



Photo: FAO/B. Barten



Photo: NAFRI

FARMER ACCESS TO SEEDS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN THE VIENTIANE PROVINCE OF LAO PDR

CHANGES IN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

The growing economy in Lao PDR has resulted in an increasing demand for rice, vegetables and other products produced in the rural areas. This increasing demand spurred a new type of growth in which new market opportunities influence the orientation of farming systems and where new economic roles, outside the traditional crop production, are emerging in rural villages.

A case study on “Plant Genetic Resources Access and Utilization: Understanding and Contributing to Sustainable Livelihoods in Lao PDR”, carried out in the Vientiane province, showed that small scale rural farmers are combining their efforts in agriculture to produce both for their home consumption and for the market. They are increasingly shifting from mainly subsistence production to market-oriented farming and are including off-farm sources of income like services, small business enterprises, employment and seasonal labour wage labour in their livelihood strategies.

CHANGES IN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES DEMAND CHANGES IN SEED SYSTEMS

The case study showed that seeds are a vital component for farmers to pursue these emerging livelihood strategies. Outcomes of the case study also showed a gap between farmer needs and access to seeds. Examples that illustrate linkages between access to seeds and livelihood strategies are the following:

- Demands from consumers in city markets require farmers to look for crop varieties with new traits and quality standards of seeds that cannot be produced by and accessed in local seed systems.
- The growing importance of off-farm sources of income spur an increasing demand for rice varieties that are well adapted to local conditions and early ripening in order to save labor for other livelihood activities.
- Farmers need to rely on quality seed that is imported. These seeds are now external inputs

over which farmers have little control. Farmers reported that generally, seed supply is ad hoc, and the main source of vegetable seed is through the import from private sector companies, mainly from Thailand.

- The disadvantage of imported seed is that it is not well adapted to their agro-ecologic conditions, thereby increasing the risk of crop failure compared to local varieties.
- Increasing intensive market oriented farming leaves less resources available for the cultivation of local crop varieties; as a result the genetic base of crops cultivated under these intensive systems is becoming narrow.



Photo: FAO/B. Barten



Photos: FAO/T.A. Vu



Photos: FAO/T.A. Vu

With increasing market orientation also comes increased risks and vulnerabilities to external shocks and crises. A narrowing genetic base increases the risk of crop loss to natural shocks such as droughts, flooding, pests and diseases. The stronger dependence of farmers on market prices for their livelihoods increases the impacts of national and international economic crises at the village level. Price fluctuations are now related to other factors (including production activities and market demands in other provinces and/or neighboring countries, currency fluctuations, etc).



Photo: SEARICE



Photo: NARRI

STRENGTHEN SEED SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE LIVELIHOODS

Strengthening farmer access to seeds and local seed systems will be essential to improve income, maintain domestic food production and decrease risks and vulnerabilities of farmer livelihoods to external shocks and crises. Strengthened farmer access to seeds should be seen in the context of improved access to a larger amount and number varieties of higher quality seeds, at the time when farmers need them.

Efforts to strengthen access to seeds in the Vientiane province should focus on: (i) developing and releasing varieties with traits for market oriented production that are adapted to local agro-ecological conditions; (ii) increasing farmer involvement in variety development; (iii) increasing systematic mass production of good quality seed; and (iv) conserving the large diversity of local crop varieties and associated farmer knowledge.

In the Vientiane province, a contribution to strengthening farmer access to seeds was to organize two farmer training sessions on good quality vegetable seed production.



Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

P.O. Box 811
Patouxay Roundabout
Lanexang Avenue
Vientiane 0100

www.maf.gov.la



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome - Italy

www.fao.org/biodiversity
With the support of FAO and the FAO/Netherlands Partnership Programme