บทคัดย่อ

เกษตรกรในสาธารณรัฐประชาชนลาว (สปป. ลาว) พึ่งพิงรัฐบาล ภาคส่วนที่ไม่ใช่รัฐและเอกชน สำหรับการสนับสนุนและการให้บริการทางการเกษตร ในการพัฒนาการผลิตพืชและสัตว์ การพัฒนาความรู้และทักษะของเจ้าหน้าที่ส่งเสริมซึ่งปฏิบัติงานกับชุมชนชนบทเป็นจุดมุ่งหมายหลักของการทรงกระหน่ำและวางแผนในการพัฒนาการพัฒนาความสามารถของเจ้าหน้าที่ส่งเสริมสัตว์ใน สปป. ลาว ผ่านการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างเชิงปริมาณ โดยนำไปใช้กับผู้จัดการโครงการ 16 คน ปศุสัตว์เมือง (อำเภอ) 10 คน และเจ้าหน้าที่ส่งเสริมระดับเมือง 20 คน ในช่วงปี ค.ศ.2008 ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการสร้างความสามารถของเจ้าหน้าที่มีรวมถึง การนำไปใช้ได้ของเงินทุน การสนับสนุนและอิทธิพลของผู้จัดการในระดับเมืองและแขวง (จังหวัด) การให้มีผู้แทนของสตรีและกลุ่มชน thiểuทางชาติพันธุ์ และโอกาสสำหรับการศึกษาเพิ่มเติม (ปัจจัยทางสถาบันและองค์กร) ปัจจัยส่วนบุคคลที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความสามารถเข้าร่วมดูดของเจ้าหน้าที่รายบุคคล การสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวและผู้ช่วย อิทธิพลของเกษตรกรและกลุ่มเกษตรกร มีตัวอย่างที่ดีในสนามการทำางานและการส่งเสริมของเจ้าหน้าที่ การพัฒนาความสามารถทำให้เข้าใจว่ามีโอกาสได้รับความร่วมมือกัน (partnership) ระหว่างรัฐบาล ภาคส่วนที่ไม่ใช่รัฐบาล องค์การด้านการพัฒนาภาคเอกชน และผู้มีส่วนได้เสียอื่น

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Abstract

Farmers in Lao PDR rely on government, non-government and private organisations for agricultural advice and support for livestock development. Improving the knowledge and skills of extension staff working with rural communities is a key goal of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. This paper presents a study of the factors influencing capacity building of livestock extension staff in Lao PDR. Quantitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 Project Managers, 10 District Heads, and 20 District Extension Officers during 2008. Factors influencing capacity building of staff included availability of funding, the support and influence of provincial and district managers, representation of women and ethnic minorities, and opportunities for further study (institutional and organisational factors). Personal factors related to individual staff ownership and motivation, family support, and other commitments, influence of farmers and farmer groups, having good examples in the field and staff relocation. Capacity building can be further strengthened by partnerships between government, non-government, development organisations, private sector, and other stakeholders.

Keywords: Capacity building, Extension, Lao PDR, Livestock development

Note: PAFO = Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
DAFEO Head = District of Agriculture and Forestry Extension Office Head.
District Staff = District extension staff.

Introduction

Capacity building refers to activities that improve an organisation’s ability to achieve its mission or a person’s ability to define and realise his/her goals or to do his/her job more effectively (Linnell, 2003). Capacity building also increases the abilities and resources of persons, communities and organisations to manage change (Coutts, Roberts, Frost & Coutts, 2005). Capacity building of staff at local, regional and national levels has become
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central to the goals of development organisations and governments in developing countries (Horton, 2002). This is due to past failures of some rural development programs to reduce poverty and empower local people to improve their livelihoods. Development organisations and governments tended to transfer only funding and modern technology to farmers or provide formal education to rural communities (Horton, 2002). These activities were conducted by researchers and extension officers in a top down approach, with little involvement of local people in problem solving or decision making. Lack of staff capacity to facilitate capacity building of local people led to little or no improvement in the livelihoods of rural communities (Eade, 2007).

Farmers in Lao PDR rely on government, non-government and private organisations for agricultural advice and support (known as ‘extension services’). NAFES and NAFRI (2005) pointed out that all stakeholders including government, the private sector and international organisations have the responsibility to assist and support production and livelihood improvement based on farmers’ needs. However, human resources and capacity, including lack of awareness, knowledge and skills at the provincial and district agriculture and forestry office level needs to be addressed (MAF, 2008). According to (Stur et al., 2002) extension staff are limited in both quantity and quality. Capacity building is important for extension in Laos because government extension staff work closely with farmers. They take on a role as facilitators helping farmers to identify their main problems and opportunities. They transfer new technical knowledge using extension methodology to individual farmer and farmer groups, and help farmers to access markets (NAFES, 2005).

To improve livestock production, farmers need effective extension or advisory services. During the last ten years there have been a range of
livestock projects funded by international donors some of which included capacity building components. These projects were administered by the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and its departments such as the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) and Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF). Improving the knowledge and skills of extension staff working with rural communities is a key goal of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF, 2008).

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in Lao PDR also play a major role in rural development, education, and social development with increasing emphasis on agricultural development. Capacity building has been a high priority for NGOs and donor organisations but they often lack knowledge of technologies. On the other hand, the Lao government has limited funds to support staff capacity but has international support for agricultural research. Hence, capacity building partnerships can be formed for mutual benefits (Stelling et al., 2009).

This paper presents a study of the factors influencing capacity building of livestock extension staff in Lao PDR. The first section describes the qualitative methods used to explore capacity building factors. Results are then presented based on the institutional factors identified followed by personal factors influencing capacity building outcomes. Strategies are recommended to address all factors and improve staff capacity building outcomes for livestock production in particular and rural development more generally.
Methods

A qualitative inquiry approach was used in this research to collect in-depth data on both positive and negative factors influencing capacity building outcomes from the perspective of those experiencing or managing capacity building programs. It was felt that quantitative closed questions based on a predetermined set of factors would not deliver the information required on the reasons why certain factors influenced capacity building from the interviewee’s perspectives. Semi-structured interviews using an interview guide and open questions are more useful for understanding interviewee’s knowledge, skills, and opinions about capacity building and for reflecting on how to improve capacity building processes (King, 2004).

The research design consisted of three data collection phases in 2008.

1. Semi-structured interviews with 16 project managers involved in livestock development (Figure 1),

2. Semi-structured interviews with 10 Heads and Deputy Heads of District Agricultural and Forestry Extension Offices (DAFEO) (Figure 1),

3. Semi-structured interviews with 20 district livestock extension staff working at District Agricultural and Forestry Extension Offices (DAFEO) (Figure 2),

The research used purposeful sampling to identify project managers with at least 8 years experience in managing large projects and capacity building of extension staff. Twelve managers were located in Vientiane with two from Luang Prabang and two from Xieng Khouang (see Figure 1). Nine project managers were involved in livestock projects only (representing 100% of livestock projects in Lao PDR). The other seven were managing integrated projects with livestock, crops, education, public health, forest, and
irrigation components (representing 70% of integrated projects with livestock components in Lao PDR). Six projects were administered by the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES), four projects were within the Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF), two projects were implemented with the National Agriculture and Forestry Institute (NAFRI) and two projects were managed by non-government organisations. All project managers were male from Lao Loum ethnic group with Bachelor degrees. Five had Masters degrees and one had a PhD. Ages ranged from 38 to 54 years old.

District heads (6) and deputy heads (4) were selected using stratified purposeful sampling to ensure representation from districts and provinces where most livestock projects were operating (Figure 1). These key informants were important for the research because they had direct responsibility for capacity building of extension staff at the district level. All respondents were male from Lao Loum ethnic group with Bachelor degrees. Ages ranged from 40 to 60 years old.

District livestock extension staff were purposively selected based on having at least 5 years experience in extension so they could reflect on capacity building experiences. Fourteen extension staff were male and six were female. The qualification of district staff was Middle Diploma to Bachelor degree in Livestock Husbandry from agriculture colleges and the National University of Laos. Interviewees were aged between 26 and 36 years old. Fifteen staff were Lao Loum and five were Hmong. Areas where interviewees worked included Viengphoukha District, Luang Namtha Province; Luang Prabang, PakOu and Xieng Ngeun District in LuangPrabang Province; Mai District in Phonsaly Province; NongHet, Pek and Khoune District in Xieng Khuang Province; Hine Heup District and PhoneHong District in Vientiane Provinces (Figures 1 and 2).
Results

The following results are presented according to 1) institutional and organisational factors influencing capacity building, and 2) personal and village related factors influencing capacity building according to those interviewed.

1. Institutional and organisational factors

Availability of government funding and dependency on projects

Despite the slowly increasing number of government extension staff working at the district and subdistrict level, the issue of ongoing lack of budget was raised by most interviewees as a major limiting factor to capacity building. Government funds are seen to be inadequate to provide
capacity building opportunities for staff, let alone for daily extension activities or salaries for volunteer or contract staff beyond projects. As one district head explained;

“...my district is located in city and without any project coming to work with us...we lack opportunities to build the capacity for my staff...we lack funds to support new volunteers and contract staff.” (DAFEO Head 2, 2008)

However, some district staff continued to work despite the lack of funds;

“...sometimes I tell my team that if district head don’t have budget for providing our Perdiem.... We need only money to buy fuel for our motorbikes to visit farmer groups.” (District Staff 18, 2008)

Reliance on donor projects for the capacity building of district staff is a result of lack of government funding. Although projects have provided important skills, this creates a cycle of dependency amongst managers, as illustrated by the following quotes;

“I observed that two of my district staff gained experience with projects, they have more opportunities than other staff...compared with before when they were waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Now I use these two staff, not only to train to volunteers and contract staff but also to help me in admin and planning activities.” (Deputy Head 8, 2008)

“...I would like to invite donors, NGOs and development projects come to join and work in my district in order to upgrade staff’s knowledge, skill and ability.” (DAFEO Head 3, 2008)
**Provincial (PAFO) and District (DAFEO) support and influence**

The influence of provincial and district managers on capacity building of extension staff can be profound according to those interviewed. The attitudes and managerial abilities of the district heads can motivate or inhibit staff capacity building and performance. One district head said that he tries to help staff to resolve their problems (including personal problems) or to understand their responsibilities;

“...I give advice to staff who are not experienced in working with farmers (using new technology). Sometimes in the village meeting I help them resolve problems.” (DAFEO Head 4, 2008)

A district staff member confirmed the importance of support from the district head;

“...at the present time I have ability and confidence to work with farmers 90% in improving animal feed or livestock production, because my DAFEO head supported me by giving advice and feedback and allowed me to attend the training courses.” (District Staff 3, 2008)

For staff who are not active in their work and/or not successful, some DAFEO heads give them advice, starting from simple things they can do to improve in a step by step fashion. Some DAFEO also mentioned that they follow up staff actions in the field:

“...I need to follow up in order to evaluate staffs’ activities in the field and ask farmers who the staff work with...check what activity they have done well and what activities they need to improve and where they need advice from me.” (DAFEO Head 3, 2008)

Each year PAFO and DAFEO heads provide awards to individual staff who have progressed well (such as attending study tours, providing certificates of achievement and being promoted to new positions). Providing
awards to district livestock extension staff is one way to recognise staff and build their capacity. However, some interviewees identified that sometimes awards are not given equally or fairly. There was strong support for DAFEO heads to be a fair and not favour certain district staff. For example, in providing incentives to staff, both local people and outsider people, senior and younger staff, women and ethnic group minorities should be considered equally. One interviewee said that:

“…DAFEO heads should be careful in reorganisation inside the district and provide support equitably to staff.” (DAFEO Head 4, 2008)

**Representation of women and ethnic minorities**

According to all interviewees, women can work alongside male extension staff to help farmers in improving livestock production, especially feeding and animal health. However, several district staff noted that female not male district livestock extension staff should work closely with women from ethnic minorities, especially those raising small animals such as pigs and chickens.

“Usually Hmong woman like to grow vegetables garden and raise small animals. If we use Lao Loum men extension staff to work with them… they will not understand because communication has problems…one thing is that men and woman are different if we talk about traditional culture… If the extension workers are men and the farmers are women, when we go to the field to demonstrate it is not suitable because we are afraid that their husbands may get angry or misunderstand… Male extension staff and women farmers are difficult to make friends… So the same gender works best.” (District Staff 1, 2008)
Some district heads stated there were not enough women (particularly from ethnic minorities) to work for the livestock section in the district office, or at sub-district Technical Service Centres. As one interviewee explained,

“...I need more women from different ethnic groups to do livestock extension, however it is difficult to find them because younger women of each ethnic group find it hard to finish or complete high school and Agriculture College.” (DAFEO Head 4, 2008)

There is also a general lack of extension workers from different ethnic minorities, especially in the northern part of Lao PDR. One program manager described the difficulties in communicating with Akha and Muser ethnic groups because they needed to translate from Akha and Muser language into Lao and from Lao language into English for foreigners. In general, this interviewee had seen only district extension workers from Hmong and Khamu minorities.

“...working with local people it is very difficult to communicate with them because district extension staff are not from those ethnic group minorities, so building the capacity of district extension staff from those ethnic groups is needed.” (Project Manager 8, 2008)

Opportunities to study

Providing opportunities to district staff to do further study is another way to build capacity of extension staff. In some provinces PAFO and DAFEO select students who have completed high school to go and study at the National University of Laos or at provincial Agriculture Colleges. When those people have finished they return home and apply to get jobs with DAFEO in their provinces. DAFEO heads also select district staff who have lower
diploma (LD) and middle diploma (MD) to study at Agriculture Colleges and then return to their place of work. They may also select volunteers who have been very active and like to work in livestock extension to study.

“…along with providing intensive training to staff within the district I also allowed some staff to study part time within the province; long term study in Vientiane by distance-learning modules and full time study. Some of them used their own funds.” (DAFEO Head 1, 2008)

Only a few district staff get scholarships because attaining a scholarship depends on their age, English proficiency level, family commitments and the organisation’s selection process (DAFEO Head 2). In addition, only a few scholarships are provided by donors. Some projects have no funds for capacity building components and DAFEO heads sometimes do not have funds, so they wait for government and foreign scholarships.

“…. in my district we received some funds from the government but I used these funds for administration activities, so I did not have enough funds to provide training or support for staff who want to study at University.” (DAFEO Head 9, 2008)

However, district heads do provide support in other ways;

“…. my staff study part time at Souphanuvong University, Luangprabang. I allow them to use a work motorbike and give some extra money for fuel.” (DAFEO Head 6, 2008)

**Working with NGOs**

Most DAFEO heads stated that good collaboration and working with NGO projects is the best way to help DAFEO in building capacity for district extension staff. Most NGO projects conducted in upland areas have livestock production and capacity building components. Giving opportunities to
government district extension workers to cooperate with non-government extension staff and stakeholders who work in the same district forms good relationships and they are able to share ideas and exchange experiences with each other. As one district extension staff recalled:

“…my boss allowed me to work closely with the World Vision project’s staff in my district. I had a good chance to exchange experience with them.” (District Staff 20, 2008)

2. Personal, family and farmer related factors

*Individual motivation*

Some interviewees mentioned that some district staff, (whether volunteers, contract or government staff) have high motivation to work closely with farmers at different sites and become good extension officers. These staff want to benefit farmers and they work for society’s benefit more than their own. Sometimes they face problems such as long walks to villages (four to five hours) and staying overnight in remote areas.

“… I am working hard with farmers. I have high responsibility in my job… it makes me satisfied when I see farmers get benefits.” (District Staff 12, 2008)

Another district extension staff illustrated their motivation as follows;

“I especially pay attention to my work and work hard… I have a good chance to practice and learn with my team and farmers… I have high determination to do my work in order to improve animal feed and feeding: planting forage, using animals, fattening cattle and pigs, de-worming parasites and vaccination, animal management, housing, watering to farmers.” (District Staff 5, 2008)
Family support and external commitments

The family economy can contribute to building the capacity of district staff. The level of family support and outside work commitments can influence staff opportunities for capacity building, and the effectiveness of their work. This study found that some district staff can work hard because their family supports them towards success in their jobs. However, some extension staff have limited income and often have to be involved in other income generating activities within the family (e.g., farming, fishing, and small businesses):

“...one livestock officer, the government approved him to enter as government staff and then he left ... for his business, because of family commitments. Thus we lost one quota for extension staff.”

(DAFEO Head 1, 2008)

These commitments and the demands of family members can limit opportunities to improve their capacity as extension officers. Some staff cannot study or stay overnight in remote areas because they have many responsibilities in the office and at homes, such as looking after children and relatives when they get sick:

“...I can work in remote areas and I can go early morning and come back home evening. I cannot stay overnight there because I have family (baby) and nobody to look after the baby.” (District Staff 16, 2008)

However, some staff are able to study for high diploma degrees in their provinces or at Universities in Laos using family funds. These staff have high determination to study because their families support them.

“...I used my own funds to study part time at Souphanuvong University for 5 years.” (District Staff 20, 2008)
Influence of farmers and farmer groups

The influence of farmers can have a strong bearing on the skill development of livestock extension staff. Some interviewees said that working closely with farmers using participatory approaches creates a learning process between district extension staff and farmers. District staff introduced new technology options to farmers and farmers make decisions to choose techniques which are suitable for their situations. Some interviewees mentioned that sharing knowledge with local farmers can improve their knowledge and skills very quickly, make them more confident and improve their relationships with farmers. A district staff member told the following story of how they learnt from farmers.

“For the (forage) cut and carry process I told the farmer how to cut; 15-20 cm high from the ground, but the farmers cut 10 cm high from ground. They said that stylo grows well with higher yields (if cut at 10cm) than the height district staff suggested. For de-worming parasites, I told farmers that you should mix the medicines with water and then give to animals... the farmers put the medicines inside cooked sticky rice and then gave to the animals... they said ‘we do not need to catch pigs’. So learning on-the-job and learning from farmers’ feedback increases my experience and I have more confidence.” (District Staff 19, 2008).

District staff described how they start off learning from individual farmers to gain confidence, and then slowly start working with farmer groups as livestock improvements begin to emerge (so they have something to show the group). They often start working with farmers who have land and livestock already, some kinds of local feed, and understanding of what the projects is offering them. For example;
“...I focused on working with individuals and used the impacts from individuals to group and from group to whole village - chicken groups, fattening cattle groups, pigs raising groups and animal marketing groups.” (District Staff 3, 2008)

**Having good examples in the field**

Having good examples for staff and farmers to learn in the field is necessary and important according to those interviewed. District livestock extension staff can use demonstration plots and simple trials to stimulate interested farmers and learn themselves. For example, one project uses simple trials on forage legume supplementation for pigs in two provinces; Luangprabang and Xiengkhuang.

“... I am working with a project using simple trials with farmers. I know what farmers need and what problems they face and get feedback from interested farmers. The benefits for staff are knowledge in the formulation of feed using stylo as a protein source to mix with local feed.” (District Staff 20, 2008)

Thus, having good examples in the field is an important factor influencing capacity building for district staff because they can exchange experiences with each other in the field. Several interviewees found that hands-on activities in the field are a learning-by-doing process. An interviewee explained that;

“...I applied theory to a real situation, sharing ideas with the team and farmers on forage planting and using them for animals... learning process between staff and farmers. The farmers believed us, because they saw real impacts.” (District Staff 18, 2008)
Discussion and Conclusions

The research found that many factors influence capacity building of livestock extension staff in Lao PDR. Some factors relate to the way government, donor organisations and NGOs work. Other factors are associated with an individual’s personality and background, their family situation and interactions with farmers in the field. The extent that these factors can be controlled or influenced to improve capacity building varies. For example, it may be easier to influence how district managers support their staff than change family situations of district staff. Implementing a program for working with NGOs may be more achievable than replacing staff who go on study leave (although volunteer or contract staff can replace these staff). Some of the factors identified naturally link with each other. For example, encouraging managers to be more strategic in selecting female and ethnic extension staff can be combined with making sure these staff are motivated and committed to working with such groups. Focusing on one factor may lead to better outcomes from another factor. Staff motivation to work on their knowledge and skills can be influenced by making sure they have good relationships with farmers and see success examples in the field.

The following strategies are recommended to address these factors and improve staff capacity building and outcomes for rural development. Firstly, the Lao government needs to pursue an active program of staff selection based on gender, ethnicity, motivation and ability. Selection needs to start in the high school system to sponsor and encourage more women and ethnic peoples to continue to study at agriculture colleges. The quota system then needs to select motivated and capable staff to enter the government extension system. According to Squire (2003: 8) “....training
women agricultural extension agents will improve their capacity to reach out to women farmers and to school girls with improved agricultural technologies and in the process, serve as role models.”

Once staff are in the government extension system, the role of DAFO heads and Project Managers becomes vital in capacity building. Senior management staff need to build effective teams. Senior and younger extension staff need to build trusting relationships and increase good communication within teams. According to Mullins & Constable (2007), members within teams need to believe in each other. Members need to help each other to do their respective work, to make work decisions, to solve problems, to make plans and manage change. Secondly, managers need to provide capacity building opportunities equally to district extension staff. Opportunities can include releasing them to attend workshop training, cross visits and study tours, allowing them to study at higher levels, promotion and selection to become permanent staff. However, managers should select staff who are active and successful in their jobs and consider long-serving district extension staff before more recent employees for rewards. If staff are respected and rewarded in the workplace, they may be less inclined to relocate to other areas.

The results revealed that capacity building can be further strengthened by developing partnerships between government, non-government, development organisations, private sector and other stakeholders. According to Biradar, Sridhar & Balmatti, (2006) NGOs are good in the social dimension of the development efforts but are poor in technical know-how. In contrast, Government extension sectors are strong on technical aspects of development. Government projects have new technologies and materials to apply in limited districts but not enough
budget to scale out to large areas. By cooperating with NGOs and other stakeholders there is great potential to gain more benefits than by each working individually (Stelling et al. 2009). District extension staff will gain more knowledge, skills and experience from working with government projects, NGOs, private sectors and other stakeholders.

As this study has shown, extension staff need to be allowed to develop meaningful relationships with farmers. For this to occur requires staff spending most of their time in the field working with farmers and farmer groups. Having successful examples in the field is also important for staff and farmers to learn about livestock production (Millar, Photakoun & Connell, 2005). Demonstration plots and simple trials (eg village learning activities) can stimulate interested farmers and district extension staff in learning together (Stelling et al. 2009).

At present in Lao PDR, capacity building of livestock extension staff relies to a large extent on donors and project funding as the government has limited funding. Using capacity building techniques that are cost effective will reduce reliance on donor funding. For example, building capacity of DAFEO heads and using local, experienced mentors to build teamwork is more cost effective than using national or foreign advisors (Millar & Connell 2010). Having good local examples or demonstration plots within districts also saves money and time. If staff are motivated to learn with farmers, they will be less inclined to wait for donor funds and projects before taking action. The research concludes that such strategic approaches to build the capacity of district livestock extension staff can return benefits quickly to organisations and communities, particularly in remote upland areas.
References


