

The FSP in Lao PDR – Where does it fit and what can it achieve?

Viengsavanh Phimpachanhvongsod¹

Introduction

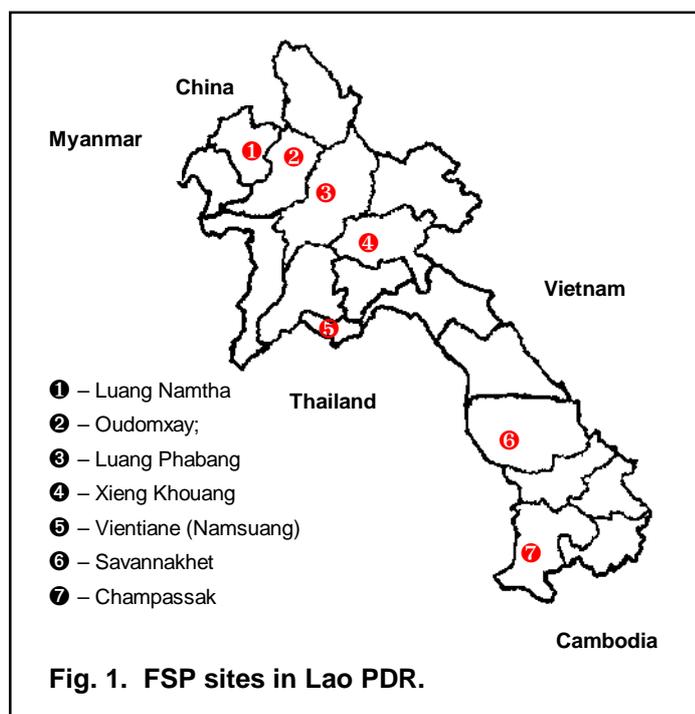
The vast majority of livestock (cattle and buffalo) in Lao PDR are managed by smallholder farmers using few or no external inputs. Livestock are an important component of upland farming systems in Lao PDR, providing draft power, manure, food, income, and livelihood for resource poor farmers. Locally available inputs (such as rice straw and tree leaves) are sometimes utilized. Animals usually graze on communal land (forests, grasslands, roadsides) and are either kept in pens at night or simply left to roam. In raising livestock, the farmers encounter many problems, including:

- Diseases.
- Lack of feed during the dry season.
- Lack of feed at critical times during the wet season (such as planting and harvesting), when there is not enough labour to care for animals.
- Loss of animals to thieves and predators.
- Damage to other farmers' fields.

The Forage for Smallholders Project (FSP) is working with the Department of Livestock and Fisheries to address these problems. This paper summarises the activities of the FSP in Lao PDR.

Agro-ecosystems

The project has activities in seven locations (Fig. 1), covering a wide diversity of agro-ecosystems and climate. Soil pH at these sites varies from very acid to neutral. Most soils are moderately to severely infertile. Average annual rainfall ranges from 1000 to 2600 mm, with peak rainfall occurring from June to August (Table 1, Fig. 1). The dry season at all sites lasts for 5 - 6 months, with only 1-4% of total rainfall being received during this period.



Project activities

The activities of the project at each of these sites are summarised in Table 2. In addition to these activities, the following booklets/manuals have been translated into Lao:

- Hacker JB, Simon BK, Phengvichith V. 1996. The pek savannas of the Lao People's Democratic Republic – ecology and floristics. Genetic Resources Communication No. 23. Australian Tropical Forages Genetic Resources Centre, CSIRO

¹ Livestock Development Division, Department of Livestock and Fisheries, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

- Tropical Agriculture, Australia.
- Hacker JB, Phimpachanhvongsod V, Novaha S, Kordnavong P, Veldkamp J, Simon BK. 1997. A guide to the grasses of Xieng Khouang province, Lao PDR, and some notes on the ecology of grazing lands in the province. Genetic Resources Communication No. 28. Australian Tropical Forages Genetic Resources Centre, CSIRO Tropical Agriculture, Australia.
 - Cheng Y, Horne P. 1997. Field experiments with forages and crops. Practical tips for getting it right the first time. 48 p. Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Canberra.
 - Developing forage technologies with farmers. A training manual. Forages for Smallholders Project.

Table 1. Agro-ecosystems for each location.

Agro-ecosystems	Louang Namtha	Oudomxay	Louang Phabang	Xieng Khouang	Vientiane	Savannakhet	Champassak
Agroforestry	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Upland cropping	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Grassland	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Rainfed lowland rice	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓

FSP partners

At all sites, we work with provincial and district livestock officers. The FSP has also established links with other development organisations in Lao PDR. Apart from consultative links, active collaboration in on-farm activities is continuing with the GtZ NAWACOP project in Xieng Khouang, the EC Micro Projects in Luang Phabang, and the Lao-IRRI Project in Luang Phabang. Another project with the Norwegian Church Aid in Luang Namtha is about to begin.

Future activities

The FSP in Lao PDR is planning to expand its activities in on-farm development and evaluation of forage technologies. In 1998, we will start on-farm evaluations in Luang Namtha and Oudomxay and will involve more farmers from Luang Phabang and Xieng Khouang.

To do this, we must learn from our experience during our first year of on-farm work. Because we depend so much on the district rural development officers, we need to spend more time and efforts in developing their skills and motivating them to work with us. This means providing them more training opportunities (both formal and informal), visiting them more often and giving them opportunities to visit other sites to build their confidence in FPR methodologies.

As we expand our on-farm activities we will continue to conduct participatory diagnoses, as these are critical components in planning on-farm trials with farmers.

Table 2. Project activities in Lao PDR.

Activity	Luang Namtha	Oudomxay	Luang Phabang	Xieng Khouang	Vientiane	Savannakhet	Champassak
Nursery evaluation	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Regional evaluation	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
On-farm evaluation	-	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
FPR training	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
Agronomy training	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-
Evaluation training	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
Participatory diagnosis	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓
Forage multiplication	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-
Legume tree evaluation	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-
<i>Brachiaria</i> seed experiment.	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓
Grassland studies	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓