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The Farmer-Driven Approach and its Contributions to Farmer Empowerment in the Village Extension System of Lao People's Democratic Republic

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Abstract: The study sought to analyze the farmer driven approach and its contribution to farmer empowerment in six districts of four selected provinces of Lao PDR. There were 78 randomly selected farmer respondents involved in the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) who were surveyed. The Pearson Correlation and Spearman's Rank Correlation were used to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables and the Point-bisetered correlation was used for dichotomous variables. Results revealed that organization related factors (local government unit support, extension materials support, leadership pattern, community member's responsiveness and cohesiveness) influenced the extent of participation of stakeholders in the projects of the village extension system (VES). Moreover, respondents were unanimous in the perceived contribution of VES in empowering them through acquisition of individual and collective assets and capabilities. Given the findings, it is necessary that VES expands opportunities for farmer participation in all phases of project cycle. Trainings in partnership with other institutions should emphasize not only "hard" but also "soft" skills which include the range of skills necessary to promote farmer to farmer extension such as facilitation skills, public speaking and leadership. Promoting home based programs like weaving and handicrafts are worth considering to support sustainable livelihood. Finally, it is recommended that the concept of empowerment be expanded to embrace the promotion of collective assets and capabilities. Relative to this, further studies should be done to promote the creation of common funds.

Key words: Farmer-driven approach · Participation · Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Farmer-driven extension recognizes that farmers are prime actors in the extension process. Control of decisions and resources rests with farmer groups, who may often work in partnership with support organizations and service providers, including elected local governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and central government agencies. Given access to information and appropriate support, it is believed that farmers can effectively organize to provide goods and services that meet their immediate priorities. Not only do poor farmers have the capacity to do extension, they also have the most to gain from making good use of resources targeted at developing capacities and disseminating technology and information [1].

The strategic vision for the agricultural sector of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) supports the farmer-driven concept. The Lao Extension Approach (LEA), which consists of the Government Extension Service (GES) and the Village Extension System (VES), is built on principles of decentralization, pluralism, participation, integration, gender sensitiveness and sustainability. This means that fundamental changes are needed in the extension delivery system. Rather than simply being agents for technologies imposed from the outside, extension workers need to become catalysts, helping communities achieve goals they have defined for themselves. They need to learn to interact closely with social groups and communities, become better listeners and facilitators and develop a responsive, two-way communication process between the community and rural service institutions.

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The VES is the nucleus of the LEA which intends to promote self respect, self-reliance and sustainability through farmer involvement in the whole project cycle. It is technically supported by the District Agriculture and Forestry Extension Office (DAFEO) staff and a farmer who serves as Village Extension Worker (VEW). During the initial phase, the DAFEO takes on a leadership phase by spearheading activities such as training needs assessment (TNA) with village authorities, facilitating learning projects, training and coaching VEWs and initiating networking activities among VEWs and farmers. In the long term view, it hopes to see farmers as leading, implementing and taking full responsibility for the extension activities in their communities. All of this is hoped to be achieved through intensive capability building and the use of participatory principles.

This study was intended to describe the individual and organizational factors and the extent of participation of farmers under the farmer-driven approach (FDA) in VES; and, determine its contribution to the empowerment of farmers in the VES.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in two villages in each of the four major agricultural areas of Lao PDR: Luangprabang, Saravane, Khammuane and Vientiene. These four provinces were selected because of their distinctness in terms of educational attainment, location and ethnic grouping. Luangprabang is a highland area populated by very poor farmers. Saravane province is a remote plateau area which can be accessed only during the dry season. Farmers in this province come from different ethnic groupings especially in Toumlan district. Khammuane and Vientiane city are mainly rice producing areas where farmers have better educational attainment as compared to the other provinces.

Simple random sampling with proportional allocation was used to draw the samples from the unit of analysis, the farmer- beneficiaries of the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP). Two villages from each district were chosen. The total sample size was computed using Slovin's formula:

$$n = N/1+N_{e2}$$

Where:
n = Sample size
N = Population size
e = Desired marginal error

A permissible error of five percent was used in the study.

To describe the sample size from each district, the proportional allocation technique was used with the formula

$$n_1 = nN_1/N$$

Where:
n_1 = Sample size taken from each district
N = Size of sample for all villages in the four districts
N_1 = Total size of villages for each district

78 farmers participated in the study from the village extension system. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to get data from the farmers which was pre-tested prior to actual use in the field.

The data was analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques such as frequency distribution, means, ranges, percentages and standard deviation. Correlation analysis was done to determine relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. The acceptable level of statistical significance was set at 0.05 and confidence level of 95%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Profile: Majority of the farmer respondents were male, in the productive age group (30-49 years of age), married and reached only primary education which means that they spent a maximum of five years in formal education. Most (64%) belong to the Lao-Tai group, the dominant ethnic group of Lao. Almost all (92%) owned the land they tilled, the average land size of which was 2.63 hectares, bigger than the national average of 1.6 hectares.

Perception on Support Received: The farmers' perceived rating of VES activities in shown in Table 1. The farmers rated the local government unit (LGU) support in terms of usefulness and timeliness at the village, district and provincial levels. For all levels, respondents gave a satisfactory rating for the usefulness of human resource development, technical support, policy support and training intervention with an overall mean of 3.56. Satisfactory ratings at the district level ($\bar{x}$ = 4.01) and at the provincial level ($\bar{x}$ = 3.*64*) could be attributed to the presence of staff in the area whenever technical support, training and advice are needed. In terms of timeliness,

Table 1: Farmers' perceived rating of village extension system (VES) activities

Perception of Ves Activities	Total		
	Mean	Sd	Adj Rating
Usefulness of VES Activities			
Village level	3.03	.64	
District level	4.01	.56	
Province level	3.64	.68	
Overall Perception on LGU Support in terms of Usefulness	3.56	.59	S
Timeliness of VES Activities			
Village level	3.10	.67	
District level	4.02	.57	
Province level	3.64	.62	
Overall Perception on LGU Support in terms of Timeliness	3.59	.62	S
Rating on Provision of Material Support			
District	2.23	.66	
Province	2.22	.63	
National	2.11	.66	
Overall Material Support	2.22	0.65	M

Adjectival Rating:

Below 1.66	Poor	(P)
1.67-3.33	Moderate	(M)
3.34-5.00	Satisfactory	(S)

Table 2: Farmers' rating of responsiveness of the production group

Responsiveness Indicator	Mean	Sd	Desc
Attended meetings, seminars and related activities regarding VES	4.55	0.68	O
Took initiative in learning particularly the VES	4.58	0.75	O
Took initiative in consulting with the VEWs/DS staff	3.28	0.85	M
Took part in generating resources for theVES	4.09	0.84	O
Attended other agricultural services conducted in the village in relation to VES	3.97	0.82	O
Implemented VES advice and recommendations without close supervision	3.05	0.77	M
Showed appreciation for the contribution of the VES efforts in improving the livelihood status of the family and the community	3.09	0.49	M
Shared important information concerning VES with fellow community members	2.96	0.84	M
Overall	3.70	0.75	O

Adjectival Rating:

Below 1.66	Not often	(NO)
1.67-3.33	Moderate	(M)
3.34-5.00	Often	(O)

farmers gave a satisfactory rating for the support received from local government units with an overall mean of 3.59. Overall, local government support has been perceived to be satisfactory, useful and timely. This is a positive finding since perception of timeliness and usefulness is considered important to ensure continued interest and participation of farmers.

The use of extension materials is important in the process of disseminating information and technology to the farmers. These materials included leaflets, posters, brochures, videos and newsletters distributed at the district, provincial and national levels which were usually given during meetings and trainings. Most of these materials were on crop and animal production technology. Farmers gave these extension materials a moderate rating for at all levels with an overall mean rating of 2.22.

Responsiveness: Responsiveness pertains to the behavior of community members to collaborate and get involved in and appreciate VES activities. These activities included meetings, seminars, agricultural services and other extension-related projects. The community takes the initiative to consult with the VEWs, generate resources, implement advice and share important information regarding the VES.

The farmers' rating of responsiveness is shown in Table 2. Using a five-point scale to measure responsiveness, four statements obtained mean scores ranging from 3.97-4.58 and an overall mean of 3.70. This was translated to a descriptive rating of "often" which meant that community members were receptive to VES activities. In more specific terms, members taking the initiative in learning, got the highest mean ($\bar{x}$ = 4.58),

followed by attendance in meetings, seminars and related activities regarding VES (=4.55). On the other hand, sharing important information concerning VES with fellow community members got the lowest mean rating ($\bar{x}$ =2.96). This showed that the community members were willing to cooperate and get involved in VES activities and that they could learn from what the VES is doing for them. However, they have not reached the point where they willingly shared VES activities and benefits to other members of the community.

Cohesiveness: Cohesiveness refers to the result of an action when people get on well together. People tend to become closer or cohesive when they become adjusted to one another. In this study, cohesiveness was measured through the association of people to each other which was reflected in their desire to form groups and address their concerns. Cohesiveness was also shown by the degree to which the group helps its members reach important goals or participate in desired activities in the community such as labor exchange, conflict management, project implementation, education of farmer and peer relationship.

Using a three-point scale, conflict management got the highest mean score ($\bar{x}$ =2.33) and project implementation got the lowest ($\bar{x}$ =1.92). This finding confirms that the presence of conflict and misunderstanding in the group is one indicator that affects group cohesiveness. However, farmers believed they were able to resolve their problems as a group, had friendly and smooth relations among themselves despite individual differences. On the other hand, project implementation and education of farmers got the lowest means ($\bar{x}$ =1.85 and $\bar{x}$ =1.87, respectively) which implies that farmers still require supervision and education in the implementation of VES activities. Farmers' education, either formal or informal, is deemed important to increase their indigenous farming knowledge and ingenuity. For instance, trainings and seminars are avenues where farmers' potential was recognized and consequently equipped them with the necessary skills in developing partnership between the extension agents and fellow farmers (Table 3).

Extent of Farmers' Participation: Table 3 presents the farmers' extent of participation in the project cycle. Extent of farmers' participation in planning was determined using a five-point scale. Of the 15 planning activities, 12 got mean scores equivalent to "high" while only four got mean scores equivalent to "moderate". Results reveal

Table 3: Farmer' rating of cohesiveness of the production group

Cohesiveness Indicator	Mean	Sd	Desc
Conflict management	1.95	0.56	S
Project implementation	2.30	0.56	S
Education of farmers	1.85	0.61	S
Peer relation	1.87	0.56	S
	2.23	0.44	S
Overall mean	2.04	0.55	S
Adjectival Rating:			
Below 1.66	Never	(N)	
1.67-3.33	Sometimes	(S)	
3.34-5.00	Always	(A)	

Table 4: Farmers' extent of participation in the project cycle of village extension system activities

		Total		
Project Cycle Activities		Mean	Sd	Desc
Planning		3.63	0.96	H
Implementation		3.16	0.85	M
Monitoring and Evaluation		3.19	0.81	H
Sharing		2.85	1.01	M
Adjectival Rating:				
Below 1.66	Low	(L)		
1.67-3.33	Moderate	(M)		
3.34-5.00	High	(H)		

that farmers believed that DAFEO takes the lead role in appraisal. Decision-making is done mostly with the help of DAFEO who also actively inspects farmer activities. Results show that farmers are closely supervised by DAFEO staff in all of the planning activities.

In similar manner with planning, extent of farmers' participation in implementation was measured using a five-point scale. Of the 15 implementation activities, farmers gave 10 statements with "moderate" scores and five having "high" scores. A closer look at the mean ratings, however, revealed that for items that emphasized farmer leadership, lower means were given by farmers. Again, this implied that there is still a need to develop farmer initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation participation was measured using a five-point scale. The item that got the highest rating was on DAFEO follow-up of activity and informing farmers of results of monitoring and evaluation. Results show that items with the lowest ratings are activities listed that needs initiative and leadership of farmers.

The extent of farmers' participation in the sharing of VES activities was measured using a five-point scale ranging from "high" to "no sharing" categories and is shown in Table 4. The activities on sharing got an overall mean score of 2.85, described as "moderate". Compared to other activities in the project phase, sharing of

Table 5: Farmers' rating on dimensions of empowerment

	Total		
Individual Assets and Capabilities	M	SD	Desc
Over-all Mean of Individual Assets and Capabilities	2.98	0.68	M
Over-all Mean Collective Assets and Capabilities	3.18	0.82	M
Over-all Mean for Project Ownership	3.90	.70	H
Adjectival Rating:			
Below 1.66	Low	(L)	
1.67-3.33	Moderate	(M)	
3.34-5.00	High	(H)	

information got the lowest means. Where farmers were eventually expected to lead in the project activities and consequently in sharing information to communities, more interventions to develop initiative and leadership skills should be formulated.

Empowerment: The concept of empowerment is closely linked with the notions of power. Power in turn enables people. Empowerment is defined as the ability of people to act on their own in order to reach their self-defined goals [2].

Empowerment involves the development of capabilities to enable people to manage their own projects better and have a voice in existing delivery systems [3, 4].

In this study, empowerment was divided into three categories: individual empowerment attributed to material and technological aspects and observed through improved capacities to decide for themselves and increased confidence to share knowledge and skills; collective assets and capabilities referring to improvement in communal funds for example and group capabilities; and, the degree of feeling of ownership of projects by the farmers.

The farmers' rating on dimensions of empowerment is shown in Table 5. Improvement of individual assets and capabilities was measured in terms of monetary assets and capability using a five-point scale. Farmers rated monetary assets as "moderate", with a mean score of 3.02. Increased income and increased standard of living gained the highest mean scores of 3.27 and 3.15, respectively, while saving money got the lowest (2.55). This means that while farmers perceived that they have more money now prior to joining VES, this money goes to expenses on household needs which they could not afford before. Farmers' earnings are just enough for their current needs and hence saving is not a priority. Farmers should be given the chance to have more access to information and technology to improve their own farming activities and be provided with income generating opportunities to augment their income.

Improvement in capability was rated lower compared to perceived improvement in monetary assets. This means that while farmers perceived that VES contributed to increased income, they are unable to see its direct contribution to the development of individual skills.

Collective assets referred to communal improvements, group savings and group access to services. Possessions acquired become common to the group. This contrasted with individual assets where only a single farmer acquires monetary possessions, or personal improvements for himself.

Using a five-point scale, farmers gave varied ratings resulting to an overall mean of 3.18 (moderate). They perceived that VES gave the next generation better opportunities and access to quality basic services while others mentioned the benefits of the production group fund and savings. However, it should be noted that VES is not obliged to provide funds to production groups in the community because the interventions prioritized are primarily capability building in nature. It was found that among the 12 villages visited during the data gathering and interview, only one production group (Ban Nonesavang) had a production group fund. The members of production group joined together and decided to contribute a certain amount and save this money and spend for their agricultural activities. This production group saved a total amount of 2,600.000 Kip from their monthly contribution of 10,000 Kip (= 1 USD).

Ownership referred to the extent to which stakeholders considered the project as their own. Using a five-point scale, farmers' sense of ownership of VES was measured. It was observed that the farmer-respondents got an overall mean score of 3.90 (high). All farmers believed that VES is their project and that the project has its inherent strengths and capabilities to improve their skills and capacities. This indicates that farmers have achieved a feeling of ownership of the VES and considered the project a part of their lives. This is a positive result as feeling of ownership could result to more sustainable projects. It could be inferred that when

Table 6: Correlation analysis of farmers' organizational factors with extent of participation in VES activities

	Correlation Coefficient (r_s)		
	Extent of Participation		
Variables	Planning	Implementation	M&E
Overall local support	0.475**	0.553**	0.430**
Overall materials support	-0.676^{ns}	-0.167^{ns}	-0.183^{ns}
Responsiveness	0.506**	0.486*	0.392*
Cohesiveness	0.536**	0.620**	0.569**

Legend: ns = not significant

* = significant at 0.05 ** = significant at 0.01

stakeholders developed the sense of ownership, they were empowered to account for the project's performance. This also illuminates the principle of participatory approach wherein incorporating capacity building and ownership leads to sustainability –which is the very fabric of the project process.

Relationship Between Organizational Factors and Extent of Participation: The relationship between farmers' organizational factors and extent of participation in the VES activities are shown in Table 6.

Local Government Support: There was a significant relationship between overall local support and extent of farmers' participation at the planning (r=0.475), implementation (r=0.553), monitoring and evaluation (r=0.430). This is consistent with findings that the availability of government assistance and other support systems in the community would significantly affect the level of participation of the people [5].

Material Support: There was no significant relationship between the overall extension material support and farmer-respondents' participation in the planning (r=-0.676), implementation (r=-0.167), monitoring and evaluation (r=-0.183) of VES activities. This led to the acceptance of the null hypothesis that there was no relationship between extension material support and farmers' participation in the different phases of VES projects. However, a negatively significant relationship was found between extension materials support at the provincial (r=-0.259) and national (r=-0.244) levels which is an indication that extension materials support received from the government was not enough and did not reach the village level.

Community Members' Responsiveness: A positive significant relationship was obtained between farmers' responsiveness and extent of participation in the planning (r=0.373), implementation (r=0.275), monitoring and evaluation (r=0.264) in the VES. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between farmers' responsiveness and their extent of participation in the different phases of the projects in VES was rejected. This finding supports studies that show that the more responsive the community members are, the more that the child health workers participate in health care undertakings [6].

Community Member's Cohesiveness: There was a positively significant relationship between farmer-respondents' cohesiveness and their extent of participation in the planning (r=0.536), implementation (r=0.620), monitoring and evaluation (r=0.569) of the projects in VES. This meant that the higher the cohesiveness, the more likely the farmers participated in planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation in the VES projects.

Relationship Between Extent of Farmers' Participation and Empowerment: The relationship between extent of participation of farmers' and VEWs' participation in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects in VES and empowerment is shown in Table 7.

Individual Monetary Assets and Capabilities: Results showed a significant relationship in the implementation (r=0.230) phase of the project in VES and acquisition of monetary assets. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the farmer-respondents' extent of participation in the planning and monitoring and evaluation phases of the projects in VES and acquisition of monetary assets was rejected. This meant that those who had a high level of participation in the implementation phase of the projects in VES tend to have higher opportunities to acquire monetary assets.

Table 7: Correlation analysis between extent of farmers' and VEWs' participation in VES activities and empowerment

	Correlation Coefficient (r_s)			
Extent of Participation	Individual Monetary Asset	Individual Capabilities	Collective Assets and Capabilities	Ownership of Project
Planning	0.120^{ns}	0.200^{ns}	0.419*	0.406**
Implementation	0.230*	0.224*	0.470**	0.474**
Monitoring and Evaluation	0.127^{ns}	0.207^{ns}	0.467**	0.368**

Results revealed that a significant relationship exists between farmer- respondents' extent of participation in implementation (r=0.224) phase of the projects in VES and improvement of capability. This meant that increased or high participation in the project cycle phase led to improved capabilities.

Collective Assets and Capabilities: There was a positively significant relationship between farmer respondents' extent of participation in the planning (r=0.419), implementation (r=0.470), monitoring and evaluation (r=0.467) of projects in VES and acquisition of collective assets and capabilities. This meant that in addition to concentration of projects to improve individual assets and capabilities, interventions to improve collective assets and capabilities was also necessary.

Project Ownership: Results showed a significant relationship between farmer- respondents' extent of participation in the planning (r=0.460), implementation (r=0.474), monitoring and evaluation (r=0.368) of projects in VES and perceived ownership of VES. This meant that stakeholders considered the project as their own which is a positive attitude towards achieving a more sustained project. They felt more responsible of the project's performance and that they are empowered to work collectively and actively.

CONCLUSIONS

- Personal interests like earning additional livelihood and learning new technologies motivated village extension workers more than possibility of contributing to the benefit of the community as a whole.
- Organizational factors such as local government support contributed to the extent of participation of farmers. Farmers' perception of VES activities significantly affected their participation. The more positive the perception, the more likely they are to participate in VES activities. In terms of extension materials support, there is a need to increase publication and distribution to broaden coverage from the village to the national levels. Most of the farmers only had a maximum of five years of education which meant that there wss a need to further simplify extension messages using the local language. Moreover, there were comments that materials did not reach far flung areas.

Technical and financial supports also affect the extent of participation. Some come from flung areas which require time and money. This finding either implies the provision of financial support to these farmers to enable them to participate or deployment of additional VEWs in these places to attend to their needs. Farmers suggested that farmer exchange, field visits and proper budget allocation be implemented. Monitoring and evaluation should also be improved.

- Community members' cohesiveness was significantly correlated with extent of participation in the VES. Farmers exhibited their cohesiveness in their ability to resolve problems as a group and through their friendly and smooth relations despite individual differences. Ratings of stakeholders of the VES affirmed that cohesiveness serve as a motivating factor to achieve common goals in the community though it appears that there is still room for improvement in this aspect. For example, motivation of VEWs rested more on individual gains like possibility of increasing income rather than promoting community concerns.
- Responsiveness significantly influenced the extent of participation in the VES. This was shown in their receptiveness to VES activities by taking the initiative to learn, attend trainings, meetings and seminars. However, sharing of information with fellow community members regarding VES activities was not frequently practiced.

- There is significant relationship between participation in the various project phases and empowerment. Farmers who participate more are more likely to be empowered. However, farmers see empowerment mostly on individual basis and less on a community basis. Moreover, they see empowerment more on an individual economic point of view rather than collective point of view.

Stakeholders showed high participation in planning followed by implementation. In the monitoring and evaluation and sharing phases, participation was low since DAFEO takes the lead. Moreover, results show that farmers are closely supervised by DAFEO staff in all of the planning activities. Initial data on the involvement of DAFEO in problem analysis, dialogue and decision making supports this finding.

In terms of extension skills, it is evident that farmers need training on farmer-to-farmer extension skills. This skill is often cited as lowest in various ratings of farmer skills. Considering that this project aims to develop farmer-driven extension, skills along the line of leadership, communication, networking, planning and farmer experimentation should be given importance.

In terms of technical training, stakeholders tend to list more training needs now compared to before joining the VES. Majority of training courses are on crop and livestock production. Farmer exchange and visits and trainings on planning, networking and communication skills were highly suggested. Training along the line of marketing is important as this could improve their income. In terms of livestock production, most of the training conducted were more focused on raising the animals and less on the later aspects of the market chain like slaughtering and marketing activities. There also seemed to be less appreciation of activities that were geared towards improvement of hygiene despite the fact that swine raising posts environmental hazards.

- Farmers should prioritize savings to support household expenses. They should be given access to income generating opportunities to augment income.
- Results revealed that both farmers and VEWs had a high perception on ownership of VES. Stakeholders developed the sense of ownership such they are empowered to account for the project's performance, able to work together and actively participate in the activities of the project.

Recommendations: The following recommendations were derived from the conclusions of the study.

A. Project Management and Implementation

- The criteria of willingness and volunteerism should be considered in the selection of training participants. Trainings should also include farmers belonging to other ethnic groups and women. This would enhance gender equality and accessibility to extension support irrespective of an individual's ethnicity.
- To address the wide disparity in income, extension workers should look into the development of skills outside of farming like weaving, handicrafts. This should be done in partnership with other institutions. This is in consonance with the sustainable livelihood concepts [7, 8].
- Project implementers should provide training opportunities to enhance "soft" skills with emphasis in the development of social and communication skills. The farmer exchange and field visits are suggested. In addition, the Farmers Field School, an interactive approach to learning, could provide an excellent vehicle for organizing and strengthening groups, thus making group activities sustainable.
- There is a need to develop linkages between and among institutions, both public and private, such that accessibility to adequate technical and financial resources for agricultural production will also be increased.
- The distribution of extension materials with simplified messages should be done to enable community members group with low education levels avail of these materials. Specifically, extension materials like posters and videos would be more appreciated among these groups. Improvement of extension materials support in terms of quality and distribution for wider readership should be made.
- Formation of cooperatives and savings funds is necessary to encourage community responsiveness and cohesiveness.
- Informal training should be given to farmers as well as VEWs to boost their confidence. These trainings include planning, networking, communication and farmer extension skills. In addition, farmers should be trained to develop initiative and leadership skill to improve the farmer-led extension skills.

- Farm visits and farmer exchange should be conducted to expose farmers to new trends in technology and be able to compare these with their own. They should also be given opportunities to do farm experimentation and share knowledge and skills among themselves and to other community members.
- Farmers should be encouraged to save or put up a common fund. This will ensure their capacity to support their family needs as well as carry out project activities in a more sustainable manner.

B. Research for Further Study

- A comparative study of farmer-driven VES projects implemented in other villages of Lao PDR to identify factors which contributed to their success and/or failure should be carried out.
- The Ban Nonesavang case is a model to emulate. The village was one among the several villages in the country which was able to establish a production group fund. The initiative, willingness and cooperation among the members served as driving forces. An in-depth study on the factors which influenced the village to come up with this achievement is a worthwhile undertaking in the future.

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