongoing processes. Likewise, it was pointed out that Laos has immense social and biophysical diversity and a solution in one part of the country cannot be applied in other parts. Solutions need to be site specific and adapted to the local context. Additionally, as illustrated by research highlighting the differential impacts of development interventions (e.g. resettlement schemes) on women and men, solutions need to be tailored carefully so as to address these sorts of differences.

(2) Promote multi-disciplinary research and dialogue

As mentioned in the opening speeches, many macro level issues need to be tackled by different sectors. While much of the research presented focused on micro level issues, there is a growing body of research on macro-level issues. There is a need to improve examining the linkages between the two levels and continue to promote multi-disciplinarily. The dual economy was raised as an example whereby there is a need for better research on industry, labour, and rural-urban migration. Presentations on resettlement options highlighted the need to explore a range of strategies (not just agriculture based) as people migrate out of the village. This research also needs spaces where it can be presented to policy makers from different ministries and levels. There was also a call for more trans-disciplinary research to be presented, particularly in relation to nutrition, health, agriculture and land and water governance.

(3) Need for better transparency in data

Many of the presentations and discussions called for improved transparency in data. One issue pertains to elaboration and disaggregation of existing data, for example disaggregating data by gender and elaborating on the recently announced figures of 9 million ha of concessions and 4.99 million ha of total land parcels nationwide. A second issue involves the utility of more and better cooperation across institutional boundaries (e.g. comparison of multiple concession data sets). Finally, it was found that research can play an important role in re-checking and verifying statistics as well as monitoring how policies have been implemented and what can be improved or learned.

(4) Continue to promote and facilitate gender-related research

The recommendations highlight the importance of gender as a cross-cutting theme. Likewise a number of presentations explored the impacts development is having on women such as dynamics of female led households, conditions of factory workers and the role of women in the new economy. There should thus be a continued emphasis on and support for ensuring that research incorporates gender related concerns and issues.

(5) Continue to prioritise and develop the culture of research and dialogue in Laos

Great strides in the last 10 years have been made to strengthen research capacity; the research forum showed that these efforts have borne fruit — this forum featured Lao researchers almost entirely, and was characterised by high levels of interest and discussion. One way to continue developing Laos’s research culture is to continue to support the capacity improvement of Lao researchers; this will lead to not only better presentation and communication skills, but also better data quality as research topics and methods are chosen by high-capacity and policy-engaged Lao researchers.

A second way is to continue to develop forums like NUOL as places for open, constructive discussions and deliberation. Hosting the forum at NUOL provided a way to bring provincial and district authorities into



the conversation, but also to keep the conversation in a setting that privileged evidence and debate.

A third way to continue supporting Laos's research culture is through the improvement of storage for research results and data-sets. This has long been a concern in Laos, and remains highly relevant and timely: Having a clear open access policy to research in the university and ministry research centres such as NAFRI, NERI could be a start, as this would make research more accessible, avoid the duplication of research results, and facilitate communication throughout the research process between teams and individuals who are working on related topics.

Closely related to the above, it was also recommended that data should be exchanged (especially among Government agencies and academic institutions) without costly and bureaucratic administrative obstacles.

(6) Continue to strengthen the mechanisms for science-policy dialogue.

The need to improve research-policy interactions was called for. Researchers need to hone their communication to policy-makers, including understanding the policy-making process and what policies their work is relevant to; finding the relevant formats to speak to policy-makers' needs and concerns. It also called for ways to inform policy-makers and resource allocators on the uses and limits of different types of research – e.g. case studies, large-n surveys, one-time. Along these lines, there was also a call for strengthening how different knowledge and perspectives can be used at different stages of the policy making process. One challenge identified is finding ways to bring in multiple perspectives into the policy making process. It was recommended that these issues be further discussed at the science policy dialogue.



Annex: List of Presentations

Theme 1: Rural transformation and livelihood change

Session 1. Options for improving livelihoods in hydropower resettlement

Proposed Moderators: WLE/NUOL/NAFRI

Anousith Keophoxay	IWMI/NAFRI	Hydropower development and livelihoods: exploring rice-fish integrated system in Phumakneng, Khammouane Province, Lao PDR
Bounthanom Bouahom	NAFRI/Policy Research Center	Gender and household decision making in a Lao village: implications for livelihoods in hydropower development
Vatthanamixay Chansomphou	NUOL/ Faculty of Environmental Sciences	Economic evaluation of resettlement compensation programs for hydropower project in Laos: The case of Nam Theun 2 hydropower project

Session 2. Extension and delivery

Khamphouvieng Phouisombath	Planning Division, Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Enhancing District delivery of agriculture extension services for improved livelihoods and commercial production
Rob Kelly	NAFRI/Policy Research Center World Renew	Factors affecting adoption of agroforestry in Phongsaly
Silinthone Sacklokham	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture	Direct seeded rice: potential to maintain food security with reduced labour demand

Theme 2: Access, equity and Gender

Session 3. Social Safeguard in resettlement

Proposed Moderators: WLE/NUOL/NAFRI

Yhoksamay Lathsavong	Village Focus International	Tools for improved communications and coordination among hydropower stakeholders in the Lao PDR
Damdouane khouangvichit	NUOL/Faculty of Social Science	Knowledge and institutional systems in the management and coordination of hydropower social safeguards: hydropower development in Attapeu province, Lao PDR.
Bounthiang Phommachack	NUOL	Decision process in hydro development in Lao PDR



Session 4. Women and development

Damdouane Kouangvichit	NUOL/Faculty of Social Science	Women in the process of hydropower development in Southern part of Laos
Kabmanivanh Phouxay	NUOL	Mining and rural development in Lao PDR: Gender equity and empower women in the rural mining community in Vilabuly district, Savannakhet province
Saykham VOLADET	NERI	Key determinants affecting maternal mortality in Lao PDR
Pan Noymany	NUOL/Faculty of Forestry	Local wisdom on sustainable use and management of national resources: A case study on Mei ethnic group of Pkaxum Village Kading district, Bolikhamxay province

Theme 3: Natural resources (land and water) and energy

Session 5. Agriculture Trade and livelihood

Vong Nanthavong	CDE/University of Bern	Preventing hunger and indebtedness in market transitions: a case of cash crop development in Northern Laos
Khamphet Phomphoumy	NUOL	Maize commercialization and livelihood transition in Huaphan province, Lao PDR
Lytoua Chialue	NUOL Faculty of Agriculture/CIRAD	Organic by default? Assessing the impact of certified organic agriculture on rice farming and organizational practices and livelihoods in the Lao PDR

Session 6a&b. The resource development, food security and livelihood nexus in Lao PDR

Moderators: Silinthone Sacklokham (Faculty of Agriculture, National University of Laos)

Philip Hirsch (School of Geosciences, the University of Sydney)

Phokham Lattachack & Bounyaseng Sengkhammy	NUOL, Faculty of Environmental Sciences NUOL, Faculty of Forestry	Resource degradation and food security in the Nam Ngum River Basin
Somphou Sayasone	National Institute of Public Health	Food security status and its determinants in the Nam Ngum River Basin, Lao PDR
Manithong Vonglokhram	National Institute of Public Health	Nutrition status of children under five and its determinants in the Nam Ngum River Basin, Lao PDR
Chanseng Phongpachith	NAFRI/IWMI	Hydropower and irrigation scenarios using SWAT, IQQM models (MRC-DSF) and MRC-tools box at the Nam Ngum river basin
Avakat Phasouysaingam	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture	Diversity and multi-locality in livelihood adaptation to resource development: narratives from Muang Feuang, Lao PDR



Session 7. Impacts of concessions on livelihoods and environment

Oulavanh Keovilignavong	IWMI	Characteristics of private investment in the resources sector in Laos
Vong Nanhthavong	CDE/University of Bern	The landscape of land investments in Laos: Grasping its extent and context through a systematic cross-sectoral inventory and mapping of concession and lease projects
Kaisone Phengsopha	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture	Turning land into fund and livelihood development
Dexanourath Seneduangdeth	NUOL/Faculty of Social Science	Development of a Special Economic Zone creates opportunities, benefits and challenges for local people: A case of Savan-SENO Economic Zone in Lao PDR

Session 8. Land Tenure and rural transformation

Viladeth Sisoulath	GIZ	Laos' land titling gap and its implications for rural land tenure
Miles Kenney-Lazar	University of Clarke	Dynamics of the land tenure and food security nexus in Laos
Vong Nanhthavong/ Thatheva Saphangthong	University of Bern/CDE	Systematic assessment of the social, economic, and environmental quality of land investment projects in Laos: concept, approach and first insights into results from a pilot survey in Luang Prabang province
Palikone Thalongsengchanh	NAFRI	A case study on turning agriculture land in irrigated area in Xaythany and Sikhottabong districts, Vientiane Capital

Theme 4: Regional Trade, Integration & macro-economic policies

Session 9. Agriculture and Cross border trade

Chitpasong Kousonsavath	NUOL Faculty of Agriculture/CIRAD	Analyzing cross-border value chains: the case of maize in Huaphanh Province
Fue Yang	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture	Yangbong production and marketing chain in Vietnamese border districts: Sepon and Nong of Savannakhet province
Thansamay Dethphakhoun	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture	Maize production and value chain in Thai border districts of Sayaboury province

Session 10. Export Promotion Competitiveness and Macro-economic policies

Sthabandith Insisienmay	NERI	Dutch Disease in Lao Economy, Diagnosis and Treatment
Phouphet Kyophilavong	NUOL/ Faculty of Economics and Business Management	The Causality of Dollarization, Interest Rate and Exchange Rate: Evidence from Laos
Sounthone Phommasone	NUOL	Selection of choices during concession of public-private partnerships
Vanxay Sayavong	NERI	Export growth, export potential and export resistance: a case study of Laos



Session 11. Impact of Regional trade on Lao PDR

Bounlert VANHNALAT	NOUL/ Faculty of Economics and Business Management	An assessment on FTA utilization of exporting firms in Lao PDR – The case of Champasak province –
Bounlert VANHNALAT	NOUL/ Faculty of Economics and Business Management	Impact of ASEAN free trade area on the priority integration sectors of Lao PDR, case study: agricultural, wood and garment and textile products
Thongmala Phosykhram	Souphanouvong University	Sustainable tourism: perspectives of local community about the impact from tourism development in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR
Feuangsy Laofoung	National Academy of Social Science	Sustainable development of agriculture-forestry: advantages of Lao PDR from ASEAN economic community membership in 2015

Session 12. Achieving SDGs

This session has three papers that would be presented.

Koukeo Ackkhamonty	National Assembly	Use of international sustainable development practices in Lao PDR
--------------------	-------------------	---

Theme 5: Migration, Urbanization

Session 13. Urban expansion and new labour markets

Propose moderators: Saithong and Dr. Kabmanivanh

Phanhpakit Onphanhdala	NUOL	An analysis on job matching of TVET graduates in Lao PDR - The case of Pakpasak Technical College –
Marzia Fontana	NUOL Faculty of Social Sciences	Labour practices and productivity in the Lao garment sector – perspectives from management and workers
Kabmanivanh Phouxay	NUOL Faculty of Social Sciences	Rural–urban migration, economic transition, and status of female industrial workers in Lao PDR
Saithong Phommavong	NUOL Faculty of Social Sciences	Extension of urban space: economic development and livelihood change of new Vientiane City, Lao PDR



Theme 6: Climate change

Session 14. Forest and climate change

Proposed moderators: Dr. Sithong and Khamphone Moulamai

Thanongsai Soukhamthat	NERI	Economic valuation of land uses in Oudomxay province, Lao PDR: Can REDD+ be effective in maintaining forests?
Dr. Palikone	NAFRI	Impact of climate change in agriculture and forestry sector in Lao PDR
Somvilay Chanthalonnavong	NUOL Faculty of Forestry	Impacts of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (I-REDD+)

Session 15. Agriculture & Climate change

Proposed moderators: Dr. Palikone and Dr. Chanda

Somkhit BOULIDAM	Faculty of Social Science, NUOL	Simulation of climate change impact on lowland paddy rice production potential in Savannakhet province, Laos
Thavone Inthavong	NAFRI, Policy Research Center	Does dry direct seeding can help to reduce climate risk and increasing rainfed rice production in Lao PDR ?
Amphayvan Chanmany	NERI	A case study on climate change adaptation in Agriculture sector: The challenges for climate change adaptation policy in Lao PDR and what should be done to overcome the hurdles

Poster Presentations

Sonevilay Nampanya	University of Sydney, Australia	Financial impacts of foot and mouth disease on smallholder large ruminant farmers and the national economy of Lao PDR
Khamly Adsavong	NAFRI	A research on patterns of integrated coffee production
Sonephom Xayachack	NAFRI	Improving yields of transplanted old seeding in rainfed areas in Lao PDR through increased seeding density and use of appropriate varieties
Bounsong Vongvichit	Aquatic resource research center	A study of catfish breeding
Aloun Khounthongbang	LARREC/NAFRI	Assessment of the effectiveness of enacting traditional shrimp "macrobrachium.yui" management regulation at Ban Napho, Pak Saeng district, Louang Prabang province.
Bansa Thammavong	NAFRI	Sustainable rattan management and use
Somephanh Philavong	NAFRI	No title for this one just abstract
Bounlerth Sivilai	NUOL	Utilization of cassava leaf meal as protein source on growth performance of native (moo lart) pigs
Bounthiang Phommachan	NUOL	Law enforcement for solving waste water problem of potassium chloride factory at Thakhaek district and Nong Bok district, Khammuan province
Viengsakoun Napasirth	NUOL/Faculty of Agriculture,	Potential of cassava residues silage as livestock feed in Lao PDR
Bounthanom Bouahom	NAFRI	Artificial wetlands in the context of hydropower development' A potential opportunity to improve local livelihoods
Saithong Phommavong	Faculty of Social Sciences, NUOL	Strengthening families in Lao PDR: Views of adults and children in Luang Prabang and Xayabury provinces



Khanit Phimpavong	Champassak university	Water quality analysis of Sedon river and Mekhong river in Pakse district, Champassak province in 2013
Bounleug Phouangsavady	NUoL and Kunming University of Science and Technology	Comparison of performance management system for high organizational achievement in industry and service of state-owned enterprises, Lao PDR
Daovy Kongmanila	Faculty of Agriculture, NUoL	Erythrina foliage as an alternative feed for growing goats in Lao PDR
Somchan Nanthavong	NAFRI	The comparison of teak plantation using branch cutting and trimming techniques in Louang Prabang and Xayabouly
Dr. Khamtorn Vanthanouvong	Vice director of external research center	A research of hybrid corn seeding and production
Viengsakoun Napasirth	Faculty of Agriculture, NUoL	Assessment of nutritive value of corn by products silage
Viengsakoun Napasirth	Faculty of Agriculture, NUoL	Potential of cassava residues silage as livestock feed in Lao PDR
Soytavanh Mienmany & Jerome Villanueva	NAFRI, CCAFS	Climate-Smart Villages in Lao PDR: A Community Approach in Agriculture Development



Supported by:



WLE MEKONG



RESEARCH
PROGRAM ON
Water, Land and
Ecosystems

