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LURAS Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service

Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) Phase II Project



Mid-Term Review (MTR)

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AGREE	Agripreneurs for Green Rural Enterprises and Employment
AFD	Agence France Développement
CHF	Swiss Francs
CLICK	Coalition for Lao Information Communication and Knowledge
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DoPLA	Department of Policy and Legal Affairs
DTEAP	Department for Technical Extension and Agricultural Processing
F2F	Farmer-to-Farmer
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FAW	Fall Army Worm
FO	Farmer Organization
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LEAP	Laos Extension for Agriculture Project
LFN	Lao Farmer Network
LURAS	Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MTR	Mid Term Review
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Centre
NSEDP	National Social and Economic Development Plan
NUoL	National University of Lao
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PTT	Policy Think Tank
SAEDA	Sustainable Agriculture & Environment Development Association
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SSWG-FAB	Sub-Sector Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness
ToR	Terms of Reference

Executive Summary

Background

The Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service Phase II, Lao PDR (referred to hereafter as LURAS) is a four-year project (December 2017 to November 2021) funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the international non-government organization Helvetas, in partnership with the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). Like Phase I before it, Phase II aims to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in upland Lao PDR through their access to an improved extension service.

There are four intended project outcomes as follows:

- 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands;
- 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable;
- 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups;
- 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness.

The MTR was undertaken by one international and one national consultant between the end of October and mid December 2020, including two weeks of fieldwork in the target provinces. It used a mixed methods approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from representatives of all stakeholders (government partners, civil society, private sector, community leaders and ordinary people, with a particular emphasis on women), which provided both measurable data on planned outcomes (indicators) as well as richness and texture (such as respondent's voices through case studies).

Key achievements of LURAS at the time of review

1. Green extension learning (such as action research, F2F) has increased knowledge and adoption of sustainable farming practices such as composting, natural pest management, improved seed storage;
2. Farmers have the confidence to increase their production of tea and coffee in response to more reliable markets and improved returns, which is a healthier and more environmentally friendly means of farming than relying upon high chemical inputs;
3. Youth in rural areas, including women and ethnic minorities, have an opportunity to build their own agribusinesses and contribute to local employment and the provision of services to farmers with the Agripreneurs for Green Rural Enterprises and Employment (AGREE) scheme;
4. There are interactive extension materials and support available for farmers using digital technologies, such as Facebook and Whatsapp which are especially suited to the younger generation;
5. The flexible approach of LURAS within the project design has allowed it to quickly respond to Fall Army Worm, coffee cherry borer and COVID-19;
6. Nurturing farmer groups informally from the bottom-up has fostered their sustainability compared to a traditional top-down approach;
7. The Lao Farmer Network (LFN) has reached its expectation of being a self-reliant organisation recognized by government and is contributing to increased empowerment of youth and female farmers.

Challenges remaining to be addressed

1. It remains difficult to identify healthy and sustainable options for farmers below 1,200 meters and who are reliant on upland soils, leaving them reliant on maize as their main cash crop. They are continuing to apply dangerous chemicals that are readily available in local markets;
2. Farmers believe that maintaining soil productivity (for coffee, tea) will be increasingly difficult with a reliance on labour intensive processes for natural fertilizers;
3. Face to face extension services for coffee and tea growers in Hmong language are limited, which particularly impacts upon women who have less opportunities than men to participate in learning and are usually illiterate in Lao language;
4. While MAF staff have received training in the policy development cycle, it remains difficult to review policies if the issues are sensitive or it means criticising past performance;
5. While the commitment to forming farmer groups at village level has been admirable, some of these groups lack a business focus and/or represent an extension of the existing village administration. The partnership with the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) to support post-harvest processing was not successful, and there is a lack of quality private sector partners to support extension and marketing;
6. There are large and unrealistic expectations placed upon LFN by its membership, especially over its ability to provide funding, credit and markets which puts pressure on the Secretariat;
7. Government policies that affect upland farmers are not always objectively evaluated and improved, because it is difficult to question the judgement of policy makers.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Resource Centre for the LFN should be built as planned

The LFN has reached its initial expectation of becoming recognised and self-reliant organization by government and donors alike. For its future development, and to take advantage of the offer of land on a main road within a new population centre, the Resource Centre should be built as planned.

Recommendation 2: Continue to nurture and mentor LFN, and seek to moderate overly ambitious plans

Future expectations by farmer groups on LFN (for credit, funding, markets, membership expansion) are unrealistic, and it is to be expected that the next few years will be challenging as LFN tries to negotiate feasible roles and responsibilities among its stakeholders. LURAS has an important role to nurture and mentor LFN, and seek to moderate any overly ambitious plans.

Recommendation 3: Scale-up AGREE to other areas

All stakeholders commented on the success of the AGREE scheme, and it was rated as the top activity in the LURAS internal assessment. The AGREE scheme can be continued and expanded, provided it maintains its existing focus on the development of ethnic youth and women.

Recommendation 4. Nurture farmer-owned or farmer group enterprises as an alternative to traditional groups, using a process similar to AGREE

Some of the farmer groups supported lack entrepreneurial focus and/or represent an extension of the existing village administration, and have not successfully been able to engage local entrepreneurs who may have ideas for more appropriate technologies. Phase III needs to correct this balance, by selecting and supporting local entrepreneurs as an alternative to groups, using a model similar to the existing AGREE scheme.

Recommendation 5: Work closely with DOPLA to improve policy review in a sensitive manner.

While MAF staff have received training in the policy development cycle, it remains difficult to review policies if the issues are sensitive or it means criticising past performance, and DOPLA specifically requested continued support in this area. There may be scope to incorporate this recommendation with another program of SDC, which is to support the Policy Think Tank (PTT) now hosted by the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Centre (NAFRI).

Recommendation 6: Have one day study visits for Hmong women to meet Hmong female entrepreneurs

While Hmong women were interested to participate in the offered F2F exchanges, family responsibilities and disapproval from their husbands meant that they were denied such opportunities. They did however, suggest that a day visit to Phonesavanh (or another equivalent location) would be acceptable.

Recommendation 7: Provide a Hmong Extension Worker (preferably female) to Meuang Xiang coffee

Meuang Xiang Coffee is not in a position to provide in depth extension services to Hmong farmers because coffee planted now takes several years to provide returns and there is no guarantee that farmers would while government lacks resources and Hmong speaking staff. Funding a Hmong Extension Worker (preferably female) to Meuang Xiang coffee would be relevant to LURAS's mandate to boost services to this disadvantaged social group.

Recommendation 8: Begin an action research program for soybeans with XP or Aa-ming companies

Demand for soybeans for animal food blends will increase as pig populations recover from the African Swine Fever outbreak, and large quantities are now being imported into Lao to supply the needs of these companies. There is the potential to cooperate with them to trial action research in soybeans as a livelihood option, including farmers in Xieng Khouang who now rely on maize for their primary income.

Recommendation 9: LURAS, Helvetas, SDC and DTEAP should have a discussion about ownership and financial management for Phase III to find the best possible balance

There are some different perspectives on the best way forward to promote project ownership for Phase III, which might be the final (handover phase) of the project. All four parties (LURAS, Helvetas, SDC and DTEAP) need to be involved in order to discuss the best possible balance between promoting ownership and safeguarding financial management standards.

Recommendation 10: Seek out opportunities for new digital applications for farmers

The widespread use of social media by Lao farmers, and particularly young people, has been a factor in the success of LURAS in Phase II. The rapid pace of technology and internet uptake suggests that the opportunities for further success need to be actively sought out in Phase III, with possible ideas to consider, being a Whatsapp group in Hmong language, direct payments by mobile phone for farm produce and crop insurance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

The Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service Phase II, Lao PDR (referred to hereafter as LURAS) is a four-year project (December 2017 to November 2021) funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the international non-government organization Helvetas, in partnership with the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). Like Phase I before it, Phase II aims to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in upland Lao PDR through their access to an improved extension service.

The development goal of LURAS is:

A demand-driven pluralistic extension system, which involves various service providers including self-reliant farmer organisations, has been established to support inclusive agricultural value chains, which improve upland farmers' food security, opportunities and income in a fair, healthy and sustainable manner.

There are four intended project outcomes as follows:

- 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands;
- 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable;
- 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups;
- 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness.

At the time of this review, LURAS activities were focussed in nine districts of Xieng Khouang, Houaphan and Xaysomboun and on the coffee, forest tea, 'khao kai noy' rice, maize and cassava sectors (Table 1). Forest tea activities in a tenth district, in Oudomxay, were handed over the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) in July 2020 as part of the sustainability plan of the project.

Table 1: Summary of districts/village and value chains supported by LURAS in Phase II

District/village	Coffee	Forest Tea	Khao Kai Noy	Maize	Cassava + NTFP	Organic Vegetable	Green School
Phek (XK)		4					1
Khoun (XK)	40		6				
Phaxay (XK)	7		7				
Kham (XK)				12			
Nong Het (XK)	6						
Hiem (HP)		3				1	
Xone (HP)							1
Thathom (XSB)					3		
Anouvong (XSB)						1	
Pakbeng (OUD)		5					
TOTAL	53	12	13	12	3	2	2

Source: LURAS data provided to MTR team.

It is important to note that Table 1 is designed to give a general impression of the depth of work of LURAS: unlike many projects, LURAS does not have a fixed and limited set of target villages, but rather seeks the flexibility to respond to the needs of its government partners.

LURAS is guided in its work by a Steering Committee chaired by MAF and SDC, that meets every six months.

1.2 Objective of the Mid-Term Review (MTR)

As stated in the TOR:

The objective of the MTR is to provide an independent analysis of the progress of the project so far and provide recommendations to shape the direction of the possible next phase [Phase III] of the project. The MTR will review progress towards the achievement of the project objective against the project’s log-frame, identify potential project design problems, identify strengths and weaknesses and document lessons learned. Based on the findings, the MTR shall make specific recommendations on how to improve the project, including recommendations to guide which activities should be scaled up and which ones removed when moving forward to a possible additional phase.

While technically an MTR, it’s timing (three years into the four-year project) means that it is unlikely that SDC will also undertake a final evaluation for LURAS¹.

The complete TOR is given in Annex 1.

1.3 Summary of outcomes and outputs

The planned outcomes and outputs as presented in the LURAS Project Document are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Outcomes and outputs of LURAS

Outcome	Outputs
<u>Outcome 1:</u> Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands	<p><u>Output 1.1</u> Capacity has been built for the implementation of Green Extension, including expansion of knowledge and skills related to the ‘new extensionist’, agro-ecology and the CLEAR approach.</p> <p><u>Output 1.2</u> Proactive extension services have been delivered: promoting a transition towards more sustainable farming systems.</p> <p><u>Output 1.3</u> Reactive extension services have been delivered: promoting measures to mitigate negative impacts of current farming systems.</p>
<u>Outcome 2:</u> Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable	<p><u>Output 2.1</u> The effectiveness of farmer organisations in the target provinces has been significantly improved, including strengthening management, networking and access to productive resources.</p> <p><u>Output 2.2</u> Rural enterprises are adding greater value to farm products, including improvements in processing, certification and contracting.</p> <p><u>Output 2.3</u> The issue of rural employment in integrated into rural advisory services, particularly the need to create opportunities for rural youth to get decent jobs in agribusiness.</p>

¹ By email, 22/10/2020 from Chitlatda Keomuongchanh, SDC.

Outcome	Outputs
<u>Outcome 3:</u> Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups	<u>Output 3.1</u> Women’s engagement in agricultural extension has been significantly improved, both as service providers and clients, by providing supplementary training and incentives for female staff who will implement field activities with women’s groups. <u>Output 3.2</u> There is improved access to extension services in ethnic languages, both through face-to-face communication or media/materials. <u>Output 3.3</u> Rural youth have better prospects, including support for young agripreneurs, exposure to agro-ecology in schools and colleges, and role models for the next generation of farmers.
<u>Outcome 4:</u> Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness	<u>Output 4.1</u> Decision makers and policy makers in the agriculture sector have access to information and platforms for dialogue. <u>Output 4.2</u> New information systems have been established that to bring knowledge to and from rural areas, giving greater voice and choice to field workers and farmers. <u>Output 4.3</u> There is improved regional collaboration on Green Extension, particularly knowledge sharing within the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Source: Project Document.

1.4 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews several key documents that were used in the preparation of the Inception Report, while Section 3 presents the methodology used by the MTR team. Section 4 presents the findings based on the data collected by the team and its analysis, in accordance with the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.² It also addresses management aspects, in keeping with the scope of the TOR.

The conclusions (Section 5) consider the evidence presented in Section 4 and identifies the key achievements of the Project, along with the challenges that remain to be addressed over its remaining period and during a possible third phase. Finally, recommendations (Section 6) present practical, realistic and actionable recommendations to address these challenges.

2 Document Review

The MTR team was provided all relevant documents in both Lao and English, including the project proposal, logframe, progress reports and policy outputs (as a Dropbox link). Some key documents are reviewed below.

² See each subsection for a definition of each criterion, newly updated at 2019 by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

2.1 LURAS documents and materials

1. Project Progress Reports and Presentations

The latest project progress report (April-September, 2020), includes the latest measurement of the project indicators (Annex 5). These figures, which have been developed by the LURAS team (including the DTEAP counterpart), reflect the capacity of the LURAS internal monitoring system and have been used by the MTR team to assess effectiveness. Further, the progress reports identified key successes and areas which could be improved, and assisted in the identification of particular villages and groups to be visited during this mission.

An internal workshop was held on 29th October with the LURAS team (including government counterparts) which provided the latest information to the team. The topics presented were:

- Phase II Overview, Progress and Highlights, Andrew Bartlett, Team Leader
- Gender and Youth Mainstreaming, Ms Rakounna,
- Farmers Action Research, Khamkone, Xieng Khouang Field Coordinator
- DTEAP highlights, Souvanthong, NPD, DTEAP

The workshop was an opportunity to gather the perspectives of the LURAS team on which components of the project were most/least successful (a self-assessment), and which activities they would prioritise for Phase 3. Items of particular interest to the reviewers included:

- The Agripreneurs for Green Rural Enterprises and Employment (AGREE) scheme, which was nominated by all participants as particularly successful and should be continued into a new phase of LURAS
- There is no Hmong extension staff on the team. We try to use the Hmong driver to translate. Out of all the women workers in PAFO Xieng Khouang, none are Hmong.
- Although LURAS has done a lot at the national level, the PAFO/DAFO's didn't assist to control illegal chemicals as expected – and most farmers still continue to use them.

A summary of the workshop results is given in Annex 2.

2. Policy Briefs

Policy briefs, available in Lao and English, are designed to sensitize and influence stakeholders to promote a more sustainable and profitable agricultural system for upland farmers. An example is green extension, which is defined in Issues Brief No. 1 (2019), as follows:

Green extension is an umbrella term that can be used to describe rural advisory services which supports the scaling up of sustainable agriculture. This encompasses a range of methods to promote various types of content. What these approaches have in common is a process of socio-ecological learning, i.e. supporting farmers to analyse local problems and opportunities, and test alternative practices under local conditions.

Green extension is a critical component of LURAS, since as well as promoting healthy and sustainable agriculture, it enables farmers to learn through analysing local problems and opportunities, and testing alternative practices under local conditions, as shown in Figure 1.

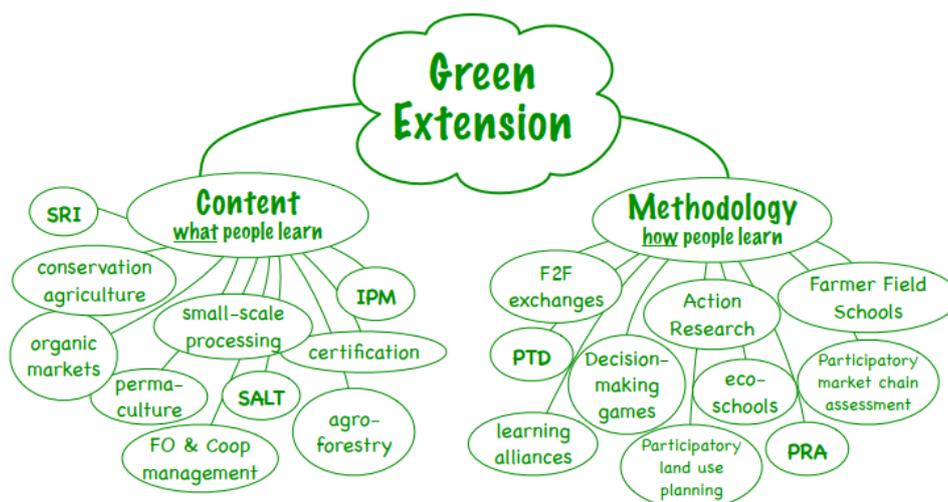


Figure 1: Green Extension supports farmers to analyse their problems and opportunities

3. Websites, social media sites and videos

Through its partnership with the Coalition for Lao Information Communication and Knowledge (CLICK), LURAS and its predecessor projects (such as LEAP) have supported several platforms which have contributed to the Lao development community since the mid 2000's. These include the social media forums Laofab (in English) and Lao44 (in Lao), which provide information sharing and discussion on issues related to Lao farmers and agribusiness, while the websites <https://laowomen.org>, <https://laocoffee.org> and <https://laotea.org> provide resources and information (in English and local languages) on three key focus areas within LURAS.

In terms of numbers, the LaoFAB Facebook page now has 13,597 followers (at 7/12/20), while the page operated by the Lao Farmer Network (LFN), which was nurtured by LURAS over the past seven years, has 21,900 (at 7/12/20). The links to documents and videos in Lao and English on these sites reflect the efforts of LURAS to support knowledge and learning. The feedback from platform users, including the number of downloads of particular items assists LURAS to measure the priorities of the community and can guide their future efforts.

2.2 External documents and materials

4. Papers on the adoption of agroecology techniques in Xieng Khouang

Agence France Développement (AFD) has funded conservation agriculture and agro-ecology activities in Xieng Khouang (including Kham district) since 2005, which included encouraging maize farmers to grow soybeans or other legumes as either intercrops or relay crops with maize. However, farmers have not readily adopted the new techniques, with Lestrelin et al³ (2012b:48) observing that:

³ Lestrelin, Guillaume, Nanthavong, Khamla & Jobard, Etienne & Keophoxay, Anousith & Lienhard, Pascal & Khambanseuang, Chanxay & Castella, Jean-Christophe. (2012b). To till or not to till ? The diffusion of conservation agriculture in Xieng Khouang province, Lao PDR Opportunities and constraints. *Outlook on Agriculture*. 41. 41-49. 10.5367/oa.2012.0075.

although they [farmers] understood the logic and functioning of the conservation techniques proposed, they felt that there was no pressing need to apply them as the soil quality was still fairly good and they could still apply them in the future.

Seven years later in 2019, the adoption of conservation agriculture remains difficult in northern Lao PDR. Yap et al.⁴ (2019:1) conclude that:

the investigated maize/rice bean intercropping system is poorly suited to the current conditions in the study area, and call for farm-based studies focusing on developing locally adapted legume intercropping systems able to perform under variable rainfall conditions.

5. District level interventions for a jurisdictional approach to Green and Sustainable Agriculture (GSA), May 2020

The MTR team recently contributed a study into Green and Sustainable Agriculture for FAO, which complements some aspects of this evaluation, by attempting to identify incentives for districts, companies and farmers for adopting GSA. Detailed surveys were undertaken in Phoukout and Kham districts, Xieng Khouang. One of the lead firms surveyed, XP Trading, which has an animal feed mill in Phoukout, would be motivated to adopt a greener supply chain (deforestation free and illegal chemical free maize) in return for improved terms of credit from finance institutions.

3 Methodology

3.1 General Approach

The MTR used a mixed methods approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from representatives of all stakeholders (government partners, civil society, private sector, community leaders and ordinary people, with a particular emphasis on women), which provided both measurable data on planned outcomes (indicators) as well as richness and texture (such as respondent's voices through case studies). At village level, particular care was taken to ensure the voices of women could be heard, with men and women being separated during the focus group discussions and activity visits at village level. All exercises and interviews with the community were conducted in Lao, with the exception of women farmers in one Hmong villages, in which a Hmong translator was used.

3.2 Components of the MTR

The MTR was undertaken between the end of October and mid December 2020 and included two weeks of fieldwork in the target provinces. Key components were:

- Review of project document/reports/materials and design research questions/data collection tools in Vientiane, and review an approved inception report;
- Presentation and self-assessment with the LURAS team on project outcomes in Vientiane (29/10/2020)
- Attendance in the General Assembly of LFN on 11-12/11/2020 (Figure 2);
- Interviews with central, provincial and district agencies (including DAFO in all districts), civil society partners and companies;

⁴ Yap, V.Y.; Xaphokhame, P.; de Neergaard, A.; Bech Bruun, T. Barriers to Agro-Ecological Intensification of Smallholder Upland Farming Systems in Lao PDR. *Agronomy* 2019, 9, 375.

- Participatory exercises with men, women and youth representatives (village facilitators) in eleven representative villages (Figure 3);
- Data analysis and presentation preparation (including feedback from each district team);
- Presentation and feedback workshop in Vientiane with key stakeholders on 7/12/2020;
- Submission of draft report to SDC on 16/12/2020;
- Complete final report after incorporating feedback on 4/1/2021;



Figure 2: The General Assembly of the LFN was an opportunity to meet farmers from across the country



Figure 3: Focus group for women vegetable growers in Na Vieng, Hiem district

A detailed timeline of the MTR is given in Annex 3.

3.3 Participants in the MTR

Table 3 presents the number of key informants (men and women) who participated in the data gathering exercises and interviews, with women making up nearly half of those interviewed.

Table 3: Number of key informants from the community from interviews and focus group discussions

No.	Key informants	Total	Women
1	Government (MAF and line agencies)	27	4
2	Government (Youth Union Xieng Khouang)	5	4
3	Government (Green School in Xone)	5	1
4	Farmers (10 villages)	152	90
5	LURAS Team	8	5
6	LURAS Partners (LFN, CLICK, SNV)	7	2
7	Companies	6	2
8	AGREE	5	3
9	Village Facilitators	9	3
10	SDC	2	1
	Total	226	115

Source: Data collected by the MTR team.

A complete list of key informants is given in Annex 4.

3.4 Limitations of the MTR

The MTR team enjoyed the full cooperation of all stakeholders in conducting this review, which went according to plan. There were several minor limitations, as listed below, but in hindsight, these are not expected to make a difference to the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- With government officials present, some respondents might report what they think you want to hear, or social desirability bias. The team attempted to manage any possible bias by gathering data from multiple sources (such as men and women separately);
- In Phaxay, the MTR team could not sleep overnight to gain community insights, although by not doing so we ended up visiting two villages;
- There was no female Hmong translator in Phak Hing village, and a male village facilitator was used;
- There were no Khmu villages represented in the MTR schedule: Yamchaleun was initially reported to be a Khmu village and included in the schedule as such, but it is actually Lao Loum.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 Relevance

The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.

4.1.1 Relevance of the project design to partner/institution needs (Lao government)

All Lao government stakeholders interviewed highlighted the relevance of LURAS to the needs of the Lao government, including its strategy to improve the livelihoods of upland farmers and reduce poverty in accordance with the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP).

The Department of Policy and Legal Affairs (DOPLA) in MAF highlighted the importance of generating local employment, in accordance with Measure 8 of their own 8th five-year plan (Figure 4).



Figure 4: This rural employment study, led by DOPLA, is contributing to policy priorities

LURAS was described as a “catalyst of change” by one MAF official, which generates new ideas that can break down ‘old thinking’. Using horizontal learning methods [such as action research], LURAS starts small and tests the success of a strategy before scaling up. This contrasts with the approach of some large international projects that have partnerships with MAF, which try to do too much in a short time and end up “leaving nothing behind” when they withdraw.



'Old thinking', was reported to still stifle the private sector in Lao PDR, and is reflected in the complex regulatory framework and rent-seeking behaviour.⁵ Therefore, improving the environment for the private sector and entrepreneurship to flourish, and ensuring that extension services are relevant to private sector requirements are an essential element of the project. The partnership between LURAS and Comma Coffee was cited as a positive example (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Extension services must link with the private sector to provide reliable markets for upland farmers

4.1.2 Relevance of the project design to the requirements of the beneficiaries (upland farmers)

All those who had benefitted from LURAS, including ordinary farmers in ten villages, affirmed the relevance of the activities to their own farming system, a finding which reflects the LURAS approach of building on the existing knowledge of farmers (proactive extension). Improved returns are the most relevant need of upland farmers, and this is reflected in green bean coffee production in Tan Tai, cattle raising in Saphanxay and tea processing in Yort Piang. These examples will be further developed in subsequent sections of this report.

The MTR team actively sought to gain the perspectives of women and youth on the relevance of the project. As will also be described, the youth interviewed for the AGREE scheme (5 people), the village facilitators (9) and the Green School (5) were also highly enthusiastic about the support that LURAS had provided.

Also enhancing the relevance of LURAS to farmers is its flexibility, which allows it to respond to changing farmer priorities, and its long-term commitment, which has built up an experienced team including government counterparts⁶. With the leadership of DTEAP, LURAS has been able to quickly address new outbreaks of Fall Army Worm (FAW) in maize and cherry borer in coffee, while also supporting LFN to document the impact of COVID -19 on farmers (reactive extension).

4.2 Coherence

The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.

⁵ For example, see the LURAS publication on 'Taxes and informal fees in value chains in Lao PDR.'

⁶ All key personnel, including the DTEAP National Project Director Mr Souvanthong, have been with LURAS from Phase I. This stability is unusual in development projects in the experience of the MTR team.

4.2.1 Coherence at national level

Coherence at national level is promoted by the long-term support given by LURAS to the operations of the Sub Sector Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness (SSWG-FAB), which has met five times during Phase II. One of the activities of the SSWG is to commission and share policy studies, which can be used by the Lao government within an orderly policy development process which leads to the Sector Working Group (SWG). From there, the policy heads to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) for scrutiny including its compatibility with the national development plans of the Lao Government (GoL). Approved interventions then have the opportunity to be promoted and scaled up at the annual Round Table Meetings held between GoL and donors (Figure 6).

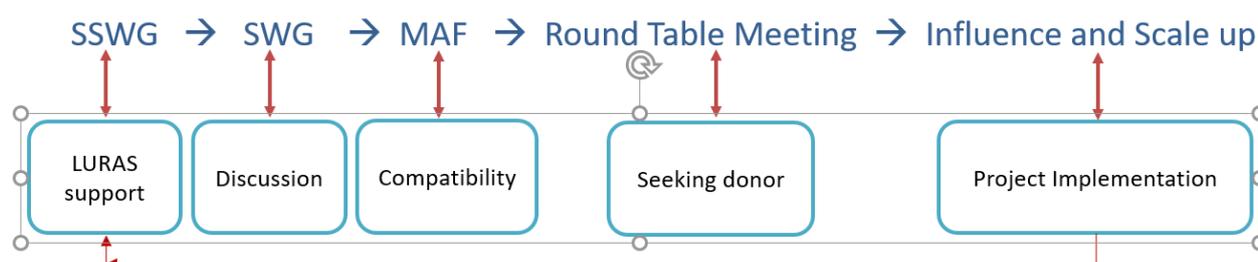


Figure 6: Policy influence chain that ensures coherence with Lao government national development plans

A good example, of this process in action is the ‘green extension’ described earlier (Section 2.1), which has now been incorporated into the draft Agriculture Development Strategy for 2030 (Figure 7).

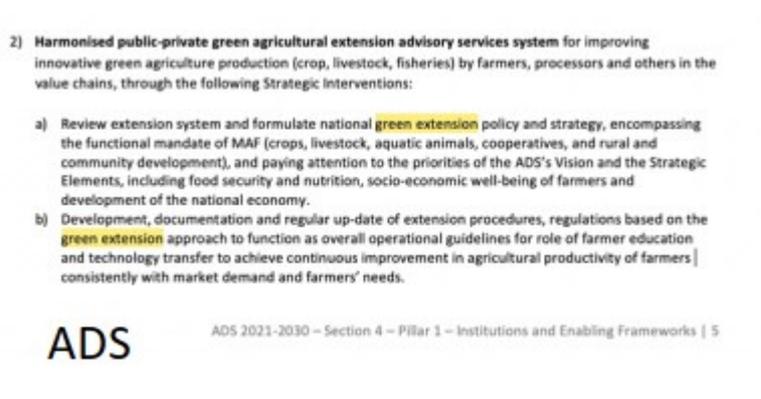


Figure 7: ‘Green extension’ as included in the draft Agriculture Development Strategy for 2030.

Source: Presentation by Andrew Bartlett, 29/10/2020.

4.2.2 Coherence at local level

An example of coherence at local level is the manner in which LURAS was able to complement the work of other agencies in Ban Hor Kang to scale up the success of a System of Rice Intensification (SRI) intervention using an action research approach (Box 1).

Box 1: LURAS is complementing a successful SRI intervention in Ban Hor Kang, Phaxay.

The Ban Hor Kang *Khao Kai Noy* (KKN) rice producer group was established in 2016 with the initial support of SAEDA, who promoted the use of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and organic input use. The adoption of SRI appears particularly successful, with one farmer (Mr Somboun) reporting 7 tonnes/ha (compared to an average of about 4 tonnes/ha using traditional methods) and employing local people@70,000 kip/day to assist with the labour-intensive transplanting process.

Through strong leadership and suitable rice growing conditions (such as irrigation) the group has received additional support from several organisations, including Bread for the World, SAEDA and the Geographical Indication (GI) Association. In 2019, five households undertook action research to test hermetic zip lock bags for the storage of rice seeds with the support of LURAS (implemented by SNV), and for the 2020 harvest the same five families have reused the bags.

The group was very positive about the hermetic bags, including for three key reasons that are related to their SRI system:

1. There is a higher germination rate, which means that only 23kg rice seed is required per 1.5 hectare instead of 50kg;
2. The seedlings come up more evenly and so are better for transplanting;
3. The seedlings are stronger, which means that there is a higher survival rate.

The bags have generated great interest, including from those outside the village. However, the group claims that they do not know how to contact the Grainpro distributor to order bags, and appear to be relying on the project to give some more away for free: as one of the few villages in Phaxay with irrigation, it is likely that they will continue to be prioritised by the district for project support.

4.3 Effectiveness

The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups (taking into account their relative importance).

4.3.1 Achievement of Project Outcomes

The indicators at outcome level for the Project (as stated in the logframe) were chosen with government partners. As noted in Section 2.1, LURAS provided the MTR team with an updated status of the progress towards each indicator, which assisted us in our assessment of effectiveness (see Annex 5).

Table 4 classifies the Outcome indicators based on our assessment, and on the data within the September Progress Report, as follows:

- Expected to be fully achieved: ✓✓
- Expected to be partially achieved: ✓
- Not expected to be achieved: ✗

In summary, ten (of 13) indicators are expected to be fully achieved and three to be partially achieved, while none are not expected to be achieved. This is discussed further in the sections which follow.

While LURAS (and partners) was usually the only development agencies working in the particular villages, the achieved outcomes can be fully attributed to the project. Identified exceptions include:

- There are several projects working in Xieng Khouang to promote safer chemical use, including SAEDA;
- The FAO Geographical Indication (GI) project is supporting *khao kai noy* rice in a limited number of villages (including Hor Kang).

Table 4: Expected achievement of Outcome indicators

Outcome	Verifiable Indicators	Evaluation team comments
<u>Outcome 1:</u> Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agro-ecological innovations made by at least 10 HHs in at least 40 upland farming communities ✓✓ • Significantly increased diversity of farming systems and reduced levels of toxicity ✓ • Returns from sustainable farming systems as measured by farmers exceeds monocultures ✓✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are agro-innovations in 40 farmer groups representing 4,000 households (LURAS data). • There is diversity in upland systems (over 1,200m) but there remain few options for mid-elevation farmers without access to paddy. Chemical regulations are not enforced. • Shaded tea and coffee plantations are expanding in expectation of improved markets.
<u>Outcome 2:</u> Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 1,000 farmers are adding value to their produce ✓✓ • At least 10 community-managed storage and/or processing facilities ✓✓ • At least 5 companies applying voluntary CSR guidelines ✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved both directly (training, learning centres) and indirectly (via media and exchange). • There are 11 community managed facilities, but none managed by local entrepreneurs. • Two companies applying voluntary CSR guidelines (Meuang Xiang and Comma). LURAS is currently seeking additional companies during its final year, but it will be difficult to reach five.
<u>Outcome 3:</u> Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% improvement in client satisfaction ✓✓ • Cooperation between extension services and at least 10 local colleges and schools; ✓ • At least 200 rural youth engaged in micro-enterprises or community development schemes ✓✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder interviews revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the project, although measuring satisfaction is difficult. • Although there was cooperation with seven schools, only two are 'green schools'. • As well as direct beneficiaries, there are also indirect beneficiaries as a result of shared knowledge.

<p><u>Outcome 4:</u> Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and analysis relating to green farming and agribusiness is available to decision-makers at all levels ✓✓ • Multi-stakeholder dialogue is taking place at all levels ✓✓ • The experience of small farmers is routinely brought to the attention of policy makers ✓✓ • Exchanges of experience are happening with neighbouring countries ✓✓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 14 policy documents have been produced and distributed to decision-makers. • The SSWG (Figure 5) is a good example of a multi-stakeholder dialogue process that brings issues to the attention of policy-makers, while the platforms LaoFAB and Lao44 reflect the contributions of thousands of individuals. • Presentations on the experience of LURAS have been made at nine international fora to date.
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4.3.2 Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands (Outcome 1)

Tea and coffee are good examples of healthy and sustainable farming systems, because they are planted with shade trees (diversity and forest protection), they are long term crops (protect soil) and they don't require chemicals. Linkages to the other three outcomes are apparent: since production and value adding is facilitated by access to organic markets and processing equipment (Outcome 2), technical knowledge comes from 'green extension' learning activities (Figure 1) received by all community members including women and youth (Outcome 3), and there is support from policy makers (Outcome 4).

The efforts of LURAS to promote healthy agriculture in Thathom are complemented by its status as an organic agriculture district, in which the use of all chemicals (including fertilizer) has been banned since 2014. In Yamchalern village in Thathom, Ms Nang, a villager in the rice farmer field school told the MTR team (Figure 8):

"I learnt how to protect my rice field from pests and diseases from DTEAP staff using a herbal formulation. Now I have shown other villagers how to make it also."



Figure 8: Ms Nang explains how to manage rice pests using no chemical alternatives

In contrast however, it remains challenging to identify safe and healthy cropping alternatives for swidden farmers below 1,200 metres above sea level where the elevation is not suited to tea and coffee production, and where rice is often insufficient for household consumption. These farmers have relied on maize to provide an income over many years, and despite the efforts of LURAS (in both Phase I and Phase II), the use of banned chemicals remains high. In Kham district, villagers in Hai Nieng (Lao Loum) and Samphanxay (Hmong) reported that they are still using Gramoxone (paraquat) in the maize fields as before.

“Next year we will need to use more chemicals, because the price of maize is high (@2,000 kip/kg) and everyone in the village will increase their production.”

Men’s farmer group, Ban Samphanxay, 26/11/2020.



In both villages, farmers were asked where they purchased banned chemicals. In both cases, the source of Gramoxone was reported as three shops in the Kham market, all of which were owned by DAFO staff or close family members⁷. The MTR team considers that unless government is willing to address the openly illegal sales of toxic chemicals by its own staff, then it is unlikely that awareness alone from LURAS can make much difference.

Further, the tank for collecting used chemical containers in Samphanxay was overgrown and had not been used for over a year, reportedly due to a lack of budget.

Figure 9: Unused chemical container storage tank in Samphanxay, Kham district.

4.3.3 Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable (Outcome 2)

LURAS has developed more than 20 processing and storage facilities for coffee, tea, maize and rice (September 2020 progress Report). Several farmer groups visited during the MTR reported that they have been able to increase their profitability by adding value to their crops, including Tan Tai (producing green beans for Comma, Figure 10) and Yot Piang (producing organic Phousan tea for the Xieng Khouang tourist market).



Figure 10: Tan Tai is producing green cherries instead of lower value parchment coffee or red cherries

⁷ The names of the three staff were recorded, but are withheld in this report.

LURAS has focussed its efforts in developing community-managed facilities, rather than ‘local entrepreneurs’ (the indicator in Output 2.2). However, such community groups comprise a large proportion of people who are not business-minded. Ms Hung from Comma coffee stated in relation to Tan Tai:

“If the project finishes, will the farmers be able to continue by themselves? They don’t have a business sense yet – for example, they don’t know how to talk to buyers.”

Community groups interviewed were unwilling to risk their own capital to increase the level of value adding, leaving them dependent on future project support. The Yot Piang tea group requested more funds for a grading machine and an oven, the Na Vieng vegetable groups asked for three wells while the Hai Niang maize group wanted more silos. In contrast to Yot Piang, twelve local entrepreneurs in Or An had invested their own funds (or partnered with other businesspeople) to process tea. Or An farmers were receiving good prices, with up to 200,000 kip/kg for ‘spring flush’ forest tea on higher elevation sites (up to 1,700 m asl), providing pickers with one million kip/day. Wet season prices were still at 30,000 kip/kg for regular planted tea (it is possible to pick 20kg/day or 600,000 kip). Ms Khamphoui employs twenty people at her factory, with the highest salary (for a tea wilter who must work all night) being four million kip/month.

Further analysis of the sustainability of farmers groups is given in Section 4.6.

4.3.4 Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups (Outcome 3)

Despite the challenges of providing extension services to disadvantaged social groups, the MTR team believes that LURAS has made excellent progress. Figure 11 assesses ‘client satisfaction’ for LURAS activities supporting the coffee value chain in Tan Tai, Khoun district.

No.	Activity	Man				Women			
									
1	Provide coffee seeds and bags		8	2					
2	Training on seed propagation		10			1	5	11	
3	Equipment for processing	10					7	4	
4	Processing/quality control training	8	2				9	8	
5	Composting and natural fertilizer training						4	8	
6	Natural insecticide training						7	9	
7	Harvest training and monitoring	10				2	7	7	
8	Youth meeting	1	9						
9	Study tour and exchange visits	2	8				4	5	
10	Bring in another buyer (Comma)	6	4						
11	Cherry borer control training					6		10	
	Average over all activities (%)	46	52	2		7	20	46	

Figure 11: ‘Client satisfaction’ for LURAS activities in Ban Tan Tai.

Source: Men’s and women’s focus groups.

Figure 11 shows that overall, 98% of men were either very satisfied or satisfied with LURAS activities, compared to 27% of women. Much of this difference can be explained by the fact that 12/18 who participated in the women’s focus group were previously in an alternative group which had been facilitated by another NGO (Caritas), and which had not participated in the LURAS training activities. Apart from this, women were less satisfied than men because:

- the equipment provided will not be sufficient (cement drying, coffee shellers, pruning shears) as production expands in future;
- the natural insecticide formula did not kill the aphids.

Rural youth have often been ignored by development projects, who typically focus their activities on village leaders and household heads. Constrained by these traditional and patriarchal structures, and lacking resources and knowledge youth become disinterested in farming. Unlike such projects, LURAS has actively sought to engage youth (and particularly young females and ethnic people) in a range of activities (Table 5).

Table 5: Youth Participants in LURAS by Gender and Ethnicity

Ethnic group	Type of activity							
	Village Facil.		AGREE		Short course		TOTAL	
	Total	F	Total	F	Total	F	Total	F
Lao/Tai	19	14	30	15	11	8	60	37
Khmu	0	0	3	3	4	1	7	4
Hmong	10	0	11	4	19	7	40	11
TOTAL	29	14	44	22	34	16	107	52

Source: Ms Rakounna, by email, 3/11/2020.

Of these programs, the AGREE scheme was the most highly rated activity by the LURAS project team (Annex 2), and its success was highlighted by stakeholders at all levels of government. Reasons for the success of AGREE are summarised in Box 2.

Box 2: All agree on AGREE!

Factors that have led to success of AGREE are:

- The Lao Youth Union has pride and enthusiasm for the scheme. It became apparent in our interview that LURAS was the only project that it managed, and was a source of pride among the staff who frequently invited the central level to visit the recipients.
- Only youth who are genuinely interested are chosen. The application process is time consuming and weeds out those that are only thinking about having a grant without the commitment.
- There is a focus on practical training and marketing: Ms Chanthala, who is doing an integrated garden close to Phonesavanh, commented on how the one month of practical training, gave her more confidence than four years at Nabong (NUoL).
- There are opportunities for ethnic minorities: Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in government and access to services, but LURAS has actively sought to given them an opportunity to participate in the scheme.
- There is monitoring and support: The Whatsapp groups set up by the recipients have enabled exchange from learning from each other, as distinct from relying on government services to take on this role.

Despite these successes, it remains a challenge to accessing ethnic Hmong women with extension services. In focus group interviews with Hmong women in Phak Hing, they expressed their disappointment that they were denied the opportunity to participate in F2F exchanges due to family responsibilities and disapproval from their husbands. To resolve this issue, they suggested that LURAS organise day trips. Both Meuang Xiang Coffee and DAFO in Khoun highlighted the challenges in reaching Hmong communities, and especially women.

“I would like to see LURAS scale up its F2F activities in the other 35 villages growing coffee in Khoun.”

Mr Phonesavath, Head of DAFO, Khoun District.

There has been cooperation with seven schools under the indicator “Cooperation between extension services and at least 10 local colleges and schools’ as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of schools with cooperation in extension services

Name of School	Area of Cooperation
Non-Formal Education School, Xieng Khouang	Mushroom cultivation, making organic fertilizer, short course
Integrated Technical and Vocational School, Xieng Khouang	Fruit trees expansion, animal feed, vet services, AGREE
Nabong Agriculture College, Vientiane	Food processing AGREE
Lao-German Technical School, Vientiane	Agriculture machinery, AGREE
Northern Agriculture and Forestry College, Luang Prabang	Fish and frog breeding, vet services, AGREE
Phek Ethnic School, Xieng Khouang	Green school (organic vegetables, fruit trees)
Xone Tai Secondary School, Houaphan	Green school (organic vegetables, fruit trees)

It has proved difficult to identify and support potential Green schools, even though the school visited by the MTR team, Xone Tai, appears to be active in implementing its sub agreement with LURAS to development a school water system, vegetable shade houses and fruit tree/bamboo plantings (Figure 12)



Figure 12: Students at Xone Tai beside a (soon to be) newly fenced tree

4.3.5 Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness (Outcome 4)

All indicators under Outcome 4 are expected to be achieved, with the example of access to policy -makers via the SSG-FAB having been presented in Section 4.1.1.

An example of the effectiveness of the videos in reaching policy-makers comes from Na Vieng organic vegetable group in Hiem district (Figure 13).



Figure 13: The Head of the Na Vieng organic vegetable group, Ms Sor Somphone.

Na Vieng was one of the villages chosen for the LURAS supported videos on the impact of COVID-19 to small-scale farmers:

“The Navieng vegetable group was unable to sell their high-value vegetables (carrot, radish, beetroot) to Vientiane during the COVID-19 pandemic due the lockdown. However, the district governor learned from the LFN Facebook page about this issue, and he ordered his staff to negotiate with the Houngaloun shipping company to transport the Na Vieng vegetables to Vientiane at a reduced rate.”

Mr Phouttasinh, Secretariat of LFN, 5/11/2020.

Further details on this case study are available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/laofarmernetwork/posts/1543195352523338>



Wider internet penetration and rising social media usage in rural areas has benefitted LURAS. The Xieng Khouang Provincial Youth Union administers a Whatsapp group that allows the AGREE recipients to share information and receive follow-up and mentoring to ensure their enterprise is sustainable (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Ms Tuk, from the Xieng Khouang Youth Union, displays the AGREE Whatsapp page.

4.4 Efficiency

The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

According to the September 2020 Progress Report, LURAS was expected to expend 89.5% of its activity budget of 4,100,00 CHF (Annex 6). COVID-19 is not expected hinder to overall progress⁸, despite delays in some activities due to COVID-19 (such as the gender strategy for Xieng Khouang, cassava action research, international conferences) – in fact, the swift reaction to COVID-19 (such as the production of impact videos – see section 4.3.5) is evidence of results being delivered in a ‘timely way.’ The MTR team concurs with the following statement:

The trust that has been established between SDC, DTEAP and Helvetas over many years, plus the experience and networks of the different members of the project team, have all contributed to the effectiveness of reactive extension supported by LURAS during the past few months.

(LURAS Progress report, September, 2019).

⁸ A review of the implications of COVID-19 was specifically requested in the TOR.

The efficiency of LURAS was favourably compared to other development projects by several stakeholders.

"LURAS only has a small budget, but it does a lot compared to other projects."

Mr Bounlert, Head of DAFO, Phek District.

The only area identified by the MTR team with questions over its efficiency was the maize post-harvest activities (within Output 2.2), which were sub-contracted out to SNV for two years⁹, after which LURAS decided not to renew the contract (Box 3).

"SNV were unable to provide the project with the required expertise, so we decided to look for a new partner".

LURAS team member, 17/12/2020.

⁹ The total contract value with SNV was \$169,963 USD (Annex 6), including maize/rice post-harvest activities and overheads.

Box 3: Maize Post-harvest Research did not deliver as expected.

The MTR team interviewed all stakeholders, including the Head of SNV (Mr Allert), the Lao Technical Advisor (Mr Ounkeo), a private metalworker who built the silos (Mr Saithong) and representatives of a farmer group which trialled the technology (Ban Hai Niang in Kham).

According to the SNV side, the pilot (action research) trials were about to be expanded to promote viable enterprises that could generate product demand and scale up the technology, and that LURAS terminated the contract prematurely. However, from the interviews, the MTR team did not find any evidence that the trialled technologies for maize post-harvesting (cocoons, silos, driers) would have been feasible to be scaled up.

In particular:

- The economic analysis in SNV's June 2020 report for maize post-harvest technology was unrealistic and confusing. The benefits of selling dried maize are overstated and it appears to ignore the purchase costs of the silos/Grainsafe cocoons. The figures in the report were also questioned by Ounkeo, who felt that only the hermetic bags offered a viable alternative for maize farmers;
- In Hai Nieng, only the original five farmers have used the drier for maize in 2020 (one other farmer hired it to dry 500 kg of rice seed). Using the figures given in the SNV report and by farmers, drying and cleaning would cost at least 250 kip/kg in labour costs and 80 kip/kg in drying unit hire costs (a high cost per unit of output when maize is valued at only about 1,200 kip/kg in a normal year);
- According to the silo manufacturer (Mr Saithong), a 600kg silo to store dried grain would cost 1,600,000 kip/unit (minimum order of 10), or 2,670 LAK/kg, an investment too high (and too risky) compared to the potential profits. This compares to a hermetic bag of 25,000 kip which can store 50kg (500 kip/kg).
- In any case, ordinary farmers have borrowed their inputs from traders on credit (reducing their own risk if the crop fails) and are usually required to sell their maize immediately upon harvest.
- Linking the post-harvest processing of maize to animal production, may improve the economics of maize post-harvest processing provided animals are kept in sanitary conditions, vaccinated and fed properly (too risky for ordinary farmers).

In conclusion, post-harvest technologies for maize are suited only to entrepreneurial minded farmers who are willing to invest in labour-saving machinery and storage facilities to clean, dry and store maize, in expectation of receiving a return from providing services to local farmers.

4.5 Impact

The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.

The development goal (impact level) of LURAS is:

A demand-driven pluralistic extension system, which involves various service providers including self-reliant farmer organisations, has been established to support inclusive agricultural value chains, which improve upland farmers' food security, opportunities and income in a fair, healthy and sustainable manner.

Although LURAS is not yet completed, there will significant impacts are anticipated. Four legacies of LURAS are described below.

1. Lao Farmers Network has attained autonomy and recognition

The LFN was conceived and formally established in 2014 with the support of LURAS's predecessor (Lao Extension for Agriculture Project, or LEAP), and by the end of 2020 had a membership of 58 farmer groups.

With the support of LURAS, LFN recently developed its five-year strategic plan 2021-2025. It's focus on youth and women clearly reflect the values of LURAS, although debate continues on the appropriate balance between knowledge exchange or market access¹⁰. After attending the LFN General Assembly on 11/12th October and talking to stakeholders, the MTR team confirms that a focus on 'access to markets' reflects the will of the committee, its membership, its government partners and potential donors, who lined up behind the strategy on the day (Figure 15).

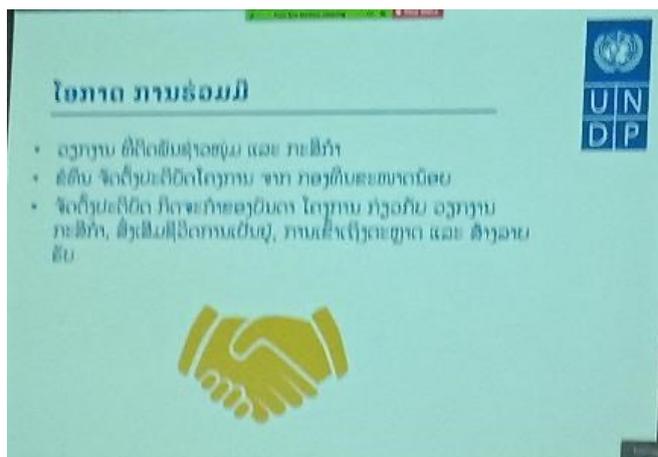


Figure 15: The UNDP sees “opportunities for cooperation” with LFN.
(Source: LFN General Assembly, 12/11/20)

The autonomy and recognition of LFN is reflected in the following statements, and in the newspaper articles in Annex 7.

“I am very proud of what LFN has achieved. I contributed to it's establishment, and I want to see it succeed.”

Mr Somxay, Dept of Planning and Cooperation, MAF, 11/11/2020.

“If LURAS doesn't support us, then we can find other funding.”

Mr Phouttasinh, LFN Secretariat, 5/11/2020.

¹⁰ See the report by Rita Gebert, entitled, “At the Crossroads: Assessment and Strategy Elements for the Future.”

“When I first suggested to the Minister that he should meet the LFN in about 2015, he was totally dismissive.”

Retired DTEAP official, LFN General Assembly, 12/11/2020.

The 2021-2025 strategy includes the development of a Farmers Resource Centre to be located on land provided by DTEAP. Although accommodation could be sought within the existing Korean Training Centre in the short term, potential government restructures and uncertainties over ownership may hinder LFN to achieve its potential at the site. For the LFN Secretariat, the opportunity to have a secure location with permanent access to land adjacent to a main road (and thus compatible with the expectation of LFN members to seek markets), at no cost, is considered the most important aspect of the Centre – even though it will have to seek funding to cover maintenance, it will never have to funding for office rental. Further, promises have been made and expectations raised – any attempt to halt the project now will affect trust between donors and partners.

While the new strategy may be overly ambitious (Section 4.6.2), the autonomy of LFN, its membership driven focus and its recognition by government as a valuable partner suggest that the original expectations (indeed intentions) of LEAP/LURAS/SDC to develop a ‘self-reliant farmers organisation’ have been achieved.

2. There are accessible and interactive extension materials in Lao and Hmong languages

Booklets and posters have long been a staple of extension projects, but these are expensive to produce and often unread. LURAS has been able to develop alternative fora to access and share information cheaply which particularly appeal to young people: the 35,000 Facebook followers for LURAS/LFN (Section 2.1) and the expansion of Whatsapp groups (Section 4.3.5) are testimony to this.

As well as Lao language, LURAS has pioneered the production of materials in Hmong language in Laos (Figure 16). In the experience of the lead reviewer, there are numerous young Hmong women who are illiterate in Lao language, but fluent in Hmong, having simply picked it up via their social media apps.



Figure 16: Pesticide Safety Poster in Hmong language

3. Youth have a long-term future with the AGREE Program, and are providing services to other farmers

The factors leading to the success of the AGREE program are given in Box 2 (Section 4.3.4). Notably, as well as building their own futures, the AGREE recipients (and even those who trained but did not receive funding) have the potential to scale up their businesses to provide services to other farmers, such as fish fingerlings, vaccination and piglets. One recipient, Mr Khamchan in Khoun, had sold fingerlings worth eight million kip within the past eight months, and was planning to build another pond to scale up his operation (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Mr Khamchan with his breeding tanks subsidised by AGREE

4. Policies supportive of upland farmers have been introduced

LURAS has developed numerous policy studies and provided field visits to policy makers at all levels of government, in an effort to influence policy makers on the issue of fair, healthy and sustainable upland farming (see Figure 18, and the example of green extension in Section 4.2).

Lessons for commercialization and district policy – Experience in Kham and Thathom



Methodology – DOPLA Fact Finding Mission

- Interviews with District Government, District Office of Industry and Commerce, DAFO staff, cluster technical service center staff
- Focus Group Discussions – Piengtha, Naxong, Xaychalern

Figure 18: Lessons from a DOPLA fact-finding mission on chemical management

Even though not all policies have yet led to positive change, the MTR team believes that LURAS, with its long-term outlook, will eventually achieve results, as sensitized government staff move through the ranks to take-up senior positions.¹¹

In the short-term however, the impact of LURAS’ policy influencing activities might be enhanced by improving the policy review step (Step 6) in the cycle of policy development, which was specifically requested by DOPLA during this MTR, and endorsed by MAF (Figure 19).

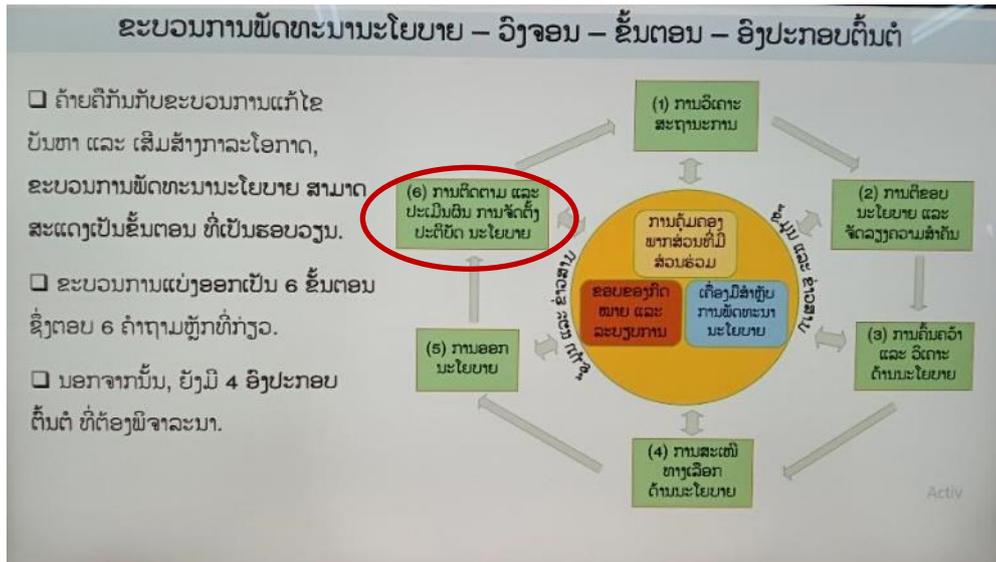


Figure 19: The policy development cycle used by MAF, highlighting Step 6 on policy review

4.6 Sustainability

The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.

Several examples of interventions which will continue to provide net benefits beyond the life of LURAS have already been presented in this report, including AGREE (Section 4.3), capacity building to female farmers (Section 4.5) and LFN (also Section 4.5).

The development goal specifically mentions self-reliant farmer organisations. Developing sustainable farmers organisations is particularly difficult in Laos, for several reasons including:

- there was forced collectivisation by the new regime in the early 1980’s, which has not been forgotten by older farmers;
- there is a culture of dependence on government which is reinforced by the Party system from central to village level;
- there is a greater degree of trust within family relationships than non-family relationships, particularly in cultures with clan-based kinship systems (such as Hmong).

¹¹ The lead reviewer has personal experience with improving the policy environment for small scale timber growers under an ACIAR project, which took six years from policy brief to policy change, and even now implementation is not universal across the country.

4.6.1 Sustainability of Farmer Groups

LURAS is working with eleven farmer groups (according to September 2020 Progress Report), who have been organised to undertake such activities as managing value adding facilities (such as storage and processing), piloting action research or simply cooperating together as independent farmers for training or information sharing. Although not all have to be sustainable, there is nonetheless the expectation that they will continue to provide services to their own members and others in the community when LURAS phases out. Table 7 provides a brief assessment of the village level farmer groups visited during this mission.

Table 7: Likelihood of farmer group continuation after LURAS phases out

No.	Name of Group	Assessment	Justification
1	Ban Hor Kang, Phaxay – Rice Seed production	sustainable	Strong leadership, linkages to SAEDA and GI market. As a registered group in Phaxay, they realise that maintaining their group status is financially advantageous.
2	Ban Yort Piang, Phek Tea	sustainable	Processing centre established, there is Chinese demand for tea at mid-range prices. Good District support such as building a tea tourism centre and marketing tea.
3	Ban Tan Tai, Khoun Coffee	sustainable with additional support	Processing centre established, there is strong demand for Keoseth coffee, but group needs more business skills to ensure its sustainability (according to Ms Hung from Comma – section 4.3.3, and LURAS coffee expert Mr Thongxay).
4	Ban Phak Hing, Khoun Coffee	likely unsustainable in long term	There is intergroup conflict – group is likely to revert to a clan enterprise as occurs in other Hmong villages (e.g. Or An), but this should not be regarded as failure.
5	Ban Navieng, Hiem, Organic vegetable	sustainable in short term	Strong leadership, but it is likely that they will face strong competition from other groups closer to the larger markets in Sam Neua, Vientiane (the expressway will bring Chinese grown cool season crops from Vang Vieng in refrigerated trucks).
6	Ban Thamla Tai, Hiem– Tea	sustainable	Processing centre established, there is an existing Chinese concession close by, there are new tea plantings. Tea price is historically high now.
7	Ban Samphanxay, Kham – Cattle raising	unsustainable	Only consists of four brothers and a brother-in law, one of whom is the deputy village head – there is no need to continue as a group. Benefits will not extend to other farmers without a revolving fund.
8	Ban Hai Niang, Kham, Maize post-harvest	unsustainable	Group is not entrepreneurial (includes the deputy village head) and the equipment provided is not suitable (Section 4.3.3), although their registered status might attract other development funding to purchase more equipment.
9	Ban Yamchalern, Thathom - FFS rice and NTFP's	sustainable with a commercial investment	Not sustained as a learning group only, but the knowledge will be transferred to others. The group were interested in growing soybeans on a contract farming basis since they have unused irrigation water in the dry season.

The high proportion of sustainable groups (6/9) reflects the time they spent together as an informal group before being officially registered, which allows group members to consider whether the group actually brings them benefits and who might make successful leaders. This contrasts with some other projects that have also had ‘sustainable farmer groups’ as an expected result (Box 4).

Box 4: A tale of two Projects that attempted to establish sustainable farmer’s groups.

In August 2020, the lead reviewer completed a MTR of another agriculture project, which provides a contrast to the approach of LURAS in farmer group establishment. This project was requested by government to service 100 villages over four-years, each of which had to have a registered farmers group as a prerequisite to receive subsidised agriculture inputs. With delays in signing the MOU and COVID19, there was no possibility of having sufficient time to form groups using a bottom-up process, such as allowing potential members to discuss and agree on their own regulations. Instead, DAFO felt pressured into preparing a standard form stating group committee members and regulations and asked each village head to sign it so it could be taken to the District Governor for registration. In some cases, those on the committee were unaware that they had even been nominated. The evaluator rated all of these groups as “unlikely to be sustained.”

By contrast, LURAS has taken a deliberately slow approach to group formation, which allows potential group members to work together informally before taking steps to formal registration. In Tan Tai (Khoun district) for example, the coffee producer’s group has been allowed to evolve for the past three years as it receives training, conducts action research and hosts/attends exchange visits in coffee production, processing and marketing. They have demonstrated that they are likely to be sustainable – at the time of evaluation (November 2020), they were preparing to formalise themselves with the election of officials and the adoption of by laws.

4.6.2 Sustainability of LFN

In Section 4.5, the impact of LURAS in nurturing LFN to become an autonomous and recognised farmers organisation was addressed, and noted that the proposed learning centre would be an important step towards its sustainability since funding for office rent would no longer have to be sought. The MTR team considers that given donor interest in supporting farmer organisations in Laos, it will be possible for LFN to cover basic operations and maintenance costs (electricity, water, repairs) from within donor budgets to ensure the sustainability of the centre in the long term.

However, during the LFN General Assembly, the MTR team observed the large expectations placed upon LFN by the participants, whether from government or farmers, particularly with regards to access to funding,¹² credit or markets. Many of these expectations are unrealistic in terms of sustainability, and it is to be expected that the next few years will be challenging as LFN tries to negotiate balanced roles and responsibilities. As in the past, LURAS has an important mentoring role to play to support LFN. Two potential concerns that were raised as possibilities during the Assembly were:

- The roles and responsibilities of government and LFN are potentially overlapping: During his interview with the MTR team, the Head of LFN, Mr Khammoune, appears to see LFN as a vehicle

¹² FASAP and Ban Kang farmer groups were not satisfied with LURAS because they were not selected for funding support (according to LURAS internal assessment, 29/10/2020).

to disseminate government policies. Doing so risks compromising the ability of LFN to advocate for the reform of unfavourable policies.

- LFN should not manage a credit scheme: There is an expectation that LFN can provide credit to its members. While LFN might be able to facilitate linking farmer groups to a credible microfinance institution, any attempt to provide credit directly will eventually fail due to non-repayment.

4.7 Project Management

This section addresses the specific questions in the TOR on project management and management arrangements.

4.7.1 Work planning

The project is results-based, with planning and reporting clearly linked to the logframe. Given that LURAS largely a project with subjective outcomes (which rely upon building capacity, providing knowledge, influencing policy etc.), then assigning objectively measured indicators is challenging. Most indicators in the logframe, and especially at output level, attempt to reflect the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound), but measuring a “20% increase in client satisfaction” or “assessing how many FO members have learnt something useful” is not really possible. An alternative tool for subjective indicators is Outcome Mapping, but unfortunately this useful tool is not recognised by donors, who must persist with logframes to meet their funding requirements from national governments.

Overall, work planning, like the other management criteria, clearly reflects the experience and longevity of the LURAS team, and ranks highly compared to other projects the MTR team has evaluated.

4.7.2 Finance

Finance, and specifically financial ownership, is the only management area which was flagged by the government partner DTEAP as a concern. The perspectives of each stakeholder from the interviews are summarized in Figure 20.

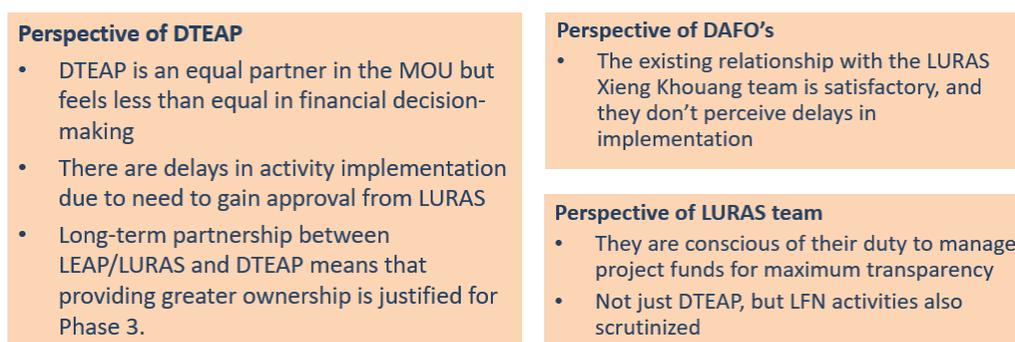


Figure 20: Summary of perspectives on financial ownership from different stakeholders

As Figure 20 indicates, DTEAP feels that despite being an equal partner in the MOU, it is only LURAS who is able to approve activity/budget requests (it should be noted that this is in accordance with Article IV of the MoU for Phase II, which gives sole responsibility for the management of donor funds to Helvetas). Sometimes this is quite time-consuming, as LURAS may not agree with the number of participants in a workshop, for example, and then the budget request is returned for modification. On some occasions, they feel demotivated by this lack of ownership. For Phase III, DTEAP would like to have a greater degree

of autonomy (accompanied by a regular audit) that reflects the long-term partnership and trust that has been built up over the first two phases.

By contrast, the DAFO offices visited did not perceive delays in implementation, and felt that they were well served by the LURAS team at PAFO in Xieng Khouang. The placement of the LURAS team at PAFO, instead of having a separate office, does allow relationships to be built and trust to be gained: this is lacking in some other projects we have evaluated. In fact, one DAFO office expressed concern that if DTEAP had more control, then it would be likely that activities would be delayed, because “staff are always busy at meetings.”

The LURAS team was conscious of their duty to properly manage the SDC funds to highest standard for transparency, and pointed out that it wasn’t just DTEAP whose activities were scrutinized in this manner. In the past, LURAS had allowed LFN to have a flexible budget approved annually, but they had to return to an activity-based approach to ensure that they only implemented activities funded by LURAS which were consistent with the agreed strategy.

As noted in Section 4.4. (and Annex 6) the activity budget is expected to be about 90% spent at the end of the project, leaving about CHF400,000 for possible reallocation. One possibility (but not an official recommendation) flagged by two of the DAFO’s visited (Phek and Khoun) is to provide motorbikes for field staff in districts which do not yet have them. In these two districts, the LURAS counterparts noted that they have to take their personal motorbikes to the field, and that the level of reimbursement under the Ministry of Finance regulations was inadequate given the state of the roads to some of the target villages.

4.7.3 Monitoring systems

LURAS has an excellent monitoring system, which is reflected in the quality of data in the six-monthly progress reports provided to the MTR team. These reports are also shared with the members of the Project Steering Committee.

4.7.4 Risk management

Table 8 presents how the risks described at outcome level in the logframe were addressed during implementation.

Table 8: Risks and how these were addressed during implementation

Outcome	Risk/assumptions at Outcome level	How these were addressed
<u>Outcome 1:</u> Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands.	The Green Extension strategy needs a high standard of facilitation. It is assumed that field staff (incl. volunteers) will be available to acquire and apply the necessary knowledge and skills.	Most DAFO staff assigned to LURAS as counterparts were experienced and appeared capable. The VF’s interviewed had contributed to action research and learning. Ms Boutsady (Ban Phiang) had trained farmers in how to recognize suitable soil types before planting coffee. Only in the Hmong villages of Pak Hing and Tan Tai Neua were the VF’s demoralized because “the

		older people didn't respect the youth and don't listen."
<u>Outcome 2:</u> Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable	Agro-processing and rural employment are new areas for development in the extension system. It is assumed that partners can be mobilized who will bring the required expertise and experience to the project.	The agro-processing systems established for tea and coffee appear to be appropriate, although some are labour intensive. Unfortunately, SNV did not prove to be a reliable partner for maize processing.
<u>Outcome 3:</u> Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups	It must be understood that a project like LURAS can do little to change the underlying causes of gender and ethnic exclusion, but it can partially mitigate the affect this has on rural advisory services.	By focusing on ethnic youth and women, LURAS has been proactive in providing opportunities to this group and possibly changing attitudes.
<u>Outcome 4:</u> Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness	It is assumed that the government will continue to support the concept of evidence-based policy making, and that decision makers are open to new information and ideas.	Unfortunately, while government might support evidence-based policy making, the reality is often different – however there is hope as a new generation of policy makers come through the system.

4.7.5 Reporting

Like planning and monitoring, the standard of reporting (at least in English) was excellent. The project results and key documents were presented in Lao language at the regular Project Steering Committee meetings and the SSWG-FAB meeting.

4.7.6 Project management structure and roles/responsibilities

There were no changes in project management structure compared that that envisaged in the Phase 2 design (pp 21-23 of the project document). The roles and responsibilities within the structure were clear at the outset, and have remained so throughout the operations of Phase 2 to date. It appears that there has only been one change of personnel within the structure throughout Phase2, which is the National Project Coordinator at DTEAP.

5. Conclusions

This section considers the evidence presented in Section 4 and identifies the key achievements of the Project, and the challenges that remain to be addressed over its remaining twelve months.

5.1 Summary of key achievements

Through the course of this evaluation, the MTR team has gained the perspectives of 226 people (115 women), from senior government officials through to ordinary farmers. Without exception, they were positive about the achievements of LURAS over the past four years, and this is reflected in the logframe, assessment, in which ten of thirteen indicators are considered fully achieved to date. This is an excellent result, that reflects the experience and stability of the LURAS team and its counterparts in the projects design, implementation and monitoring (project cycle management). It provides a good model for other

projects wishing to work on agriculture extension in the uplands of Lao PDR. The areas identified by the respondents, which were felt to be the most successful were:

1. Green extension learning (such as action research, F2F) has increased knowledge and adoption of sustainable farming practices such as composting, natural pest management, improved seed storage;
2. Farmers have the confidence to increase their production of tea and coffee in response to more reliable markets and improved returns, which is a healthier and more environmentally friendly means of farming than relying upon high chemical inputs;
3. Youth in rural areas, including women and ethnic minorities, have an opportunity to build their own agribusinesses and contribute to local employment and the provision of services to farmers with the AGREE scheme;
4. There are interactive extension materials and support available for farmers using digital technologies, such as Facebook and Whatsapp which are especially suited to the younger generation;
5. The flexible approach of LURAS within the project design has allowed it to quickly respond to FAW, coffee cherry borer and COVID-19;
6. Nurturing farmer groups informally from the bottom-up has fostered their sustainability compared to a traditional top-down approach;
7. LFN has reached its expectation of being a self-reliant organisation recognized by government and is contributing to increased empowerment of youth and female farmers.

5.2 Key lessons learnt

1. Two key tenets of SDC's support have been critical to the success of LURAS. These are firstly a commitment to long term support, which has enabled the LURAS team to build on past successes and develop strong social capital within government, and secondly a flexibility in activities and budgets, which has allowed LURAS to provide a genuine response to the needs of farmers (reactive extension);
2. Farmer groups are unlikely to attract new members unless they have close links with entrepreneurs (local middlemen) that have the ambition and skills to actively seek out and negotiate with potential buyers, are willing to invest their own time and capital to add value to the product, conceptualize and initiate new business ideas, etc....such people need an incentive to perform these roles which is why they are often missing in project formed groups;
3. The AGREE scheme has managed to seek out and foster young entrepreneurs who have the skills listed above, including women, which is why it has been widely regarded as the most successful activity of the project;
4. The success of the green extension approach, and in particular the efforts investing in adult learning (action research, F2F, farmer field school) have once again demonstrated the importance of agriculture projects using this approach as an alternative to classroom-based or top-down learning. On this point, there are also lessons for the Lao tertiary education system, which still cannot provide the practical agriculture experience for its graduates that would enable them to become effective extension workers to rural farmers or develop their own agri-enterprises;
5. The ability of LURAS to harness the widespread and increasing use of social media by Lao farmers (and particularly young people) has been a factor in its success;

6. A reduction in the use of illegal chemicals requires enforcement from government at some point if farmers are to switch to safer products for their own health and that of the environment – LURAS can only do so much in terms of awareness to drive behaviour change.

5.3 Ongoing issues and challenges

Along with successes, there are challenges which have proved too much for LURAS to overcome. The following are the most important that have been identified in this report:

1. It remains difficult to identify healthy and sustainable options for farmers below 1,200 meters and who are reliant on upland soils, leaving them reliant on maize as their main cash crop. They are continuing to apply dangerous chemicals that are readily available in local markets;
2. Farmers believe that maintaining soil productivity (for coffee, tea) will be increasingly difficult with a reliance on labour intensive processes for natural fertilizers;
3. Face to face extension services for coffee and tea growers in Hmong language are limited, which particularly impacts upon women who have less opportunities than men to participate in learning and are usually illiterate in Lao language;
4. While MAF staff have received training in the policy development cycle, it remains difficult to review policies if the issues are sensitive or it means criticising past performance;
5. While the commitment to forming farmer groups at village level has been admirable, some of these groups lack a business focus and/or represent an extension of the existing village administration. The partnership with SNV to support post-harvest processing was not successful, and there is a lack of quality private sector partners to support extension and marketing;
6. There are large and unrealistic expectations placed upon LFN by its membership, especially over its ability to provide funding, credit and markets which puts pressure on the Secretariat;
7. Government policies that affect upland farmers are not always objectively evaluated and improved, because it is difficult to question the judgement of policy makers.

These are addressed in the recommendations which follow.

6. Recommendations

This section presents “practical, realistic and actionable recommendations” for the remainder of this phase and a possible Phase III, as requested in the TOR. As well as the challenges presented above, it also addresses the following items which were listed within the scope of the MTR (see Annex 1).

- Suggest *opportunities* for other or stronger substantive *partnerships*;
- Suggest additional directions to *engage youth*;
- Suggest measures to improve *gender equality, women’s empowerment and social inclusion*;
- Provide recommendations on how LURAS could support the *sustainability of the Lao Farmer Network* including the planned Resource Centre.

There are no specific recommendations on three other items within the scope of the MTR, since:

- *climate change and disaster risk reduction* is sufficiently integrated in accordance with Annex 6 of the Project Document (for example, forest friendly farming)
- there are no *negative environmental or social impacts* that could threaten sustainability, and;
- no specific *adjustment is needed to project activities due to COVID-19*, since it is possible to complete any outstanding activities before the end of Phase II.

The MTR team recommendations are:

Recommendation 1: The Resource Centre for the LFN should be built as planned (*sustainability of the Lao Farmer Network*)

The Lao Farmer Network has reached its initial expectation of becoming recognised and self-reliant organization by government and donors alike, and is likely to have its 2021-2025 strategic plan fully funded. Although accommodation could be sought within the existing Korean Training Centre in the short term, potential government restructures and uncertainties over ownership may hinder LFN to achieve its potential at the site. The offer to allocate land for free, on a main road within a new population centre (where Ministry buildings are relocating), is unlikely to be repeated in future, leaving LFN to consistently seek administration costs from donors for office rental.

In short, the Resource Centre should be built as planned.

Recommendation 2: Continue to nurture and mentor LFN, and seek to moderate overly ambitious plans (*sustainability of the Lao Farmer Network*)

During the LFN General Assembly, the MTR team observed the large expectations (for credit, funding, markets, membership expansion) placed upon LFN by the participants, whether from government or farmers. Many of these expectations are unrealistic, and it is to be expected that the next few years will be challenging as LFN tries to negotiate feasible roles and responsibilities among its stakeholders.

As in the past, LURAS has an important role to nurture and mentor LFN, and seek to moderate any overly ambitious plans (such as providing credit to members directly).

Recommendation 3: Scale-up AGREE to other areas (*engage youth, gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion*)

All stakeholders commented on the success of the AGREE scheme, and it was rated as the top activity in the LURAS internal assessment. The co-operation of the Lao Youth Union in Xieng Khouang to implement the scheme was favourably acknowledged.

The AGREE scheme can be continued and expanded, provided it maintains its existing focus on the development of ethnic youth and women.

Recommendation 4. Nurture farmer-owned or farmer group enterprises as an alternative to traditional groups, using a process similar to AGREE

While the commitment to forming farmer groups at village level has been admirable, some of these groups lack entrepreneurial focus and/or represent an extension of the existing village administration. While there may be local entrepreneurs who may have ideas for more appropriate technologies, they have not been given an opportunity since the testing and development of value-adding technologies through action research has been subcontracted out to SNV.

Phase III needs to correct this balance, by selecting and supporting local entrepreneurs as an alternative to groups. AGREE already provides a suitable model: potential farming entrepreneurs (or partnerships of entrepreneurs at village level – or a farmer group enterprise) are given learning opportunities (short

trainings, exchange visits) before developing their own business plans for co-funding. Two potential ideas, both of which may offer labour saving opportunities for women, that arose from the MTR are presented below:

High quality pelleted organic fertilizer:

While soil improvement is a vital component of a sustainable organic farming system (tea, coffee), grinding up organic matter is labour intensive to produce, difficult to spread and prone to washing away. During the MTR, farmers expressed an interest in pelleted forms of organic fertilizer which are easy to apply. There is a farmer group enterprise in Bokeo already 11 years old and which now has ODOP accreditation (contact: Mr Thakham, 55655452).

Maize post-harvest technologies

The maize post-harvest technologies trialled to date have not been adopted because they have a high cost per unit of output. A low value (per unit price) product like maize needs larger maize shellers that reduce labour costs, produce a cleaner product and are stored in bigger barns. The XP company, which is active in Xieng Khouang, has been trialling some technology with farmers.

Recommendation 5: Work closely with DOPLA to improve policy review in a sensitive manner.

While MAF staff have received training in the policy development cycle, it remains difficult to review policies if the issues are sensitive or it means criticising past performance. Although LURAS has already made a significant contribution to policy development, DOPLA specifically requested that LURAS Phase III continue to support policy review. This suggestion was endorsed by MAF.

This represents an opportunity, since MAF will promote staff for the next five-year plan which have been sensitised to challenges facing upland farmers by LURAS over the past two phases. There may be scope to incorporate this recommendation with another program of SDC, which is to support the Policy Think Tank (PTT) now hosted by the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Centre (NAFRI).

Recommendation 6: Have one day study visits for Hmong women to meet Hmong female entrepreneurs (gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion)

While Hmong women were interested to participate in the offered F2F exchanges, family responsibilities and disapproval from their husbands meant that they were denied such opportunities. They did however, suggest that a day visit to Phonesavanh (or another equivalent location) would be acceptable. The MTR team met several examples of inspiring Hmong women close to Phonesavanh which could motivate village women to entrepreneurship as follows:

- Ms Khamphoui, tea buyer and processor, (not actually Hmong but Hmong speaking) 2857 4503;
- Ms Sy Moua, tea buyer and processor in Or An;
- Ms Yer Moua, pig farmer and AGREE recipient;

Recommendation 7: Provide a Hmong Extension Worker (preferably female) to Meuang Xiang coffee (partnership opportunity, gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion)

Meuang Xiang Coffee is currently buying coffee from 52 villages in Khoun, Phaxay and Nong Het districts, many of whom are ethnic Hmong. However, it is not in a position to provide in depth extension services to these farmers, because of its cost and because coffee planted now takes several years to provide returns (and also there is no guarantee that farmers would sell back to Meuang Xiang). Likewise, government lacks resources, and in any case has very few (if any) Hmong speaking staff.

Funding a Hmong Extension Worker (preferably female) to Meuang Xiang coffee would be relevant to LURAS's mandate to boost services to this disadvantaged social group. Although this recommendation has not been specifically discussed with Meuang Xiang, LURAS's past cooperation with the company (the work of Kim Valakhone was remembered fondly) as well as Meuang Xiang's stated desire to increase its support to Hmong communities, suggests that a mutually beneficial arrangement could be instigated.

Recommendation 8: Begin an action research program for soybeans with XP or Aa-ming (Chinese silo in Kham) (partnership opportunity)

About 2,000 tonnes soybeans per year are currently being imported from the US, Australia and Thailand to supply the needs of XP. Both XP and Aa-ming have provided free inputs to farmers in an effort to encourage production, but in both cases, farmers did not honour their contracts (Figure 21)¹³. Demand for soybeans for animal food blends will increase as pig populations recover from the African Swine Fever outbreak.

The MTR team identified Yamchaleun as a potential area to trial action research in soybeans, but additional areas might be identified, including farmers in Xieng Khouang who now rely on maize for their primary income. As noted in Section 2.2, the adoption of agroecology techniques is unlikely unless there is a feasible market for leguminous cover crops.

Recommendation 9: LURAS, Helvetas, SDC and DTEAP should have a discussion about ownership and financial management for Phase III to find the best possible balance

There are some different perspectives on the best way forward to promote project ownership for Phase III, which might be the final (handover phase) of the project. There is no simple way forward on this issue, and it is likely that some sort of compromise will have to be reached.

All four parties (LURAS, Helvetas SDC and DTEAP) need to be involved in order to discuss the best possible balance between promoting ownership and safeguarding financial management standards.

Recommendation 10: Seek out opportunities for new digital applications for farmers

The widespread use of social media by Lao farmers, and particularly young people, has been a factor in the success of LURAS in Phase II.

The rapid pace of technology and internet uptake suggests that the opportunities for further success need to be actively sought out in Phase III. Some possible ideas to consider, that arose during the MTR are:

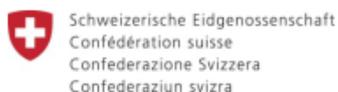
- Whatsapp group in Hmong language. Many young Hmong people, including girls who are illiterate in Lao language, could benefit by having a Hmong language Whatsapp group, obviously moderated by a Hmong person;
- Direct payments by mobile phone for farm produce. Using digital payments instead of cash reduces administration costs and might allow farmers to receive a slightly higher price for their product. A trial which included tea, coffee and maize in Uganda is available here; <https://www.uncdf.org/article/3997/implementing-digital-bulk-payments-in-agricultural-value-chains-in-uganda>

¹³ Aa-ming and XP were interviewed on this issue by the MTR team in February 2020, while they were working on another assignment entitled "District level interventions for a jurisdictional approach to Green and Sustainable Agriculture (GSA)." Their comments are relevant to this consultancy.

- Crop insurance: One of the participants at the LFN General Assembly mentioned that he was working on crop insurance. With the risk of natural disasters increasing, then crop insurance from an external provider might be an option if it was to be made fully digital and relied on a simple index to trigger payment. The LFN could play a role in mobilising its membership. See: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/can-digitizing-agribusiness-payments-africa-build-ramp-financial-inclusion-farmers>

Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference



Swiss Cooperation Office for the Mekong Region
Laos

Terms of Reference
Mid-Term Review (MTR)
Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) Phase II Project
37 days between September to November 2020

1. Introduction:

In accordance with the Evaluation Framework indicated in the Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) Phase II Project Document, a mid-term review for the project is to be undertaken. This Terms of Reference (TOR) sets out the expectation for this mid-term review. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) wishes to hire a short term International Consultant and one National Consultant to conduct a mid-term review for this project. The timeframe is end-September to end of November 2020 (maximum of 37 working days, including travel days and weekend).

SDC contributes to the development and poverty reduction in Lao PDR by addressing the rapid transformation of the rural economy. This project brings smallholder farmers in contact with a wide range of new service providers (private agribusiness companies, farmer organizations, non-profit associations). SDC contacted Helvetas Lao PDR as an Implementing Partner to deliver required services to the Government of Lao PDR, in collaboration with the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). It is a four-year project, from 1 December 2017 to 30 November 2021. Interventions take place in Houphanh (Hien and Son districts), Xiengkhoung (Pak, Kham, Khoun, and Paxay districts), and Xaysomboun Provinces (Thathon district).

2. Project Background and Objectives

In Lao PDR, impressive changes in production occurred over the past two decades. Infrastructure improvements and market development help to link smallholder farmers with a much wider range of service providers. At the same time, they have better access to information from a growing number of traders and media. Emerging farmer organizations have joined to create a network at national level, seeking a better negotiation position with the private sector and government recognition. Rapid ecological changes and landscape transformation caused by an increased production of commercial crops is affecting the current land use patterns, soil stability and fertility which directly affect the food security of upland farmers. There is, therefore, an urgent need for regulation and advice that supports good agricultural practices and protects both environmental and human health. Innovative Rural Advisory Services (RAS) to face these challenges are required. LURAS aims to achieve the following goal through delivering the four outcomes:

Impact	Impact Indicators
Development Goal: A demand-driven pluralistic extension system, which involves various service providers including self-reliant farmer organizations, has been established to support inclusive agricultural value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LURAS contributes to improvements in agriculture production, income and food security in accordance with the goals of the 8th National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP)• LURAS contributes to the realization of the strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in particular to “developing clean, safe and sustainable agriculture”

chains, which improve upland farmers' food security, opportunities and income in a fair healthy and sustainable manner.	
Outcomes	Outcome Indicators
Outcome 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agro-ecological innovations have been made by at least 10 HHHs in at least 40 upland farming communities • Significantly increased diversity of farming systems and reduced levels of toxicity. • Returns from sustainable farming systems as measured by farmers exceeds monocultures
Outcome 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 1,000 farmers are adding value to their produce • At least 10 community-managed storage and/or processing facilities • At least 5 companies applying voluntary CSR guidelines
Outcome 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% improvement in client satisfaction; • Cooperation between extension services and at least 10 local colleges and schools; • At least 200 rural youth engaged in micro-enterprises or community development schemes
Outcome 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and analysis relating to green farming and agribusiness is available to decision-makers at all levels. • Multi-stakeholder dialogue is taking place at all levels; • The experience of small farmers is routinely brought to the attention of policy makers; exchanges of experience are happening with neighbouring countries

3. Objectives of the Mid-Term Review

The objectives of the MTR is to provide an independent analysis of the progress of the project so far and provide recommendations to shape the direction of the possible next phase of the project. The MTE will review progress towards the achievement of the project objective against the project's log-frame, identify potential project design problems, identify strengths and weaknesses and document lessons learned. Based on the findings, the MTR shall make specific recommendations on how to improve the project, including recommendations to guide which activities should be scaled up and which ones removed when moving forward to a possible additional phase

4. Composition of the Mid Term Review Team

A team of two independent consultants will be hired by SDC and conduct the MTR. One international team leader and one national expert. An Institutional or company contract is also a possibility.

- The leading international consultant is required to have specific expertise in programme/project monitoring and evaluation, with extensive experience of at least 10 years in agriculture extension, rural development, agro-forestry, value chains, private sector engagement, advisory services, and support to farmer groups/producer groups. Local context knowledge is necessary. Similar experience will be a plus.
- A national expert is required to have expertise in programme/project monitoring and evaluation, project management, coordination and translation particularly analytical skills and logistics;

knowledge in agriculture, rural development, agro-forestry, value chains, private sector engagement, advisory services, and support to farmer groups/producer groups would be an asset.

The Lead international consultant will be in charge of the overall process of the MTR. The local consultant will assist the lead consultant in all relevant matters particularly local context and knowledge, data collection, analysis, monitoring and evaluation, report writing, coordination, logistics, language, etc.

5. Scope of Mid-term Review and Methodology

The MTR must provide evidence based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The review team is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with key stakeholders. The review team must apply the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the project in terms of the progress towards the achievement of the project objectives, outcomes, outputs based on project log-frame.

The review team is expected to conduct field missions and meet with different key stakeholders in Vientiane Capital, Houphanh, Oudomxay, Xiengkhoung and Xaysomboun provinces. Interviews will be held with the relevant organizations and individuals at a minimum: SDC Lao PDR, Helvetas Lao PDR, Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), Coalition for Lao Information Communication and Knowledge (CLICK), Lao Farmer Network (LNF), and line agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) such as - Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing, Department of Planning and Finance, Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) and District Provincial Agriculture and Forestry (DAFO). Relevant SDC supported projects such as The Agro-Biodiversity Initiative (TABI), and Support to the Reform of the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College (SURAFCO) and Enhancing Nutrition for Upland Farming Families (ENUFF).

The team will obtain both qualitative and quantitative data by applying a combination of desk review, interviews with key stakeholders and informants, focus group discussions with beneficiaries and other stakeholders, site visits with an agreed checklist and observations at the target areas. The team will review all relevant sources of information that the team considers useful for this evidence-based review. The following aspects of the project and rate overall progress in compliance with the OECD/DAE evaluation criteria shall be made by the consultants.

1) Project design:

- Review the relevance of the project strategy whether it provides the most effective route towards intended results. How the project addresses country needs and development priorities as expressed in the national policies/plans and sector development frameworks.
- Review the problem addressed by the project and the underlying assumptions.
- Review the relevance of the project strategy and whether it provides the most effective route towards intended results/outputs indicator included in the project logframe.
- Review whether the project objective is realistic, in light of the project duration, its geographical scope and its allocated funding, and local contexts.

2) Progress:

- Review the outputs and progress toward outcomes achieved so far and the contribution to attaining the overall objective of the project.
- Review if progress so far could lead to beneficial development effects (i.e. livelihood/income generation, gender equality, women's empowerment, improved food security and nutrition, governance etc...). Suggest measures to improve the project's development impact, gender equality and women's empowerment and social inclusion.
- Review the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES), support to the Sub-Sector Working Group Farmer Agribusiness, Policies studies implementation endorsing relevant positive elements and suggest additional directions for this innovative new component of the project.
- Verify whether achieved progress lead or could lead to any negative environmental or social impact that could threaten the sustainability of the project outcomes. If so, are these risks being managed, mitigated and minimized? Suggest mitigation measures if needed.
- Review the extent to which the implementation of the project has been inclusive of relevant stakeholders.
- Review to what extent the project created effective and useful collaboration with other partners. Identify and suggest opportunities for other or stronger substantive partnerships.
- Review the relevant and satisfactory of the government partners on how the project contribution/align to MAF's Strategy and development goals of the government.
- Review whether the implementation of the project addresses issues of climate change and disaster risk reduction. Suggest how to better integrate if required.
- Review implications of the COVID-19 on the progress of the project implementation and provide recommendation if any adjustment should be made to the project activities.
- Review and provide recommendations to guide how LURAS could better support Lao Farmer Network to ensure sustainability of this component including sustainability of the planned new Farmer Resource Center.

3) Project management

- Work planning: are work planning processes result-based? How does the project use the project document log-frame?
- Finance: review cost effectiveness of financial management. And any changes to fund allocation would be required. .
- Monitoring systems: review the project monitoring tools currently being used: do they provide the necessary information on key indicators and capture gender aspects; do they involve key partners and link to financial management aspects?
- Risk management: describe any risks identified and how management addresses these during the implementation.
- Reporting: review how progress and challenges have been reported by the project team and how it was shared with project steering committee members.

4) Management arrangements: review overall effectiveness of project management as outlined in the project document. Outline if any change in the project management structure comparing with the original design of the project management structure. Review if role, responsibilities, and reporting line within the structure are clear.

- 5) **Sustainability:** review the project's sustainability strategy/plan.
- 6) **Outlook for possible next phase:** Based on the key finding from the evaluations of the LURAS Phase 2, reflects and addresses the practical, realistic and actionable recommendations for the possible next phase (or LURAS Phase 3).

For the desk review, the following reference document will be provided by SDC and LURAS Project team:

- LURAS Phase 2 Project Document;
- Bi-annual progress reports;
- Minutes of Project Steering Committee Meetings and other relevant management meetings.
- Agriculture Development Strategy 2011-2025;
- The Lao Upland Strategy
- 8th NSEDP and development framework of the 9th NSEDP (as available)
- Documents and project products developed and produced by the project such as Youth Engagement Strategy, Lao Farmer network Strategy, technical study reports, outreach materials, etc.
- Other relevant documents.

6. Intended Outputs

Outputs	Timeline
Output 1: Inception report that include workplan to complete the tasks, presentation of the methodology, checklist and/or questions to be used for interviews and data collection during the field mission.	By 30 September 2020
Output 2: Conduct field mission and presentation of the initial findings	At the end of the MTR mission (tentative 31 October 2020)
Output 3: First draft report	10 November 2020
Output 4: Final Report that reflect comments and suggestions from stakeholders and acceptable by SDC.	25 November 2020

7. **Coordination:** The National consultant will be responsible for coordinating and liaising with Helvetas/LURAS team, SDC and key stakeholders for preparing mission programme, meeting arrangements, translation and other tasks. The lead international consultant will be responsible for the expected results of the MTR mission and presenting the final report to SDC according to the agreed schedule.
8. **Logistics:** *The National consultant will be responsible for preparing logistical arrangements including accommodation, domestic transport in Vientiane Capital and provinces with input from SDC Vientiane. The Helvetas/LURAS team will be assisting with confirming all meetings and visit during the field mission in Vientiane and Provinces. Helvetas/LURAS team will also be responsible for making available all listed reference documents to the MTR team.*
9. **Budget:** The budget for the MTR will be charged to SDC direct cost. This will cover the cost of consultancy fees, consultant's accommodation, per diem, ground and air transportation in Vientiane Capital and provinces, communication and any other relevant costs incurred during the mission.

10. Debriefing and Reporting: A briefing and debriefing of the MTR team will take place at SDC Office in Vientiane with SDC and Helvetas/LURAS team, key government representatives and other relevant partners. The debriefing will cover preliminary key findings and results for feedback and adaptation. The MTR Report must contain an Executive Summary, main texts and all annexes. The report will be submitted electronically by the consultant to SDC per agreed timeline. The report and all documents and communications shall be written in English.

Previewed tasks for the MTR team	Estimated number of days
International travel time for international consultant only (if the consultant is based outside of Laos)	2
Preparation, literature and projects document review (home based)	7
Interviews and meeting in Vientiane	5
Field visit and work in 3 provinces	11
Interim and final reporting on the assignment	12
Total	37

11. Proposal submission and Contact person: Please submit your i) **updated CV**, ii) **email expression of interest**, iii) **technical proposal** that outlines your proposed methodology and approach that addresses all aspects indicated the TOR, and iv) **financial/budget proposal (please use Annex 1 template that we provided)** to chitlatda.keomuongchanh@eda.admin.ch. **Deadline for submission all required documents is 15 July 2020.**

12. Evaluation and award criteria

Individual consultant will be evaluated based on the cumulative analysis methodology as following:

Criteria	Points
I. Technical criteria	70
A. Experience and competencies of consultant	30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 10 year experience working in programme/project monitoring and evaluation in agriculture extension, rural development, agro-forestry, value chains, private sector engagement, advisory services, and support to farmer groups/producer groups, and related field. 	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proven local knowledge and experience in the mentioned fields and in similar assignments will be a plus. 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong coordination and management skills 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong analytical skills and logistics 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent in English both spoken and written. 	5
B. Proposed work plan and approach to carry out the assignment	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All aspects of the ToR have been addressed in sufficient detail. 	15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation schedule. 	10
C. Interview	15
II. Financial	30
Total points obtainable	100

The position will be offered to the individual consultant who obtain a higher combination score (technical and financial scores).

Annex 2: LURAS Team Self Assessment Workshop

Location: Held at the Helvetas office, 29/10/2020

Participants: Stuart, Davone (Consultants), Souvanthong, Leena (DTEAP), Andrew, Rakounna, Khamla, Khambone (LURAS), Kaspar (Helvetas – ma only), Chitlatda SDC (am only)

Question 1: What are the things LURAS Phase achieved that you are most proud of. Why?

- *Change in youth after participation*, could be AGREE but more than just this activity. Even only after one or two trainings – could see enthusiasm. Youth can do presentations and use microphone. Village facilitators, Hmong ethnic woman AGREE (raising pigs), VF from coffee Kham (Keoseth),
- *Change in counterpart capacity*, women before very shy and can now see more confidence, DAFO Thatom (female Somchan Lao). Now she is emboldened to even do LUP. Also LYU counterparts in Xieng Khouang
- *Improvement of quality of coffee and negotiate with buyers* – Ban Pieng and Ban Tan Tai. Also, they process green beans (not just parchment) and got a higher price for their coffee.
- *Farmers have ownership of activities in the community*, building on the activity of LEAP because they are fully included in planning, farmer share their experience at exchange workshop (eg young coffee farmers workshop at village level from all over Laos) and income increase
- *Farmer increase income* because of better techniques, improve the quality of the produce and can negotiate (eg tea coffee),
- There has been good cooperation in *producing reports in finance* with the government partners. There has been good understanding, honesty and sending in a timely manner.
- *AGREE* scheme (all) – has a good process for doing that and an enthusiastic partner (LYU) – esp Mr Sonxay in Xieng Khouang. It is a blueprint for other projects. (Mr Lom in Kham who raises fish for market is a good example). Also can talk to Ms Philly (*ex SDC*) – she does the business training for AGREE
- *Young Agripreneurs (3)* came to VTE for training in agro-processing according to their interests. Supported by STELLA, they are able to disseminate the results of their training due to social media (were trained in online selling). Also use of social media for marketing (Hmong pig lady) – when she needs to sell she can post in Facebook. Also, Thongchan in Khoun producing fingerlings can see by Facebook. Can do F2F. Focussed on the market for sustainability
- *Pesticides control* was improved in Kham district, because of the awareness materials.
- The *coffee processing centre* for learning has benefitted many people, with people coming even as far away as Paksong to exchange experience.
- *Green Extension school* for youth and use of technology at Xone School, because it will raise awareness of the importance of green ag in future. This has the potential to expand to other schools in the district – now only just starting
- *Implementation* of green extension (action research, F2F and media. LURAS has proved that this approach is working – not top down. Able to be scaled up to a regional audience. Proof of concept – can address climate change and disasters.
- *The SSWG farmers and agribusiness* – produced studies and online sharing. Brings LURAS to the attention of policy makers and donors. Talk to Somxay co-chair of the SSWG.

Question 2: What were the challenges that meant LURAS didn't achieve as expected? Why?

- *Working in new districts is slow start-up* eg Phaxay. This is to be expected since it is a learning process. Coffee and tea was quite fast. In Thathom, didn't have an office – so couldn't spend money.
- *Working with LFN*. Different expectations – working with LURAS is so challenging because couldn't get money (eg FASAP is a farmer group in Khoun district doing *khao kai noy* also supported by SAEDA. Also the Secretariat of LFN. Also a pig group (Ban Kang group in Vientiane) - their funding application was rejected when it was seen to benefit individuals rather than the community as a whole.
- *Affirmative action for women at provincial level* – Ms Soulivanh is a technical staff at PAFO but this didn't work out as expected.
- *Ethnic minority women (2)*, when we had training in Lao Loum women came, but this is the opposite in Hmong villages. We don't have any Hmong extension staff on the team. We try to use the Hmong driver to translate. Out of all the women workers in PAFO XK, none are Hmong.
- *Cooperation with private sector* with coffee is good, but for tea and *khao kai noy* don't have a private sector partner to assist with the extension
- Pilot testing in Phaxay *integrated farming system*, because our staff/government lack experience on farming system and not an existing good model to learn in Laos.
- *School activities* will not achieve indicator (Output 3.3), maybe LURAS had too many other things to do – maybe not enough staff.
- *COVID -19*, meant that some activities could not proceed as planned (eg cassava action research)
- *Lack of permanent staff and isolated location in Xone* – difficult for PAFO to travel there (also a monopsony concession for tea)
- *Long approval process within LURAS to approve each activity* – LURAS has to do each approval (couldn't approve the annual plan)
- *Use of chemicals in Kham (2)*. Although we have done a lot at the national level, the PAFO/DAFO didn't assist to control illegal chemicals as expected – and most farmers still continue to use them.
- The *coffee borer* has reduced the production of coffee – LURAS can do the training on its control but there is a risk of expansion. There has been weak quarantine since it has migrated with coffee seedlings
- Not enough *focus on post-harvest technology* – because SNV could not find somebody that had expertise on this topic. LURAS spent \$800,000 on this activity and there were not positive results, and the partnership has come to an end. Emmanuel brought in a team from Mexico to do work on hermetic silos – no-one has since built any silos since Emmanuel left. Technically this works, but does it make of economic sense – there is a reduction in weight between wet and dry maize of about 30% (no partnership with the private sector).

3. Based on your lessons learned in Phase 2, what things (elements) should be prioritized in Phase 3? Why?

- *AGREE (and VF's) should be extended* to another district, because it specifically focuses on youth in agriculture (5) because this will improve production techniques – youth can easily access information. In the long term this will create jobs for rural people – many have had to return due to COVID. Also support the networking among AGREE alumni – make as a group so they can access finance (Could LFN also do this?)
- *More emphasis on digitisation* – how to make money out of agro-ecology.

- Should *continue the tea activity*, especially because Hiem is still starting up. Need more processing and learning centres.
- *Training for project staff in business studies*
- *Green agri-business partnerships*– need to consider climate change and natural resource management. For coffee, the shade trees can protect against frost and plant deaths
- Continue to *work with farmer groups* to support them. Eg enable grading standards so that they can get a better price – would be good if farmers could have their own standard, then easy to facilitate contract farming
- *Livestock trade* could be improved, working on the policy. Traders have opportunities – there is now a study by Dr Bounthong (former DG of NAFRI) that can guide a direction for this.
- *Integrated farming system* – but not necessarily through farmer groups. We need to come out with an economic analysis – that proves the value of integrated farming (calculate profits and also community losses). Monoculture has a cost which is not recognised.
- *SSWG Policy dialogue (2)* – eg the Youth in Agriculture Study was in Lao language. The SSWG – SWG – Round Table. But LURAS Phase 2 has not been to the Round Table (maybe SDC). Maybe some cooperation with the LMEA (Lao Microenterprises America) – they have somebody there working on policy (could do a provincial farming working group meeting) which could bring policy up and down and increase influence.
- Need to have *regulations about green agriculture and green extension* – need implementing guidelines which can be legally binding – need to have the support of DOPLA.
- *Marketing training to farmer groups* – how to add value. Farmer group establishment should be in according to the government regulations of farmer groups so that these can be approved by the district governor.
- *Coffee planting in Keoseth cluster* – now LURAS is doing product processing. Should have a processing system that ensures the product quality – more focus on quality than quantity. More processing centres can be built depending on market demand.
- *Forest friendly farming* – big success with tea and coffee. Maybe bamboo with GRET. Also cardamom in Oudomxay worked well = climate resilient uplands. Need to protect the environment and make money.
- *Maintain flexibility* – for learning, since we don't have all the answers.
- *Importance of social capital* – we have worked hard to build partnerships, and these should be consolidated.

Annex 3: Detailed Fieldwork Schedule

Day	Date	Travel	Sleep
Vientiane Interviews (5 days)			
Tuesday	3/11/2020	pm Meeting with DTEAP (Mr. Souvanthong and Team)	VTE
Thursday	5/11/2020	am Meeting with CLICK, LFN (Mr. Phouthasin, Ms. Dik)	VTE
Monday	9/11/2020	am meeting with LURAS (Rakuna and Team), pm Meeting with Comma coffee (Ms Hang), Meeting SNV (Mr Allert)	VTE
Tuesday	10/11/2020	am Meeting with Department of Policy and Legal Affairs, MAF (Mr. Vongphaphan Manivong)	VTE
Wednesday	11/11/2020	am Meeting with Department of Planning and Cooperation, MAF (Mr. Somxay Sisanonh) then LFN annual meeting at Lao - Korean training centre	VTE
Thursday	12/11/2020	LFN annual meeting at Lao - Korean training centre	VTE
Field Visit - 14 days			
Sunday	15/11/2020	Travel to Phonesavanh	Phonesavanh
Monday	16/11/2020	am Meeting PAFO, pm Phaxay DAFO, travel to Hor Kang (Village 1) - khao kai noy, post harvest	Phonesavanh
Tuesday	17/11/2020	am Participatory exercises Hosim Thapouk (Village 2 Hmong-Lao) integrated farming, pm to Phek DAFO, to Yord Piang (Village 3 - Phouan) tea	Yord Piang
Wednesday	18/11/2020	am Participatory exercises Yod Piang pm to Or An, (Village 4 - Hmong) - meet tea investors, return to Phek	Phonesavanh
Thursday	19/11/2020	Youth Union Phek, visit AGREE beneficiaries, Meuang Xiang Coffee	Phonesavanh
Friday	20/11/2020	am To Khoun, Khoun DAFO, meet AGREE beneficiary, pm to Tan Tai (Village 5 Phouan) coffee	Tan Tai
Saturday	21/11/2020	am Participatory exercises Tan Tai, pm to Phak Hing (Village 6 - Hmong) - coffee, evening Participatory exercises Phak Hing	Phuck Hing
Sunday	22/11/2020	Brief visit to Phiang (coffee). Travel to Hiem district	Hiem
Monday	23/11/2020	am DAFO Hiem, Navieng (Village 7- Lao) - organic vegetables pm Thamla Tai (Village 8 -Tai Deng), tea	Thamla Tai
Tuesday	24/11/2020	am Participatory exercises Thamla Tai, pm To Xone	Xone
Wednesday	25/11/2020	am Xone DAFO, Green school pm to Kham district	Kham
Thursday	26/11/2020	am Kham DAFO, to Somphanxay (Village 9 - Hmong) - action research cattle, detox, return to Kham	Kham
Friday	27/11/2020	am Participatory exercises Hai Nieng (Village 10 - Phouan - FAW, post harvest), to Thathom DAFO	Thathom
Saturday	28/11/2020	Yamchalern (Village 11 - Lao - cassava, pests and diseases) to Vientiane	

Annex 4: List of key informants

Government

Mr Thongsavanh Phathalavong, Deputy Director General, DTEAP, MAF
Mr Souvanthong Namvong, DTEAP, MAF (National Project Director for LURAS)
Ms Leena, DTEAP (National Project Co-ordinator for LURAS)
Mr Vongphaphan Manivong, Director, Socio-economic and Marketing Policy Division, MAF
Mr Somxay Sisanonh, Director, Department of Planning and Co-operation, MAF
Mr Viengkham, Deputy Director of PAFO, Xieng Khouang
PAFO Xieng Khouang LURAS counterparts (6 people, 1 woman)
Ms Sothida, Head of Lao Youth Union Xieng Khouang and her team (5 people, 4 women)
Ms Sonexay and Mr Erm, DAFO Technical staff, Phaxay, Xieng Khouang
Mr Bounlert, Head of DAFO and Veu Song DAFO Technical staff, Phek, Xieng Khouang
Mr Phonesavath, Head of DAFO and Mr Soulay DAFO Technical staff, Khoun, Xieng Khouang
Mr Bounsak, Head of DAFO and Mr Sonephet, DAFO Technical staff, Hiem, Houaphan
Mr Soulinxay, Head of DAFO, Xone, Houaphan (phone interview)
Mr Tanwa, Deputy Principal and four teachers (one woman), Sone Tai Green School, Xone, Houaphan
Mr Sengbounmixay, Deputy Head of DAFO and Mr Saithong, DAFO Technical staff, Kham, Xieng Khouang
Mr Phone, Deputy Head of DAFO, Ms Somchan and Mr Khem LURAS co-ordinators. Thathom

Farmer Group Leaders and farmers

Ban Hor Kang, Phaxay (5 people, 3 women) – Rice Seed production group
Ban Horsim/Ban Thoum, Phaxay (11 people, 9 women) – Integrated Farming group
Ban Yort Piang, Phek (22 people, 14 women) - Tea group
Ban Tan Tai, Khoun (24 people, 14 women) - Coffee group
Ban Phak Hing, Khoun (14 people, 4 women) – Coffee group
Ms Chandy, Ban Phiang, Keoseth Cluster, Khoun, Coffee group leader
Ban Navieng, Hiem, (27 people, 25 women) – Organic vegetable group
Ban Thamla Tai, Hiem (24 people, 10 women) – Tea group
Ban Samphanxay, Kham (11 people, 5 women) – Cattle raising group
Ban Hai Niang, Kham (12 people, 5 women), Maize post-harvest group
Ban Yamchalern, Thathom (5 people, 1 woman), FFS rice group and NTFP's

LURAS

Mr Andrew Bartlett, Team Leader
Ms Rakounna Sisaleumsa, Operations Manager
Ms Khamla, Office Manager, LURAS
Mr Khamkone, Project Coordinator, Xieng Khouang
LURAS team Xiengkhouang (4 people, 1 women)

LURAS Civil Society Partners

Mr Allert van den Ham, Country Director SNV Laos, Myanmar & Bangladesh
Mr Phouttasinh Phimmachanh, Director CLICK and Secretariat of LFN and team (3 people, 2 women)
Mr Ounkeo Pathammavong, SNV Advisor on post-harvest processing.
Mr Khammoune, Director of Lao Farmer Network
Mr Somdy, Head of Lak10 Vegetable group, Xai district, Oudomxay and Committee of LFN

Mr Bounlery, Head of Sugarcane group, Xaybouly district, Savannakhet, and Committee of LFN

Companies and entrepreneurs

Ms Hang, Director, Comma Coffee, Vientiane

Ms Khamphoui, Tea Buyer, Ban Or An, Phek

Mr Yong, Tea Buyer, Ban Or An, Phek

Mr Todd Sanders, Meuang Xieng Coffee, Phonesavanh

Mr Saithong, Owner, Saithong Manufacturing, Phonesavanh,

Mr Kirby Rogers, Partner, XP Trading, Vientiane

AGREE Scheme beneficiaries

Ms Saisamone, Flower Decoration, Phek

Ms Chanthala, Integrated Farmer, Phek

Ms Yer Moua, Pig Farmer, Phek

Mr Khamchan, Fish and frog raiser, Khoun

Mr Lom, Integrated garden, Kham

Village Facilitators

Ms Lammone, Ban Horsim/Thoum, Phaxay

Mr Xai Yang, Ban Tong, Phaxay

Ms Sermkham, Ban Tan Tai, Khoun

Mr Ko Xiong, Ban Tan Neua, Khoun

Mr Kong Xiong, Ban Pak Hing

Ms Nong, Ban Tamla Tai, Hiem

Mr Cheng, Ban Tamla Tai, Hiem

Mr Tong Lor, Ban Samphanxay, Kham

Mr Ko, Ban Hai Niang, Kham

Annex 5: Progress report on Project implementation at end September, 2020

Source: Project Management Team six-month report (April 2020-September, 2020).

Cumulative status: 0 = Nothing done; 1 = Proposals made, but no practical implementation; 2 = Implementation started but limited progress; 3 = Steady progress, but less than planned; 4 = Progressing as planned; on track to achieve targets; 5 = Logframe targets fully achieved

Hierarchy of Objectives	Verifiable Indicator	Status	Cumulative Progress in Phase II
<p>A demand-driven pluralistic extension system, which involves various service providers including self-reliant farmer organisations, has been established to support inclusive agricultural value chains, which improve upland farmers' food security, opportunities and income in a fair healthy and sustainable manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LURAS contributes to improvements in agriculture production, income and food security in accordance with the goals of the 8th National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) • LURAS contributes to the realization of the strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in particular to “developing clean, safe and sustainable agriculture” 	<p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LURAS strategy is directly contributing to Outcome 3 of the 8th NSEDP "Natural resources and the environment are effectively protected and utilized according to green-growth and sustainable principles". • The project continues to make a significant contribution to the expansion of profitable and healthy farming systems in the target area. • The experience of LURAS has become a reference point for other actors in the agriculture sector, with notable influence in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ conceptual development of 'Green Extension' ○ the implementation of F2F learning processes ○ raising awareness of the impacts of pesticide use ○ preparing communication materials in response to pest & disease outbreaks ○ support for the development of the Lao Farmer Network ○ the creation of a start-up scheme for 'Young Agripreneurs' ○ the establishment of a learning centre for northern coffee producers

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the dissemination of policy studies and other information materials
<p>Outcome 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agro-ecological innovations made by at least 10 HHs in at least 40 upland farming communities ● Significantly increased diversity of farming systems and reduced levels of toxicity. ● Returns from sustainable farming systems as measured by farmers exceeds monocultures 	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A total of 40 farmer groups and 4,000 households have been engaged in testing new practices and participating in agro-ecological extension services (both proactive and reactive), thereby reaching the target level. ● The project has already exceeded the planned targets of training 250 training extension staff. ● The project has also reached the target of raising awareness of 40,000 people on issues relating to food safety.
<p>Outcome 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At least 1,000 farmers are adding value to their produce ● At least 10 community-managed storage and/or processing facilities ● At least 5 companies applying voluntary CSR guidelines 	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More than 1,000 farmers who have acquired technical or market-oriented advice from other farmers under the project. ● Processing and storage facilities established with the support of the project includes more than 20 facilities for coffee, tea, maize and rice. ● The project is working with 8 farmer groups (out of a target of 12) that provide members with better marketing opportunities. ● Two companies have sustainable partnership arrangements with these groups.
<p>Outcome 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20% improvement in client satisfaction; ● Cooperation between extension services and at least 10 local colleges and schools; At least 200 rural youth engaged in micro- 	3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The project has provided 177 women extension workers (target of 100w) with new knowledge and skills however still missing are affirmative action or incentive system for female staff or for staff to establish new learning groups for rural women. ● To date, 102 youth have been engaged in various schemes and 9 micro-enterprises managed by young people are currently being supported.

	enterprises or community development schemes		
Outcome 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and analysis relating to green farming and agribusiness is available to decision-makers at all levels • Multi-stakeholder dialogue is taking place at all levels; • The experience of small farmers is routinely brought to the attention of policy makers; exchanges of experience are happening with neighboring countries 	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LURAS has organised 5 meetings of the SSWG-FAB in this phase. Eight policy studies have been completed. • Regarding the LaoFAB repository, the target of 500 uploads and 12,000 downloads has already been reached. • To date the project has produced and disseminated 25 new extension materials, including technical booklets, videos and posters. • Presentations on the Green Extension experience in Laos have been made at more than 10 international events.

Outputs

Outcome 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands			
Output 1.1 Capacity has been built for the implementation of Green Extension, including expansion of knowledge and skills related to the 'new extensionist', agro-ecology and the CLEAR approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR plan produced and approved • 250 extension staff (40% F) have been trained and applying new knowledge & skills • relevant guidelines available to staff in all Districts of the country • At least 3 national extension conferences 	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR plan currently being revised • To date 407 extension workers (177 w) have been trained in role of new extensionist, promoting green extension, facilitating group management, writing news article on service delivery, usage of GPS for application of data and developing maps and sustainable agriculture • Relevant guidelines developed include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Briefing note and poster on Green Extension ○ Guideline on how to prevent and manage rice insects and diseases

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guideline on NTFP management ○ FO manuals (x2) on organising meetings and taking meeting minutes ● Three national extension meetings held to date on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National workshop on Green Extension in Xieng Khouang (in collaboration with FAO) ○ National KKN wks on how to improve yield and reduce losses in storage ○ National wks on FAW outbreak, control and management
<p>Output 1.2 Proactive extension services have been delivered: promoting a transition towards more sustainable farming systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4,000 smallholders (50% F) have been reached by sustainable agriculture activities. ● 2,000 smallholders have significantly increased the diversity and productivity of their farming system ● 20 farmer groups have been involved in testing / sharing agro-ecological practices; ● Participatory M&E shows significant improvement in at least 12 villages 	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 7,994 families have been reached by sustainable agriculture activities. This include exchange visits, action research to include yield and production of tea, coffee, KKN, maize, rice, expansion of production, good practices on NTFP management, land use planning etc ● 370 smallholders (coffee, tea, rice) have significantly increased the diversity and productivity of their farming system ● More than 1021 farming households involved in action research to improve yield and production of tea, coffee and KKN, coffee development, tea development ● 48 farmer groups testing/sharing agro-ecological practices on coffee production, tea production, fodder grass and cattle raising as an alternative to maize, post harvesting activities and KKN storages
<p>Output 1.3 Reactive extension services have been delivered: promoting measures to mitigate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant and reliable data on negative impacts of current farming practices is available to farmers and policy makers 	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant and reliant data.... include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pesticide briefing note and videos on pesticide use ○ Policy brief on district level measures to reduce pesticide use published by DOPLA

<p>negative impacts of current farming systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising information on food safety reaches 40,000 households (producers and consumers) • Community-based mitigation and/or regeneration practices have been applied in 20 villages, leading to reduced toxicity and/or improved soil fertility 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data collection on source of vegetable and fruit consumed by students living in dormitories from 5 different schools completed ○ Results from action research on different Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods for treatment of FAW including scouting fields and data collection during the treatment period during wet season and dry season. • Awareness raising information on food safety reached 40,000 households. • Community-based mitigation and/or regeneration practices have been applied 36 villages. Activities include: using compost, soil testing, IPM methods for pest control, planting fodder grass as alternative to maize, NTFP management, pesticide container disposal.
<p>Outcome 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable</p>			
<p>Output 2.1 The effectiveness of farmer organisations in the target provinces has been significantly improved, including strengthening management, networking and access to productive resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 12 FOs in the project area are providing business services (inputs, credit, marketing etc), that the majority of members are satisfied with • 500 FO members (50% F) have learned something useful from members of another group • Data available on status and capacity of FOs in each province of the country, and networking taking place 	<p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 FOs in the project area are providing business services (coffee development and processing, tea development and maintenance, tea processing, organic vegetables) • 1515 (662 w) FO members have learned something useful from members of another group • Update to FO data will be take place in 1st quarter of 2021

<p>Output 2.2 Rural enterprises are adding greater value to farm products, including improvements in processing, certification and contracting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 1,000 small farmers (50% F) are reached by value chain activities and are adding value to their produce • 10 storage and/or processing facilities are in operation, managed by farmer groups or local entrepreneurs • 200 farmers receiving a price premium as a result of certification or branding 	<p>3.5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 749 small farmers (330w) are reached by small value chain activities and adding value to their produce (tea, coffee, KKN) • Improvements made to 19 existing rice storages and 4 new rice storages built. Processing facilities in operation include: one wet processing centre, 3 hulling machine, 1 green bean milling machine, 9 drying sheds, 4 drying beds, 2 grinders and 2 silos currently being tested. • 55 farmers receiving price premium for specialty coffee (natural processed) • Ongoing certification process on organic vegetable for Na Vieng Organic vegetable group in Hiem. The certification process will benefit at least 49 families.
<p>Output 2.3 The issue of rural employment in integrated into rural advisory services, particularly the need to create opportunities for rural youth to get decent jobs in agribusiness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policy makers have greater awareness of agribusiness labour practices in the uplands • 5 agribusiness companies applying voluntary CSR guidelines • 200 rural youth got new/additional employment as a result of pilot schemes 	<p>3.5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For policy studies completed by LURAS see Output 4.1 • Training materials on responsible private sector engagement and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) were developed by LURAS in collaboration with LIFE project and tested with private sector and communities. The materials will be printed in English and Lao. • For youth related schemes see Output 3.3
<p>Outcome 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups</p>			
<p>Output 3.1 Women’s engagement in agricultural extension has been significantly improved, both as service providers and clients, by providing supplementary training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incentives system developed and operational that increases the number of days in the field by women technicians by 25% • 100 female extension workers have new knowledge and skills 	<p>3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LURAS assisted PAFO XK to conduct a gender analysis within PAFO with a focus on balance of workload between men and women staff. This include development of questionnaire, training on data collection, data input and analysis of findings. Though the outcomes from the survey was well received and acknowledged by PAFO, to date except for list on training

<p>and incentives for female staff who will implement field activities with women's groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 new learning groups for women, and facilitated by women, are operational 		<p>needs, no incentive system or affirmative action has been put in place to address the findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing gender analysis with DAFOs from target districts of XK, in Thathom and Hiem. • 237 women extension workers have new skills and knowledge: presentation and communication skills, gender analysis including data collection and input, green extension and group management. • DAFOs reports 6 weaving groups established in 2018 but since then no new learning groups for women, or facilitated by women, have been established. However, the project continues to adopt a mainstreaming approach to engagement of women, ethnic minorities and youth.
<p>Output 3.2 There is improved access to extension services in ethnic languages, both through face-to-face communication or media/materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% increase number of extension meetings conducted in ethnic languages • extension material is available in ethnic languages (min. 10 print, 10 video items) 	<p>3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension videos in Hmong language are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organic coffee from the North of Laos. ○ Planting forage grass for livestock ○ Protecting women and children from pesticides in Laos ○ Labour-saving rice harvesting in Northern Laos ○ Impact of frost on coffee in Northern uplands • Radio messages on risks associated with pesticide use have been broadcast in Hmong, Khmu and Lao on both national and Lao language on an annual basis during the spraying season.
<p>Output 3.3 Rural youth have better prospects, including support for young agripreneurs, exposure to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 micro-enterprises have been piloted by graduates of agric colleges 	<p>4.5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 start-up business piloted • 2 school based learning facilities established and maintained in 2 districts (Pek, Sone Tay) to become

<p>agro-ecology in schools and colleges, and role models for the next generation of farmers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 school-based learning facilities are established and maintained • At least 50 rural youth in at least 5 villages engaged in community agriculture development schemes 		<p>green school (growing organic vegetables in shade houses, fruit trees etc..)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 102 youth (27w) from 5 districts (4 in XK, 1 in HP) on various schemes as follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 27 Village Facilitators (13w) from 4 districts in XK (Kham, Pak, Phaxay, Khoun) ○ 2 Village Facilitators (1w) from Hiem district ○ 45 youth (22w) under the AGREE XK ○ 6 youth (6m) from 2 villages in Kham district to assist with collecting data for the action research on FAW control methods from July to September. ○ 2 Village Assistants (1w) in Keoset Coffee Centre ○ 5 interns (5w) in Keoset Coffee Centre to work on value chain and coffee production. ○ 15 (10w) youth participated in short course training on mushroom and at least 4 have started producing spores and mushroom for sale. •
<p>Outcome 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness</p>			
<p>Output 4.1 Decision makers and policy makers in the agriculture sector have access to information and platforms for dialogue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two SSWG meetings per year provide opportunities for dialogue among at least 240 decision makers • 5 new studies completed on issues relating to small farmers and agribusiness • 500 uploads and 12,000 downloads at repository 	<p>5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSWG meetings held to date: 2 in 2018, 2 in 2019, 1 in 2020 with a total of 245 participants. • Studies completed by LURAS include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation 'Opening our eyes: Using video to understand women's lives in the uplands of Laos', Jun 18 ○ Presentation '<i>Lessons from Keoset</i>' (strategy for smallholder coffee in N. Laos), Feb 2019 ○ Policy brief on 'Governing Pesticide Use at the District Level', Mar 2019

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Issues brief on '<i>Green Extension</i>', Mar 2019 ○ Report 'Towards 'People Centered Agriculture: Rethinking rural labour, youth employment and the agrarian transition in Laos', Sep 2019 ○ Report on 'Lao Farmer Network: At the Crossroads - Assessment and Strategy Elements for the Future', Mar 2020 ○ Report on 'Labour saving technology for Rural Women', Mar 2020 ○ Presentation, 'Could the Covid-19 Crisis be a turning point for Youth in Agriculture, and what are the implications for Rural Advisory Services', May 2020 ○ Study on 'Taxes and Informal Fees in Value Chains in Lao PDR', Jun 2020 ○ Presentation on Covid-19 Mitigation for Lao Farmers and Agribusiness, Jun 2020 ○ Report on 'Increasing Agricultural Commercialisation and Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition in Lao PDR: A Framework for Balanced Policy Analysis, Planning and Programming', Jul 2020 ● Support to the development of new ADS strategy for MAF currently ongoing. ● From December 2017 till August 2020 a total of 904 documents were uploaded to the repository bringing the total above 4,000. The number of downloads in this period has exceeded 40,000. The number of registered members of the discussion forum is now 4,649, plus more than 13,000 followers on FaceBook.
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<p>Output 4.2 New information systems have been established that to bring knowledge <i>to and from</i> rural areas, giving greater voice and choice to field workers and farmers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 new media/materials developed, reaching at least 5,000 rural people • 50 young/rural people engaged in producing content for new online service • 250 visitors/callers per year to the new FO resource centre 	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information material/media produced and disseminated in Phase II of the project include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Videos on coffee production (x4), tea production (x2), maize pest control (x2), pesticide and health (x1), rice harvesting (x1), forage production (x1), maize storage actin research and post-harvest activities (x2), AGREE scheme ○ Print materials, including manuals and posters on coffee (4), tea (2), nutrition (x5), FAW (1 set), ASF (1 set) ○ Websites created or maintained at www.Laocoffee.org and www.Laotea.org • 74 young rural people engaged in sharing information online information via WhatsApp groups • Plans for FO resource centre currently being revised by DTEAP
<p>Output 4.3 There is improved regional collaboration on <i>Green Extension</i>, particularly knowledge sharing within the Greater Mekong Subregion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 presentations about Green Extension in Laos made at international events • 50 Lao extensionists, farmer representatives and agricultural academics participate in international meetings • At least one MELA meeting held in Laos 	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations about Green Extension and LURAS were made at international events in Rome, Danang, Dalat, Phnom Penh, Seoul, Bangkok (x2) and Kunming. • 40 Lao extensionists, farmer representatives and agricultural academics have participated in international meetings • MELA meeting in Laos scheduled for 2021

Annex 6: Comparison of budget and spending until September, 2020

Project Activity Cost	Budget CHF	Actual Y1 Dec 2017 + 2018	Actual Y2 2019	Actual Y3 Jan-Jun 2020	Estimate Y3 Jan-Dec 2020	Estimate Y4 2021
Outcome 1: Healthy and sustainable farming systems in the uplands	1,838,440	363,744	367,872	83,327	376,000	410,000
Outcome 2: Market systems in rural areas that are fair and profitable	1,077,782	88,931	251,934	177,856	250,000	300,000
Outcome 3: Extension services are relevant for disadvantaged social groups	765,565	14,928	125,188	50,775	158,190	225,000
Outcome 4: Knowledge systems support green farming and agribusiness	418,213	42,080	68,455	7,203	125,678	182,000
Total Project Activity Cost	4,100,000	509,683	813,449	319,161	909,868	1,117,000

Annex 7: Lao Farmer Network in the news

Farmers need more markets for sell crops

Vientiane Times, November 13, 2020.

Farmers have urged the government to assist them in finding new markets - both local and overseas – to sell their produce.

The requests were raised during the Lao Farmers Networking Knowledge Fair and General Assembly-2020 which was held over two days in Vientiane.

The event was attended by over 150 participants, including 120 representatives of farmers from across the country, educational institutes, agriculture research centre, international organisations, and government officials.

It was chaired by the Deputy Director General of the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing, Mr Thongsavanh Phanthavong, and the president of the Lao Farmers Network (LFN), Mr Khammoun Xaymany. This meeting was funded by the LURAS project.

Numerous challenges faced by farmers were aired during the meeting. “We want the government to assist us and extend help to find new markets to sell our produce and to ensure a good price of our produce,” said a participant.

Another issue that was raised was varied tax payments between districts and provinces and the need for a special subsidy for farmers’ electricity bills. “Farmers, especially in rural areas, need support with irrigation systems and spring water to ensure a good yield,” said a representative from LFN.

The event encouraged participants to upgrade their plantation skills. New techniques of agriculture, which reduce the workforce but increase the harvest, as well as special policies for farmers which included 25 issues - such as agricultural techniques named “beautiful wife rice”, policy research on agricultural taxation policy, youth participation strategy, research on fall army worm outbreak in the northern provinces were shared with participants.

Participants discussed the challenges faced by small farmers and the best five-year strategy plan from 2021-2025 of LFN. The event also had booths from national agriculture research centre for and agriculture organisations such as - SAMIS, WOCAT, LURAS, AFN-IFAD, CLEAN project, GAIA VITA.

LFN’s members brought their products, including organic purple rice from Ban Jaeng village of Vientiane province, organic vegetables and crops from Thongmang organic vegetable cooperative, coffee soap and coffee beans from Pakxong district of Champassak province, cooking oil from Xieng Khuang province, and others products for display.

Vientiane Times Nov 24

Caterpillar outbreak slashes sweetcorn harvest in northern provinces

An invasion of fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) caterpillars has affected sweetcorn yields in the northern provinces despite efforts to control the outbreak.

A study by the Lao Farmers' Network with support from the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre was conducted in Nonghet district, Xieng Khuang province and La district, Oudomxay province, which are the country's main sweetcorn farming areas.

The study showed the infestation reduced the harvest by 1.2 tonnes worth US\$200 (nearly 2 million kip) last year.

According to the centre, the study aimed to control the pests and lay the groundwork for raising awareness of sustainable best-bet agroecological strategies that promote a healthy system approach to sweetcorn farming.

The study was completed last month and the results shared during the Lao Farmers' Networking Knowledge Fair and General Assembly 2020 which was held over two days in Vientiane.

"The study showed that some farmers know about the fall armyworm but some do not, while about 70 percent continue to grow sweetcorn in places where the caterpillars are still present," said a representative of the Lao Farmers' Network, Ms Maikham Xayyanan.

"Thirty percent of the study cases indicated that they want to grow another crop but could not decide which crop due to the limited market."

"Farmers can still get a good sweetcorn harvest of 4.6 tonnes per hectare on average and can make nearly 5 million kip in profit per hectare," she added.

To control the caterpillars, the Lao Farmers' Network has tried to use biological means by deploying an army of predatory stink bugs to battle the invading pests.

"In Xieng Khuang province, the plans are going well and show that stink bugs can control the caterpillars in sweetcorn fields and are able to increase in number naturally," Ms Maikham said.

"But in Oudomxay province, all the stink bugs that were released died because farmer used pesticides to kill the caterpillars so when the bugs ate the caterpillars they also died."

"After this study, we plan to investigate other biological means to try to control the caterpillars," she added.

In Xayaboury province, 30 percent of 35,000 hectares of sweetcorn was destroyed by a plague of fall armyworms.

[Source](#)