Village Livelihood Development in Houaphan

Introduction

The main threats to forest areas in Houaphan Province, including the Nam Xam National Protected Area (NPA), are encroachment by upland farming, shifting cultivation, unsustainable methods of non-timber forest product extraction, and unplanned logging. However, awareness raising about these issues is not sufficient when local communities are in poverty, and have no other viable options for their livelihoods. For this reason, the USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forests (USAID LEAF) project, implemented by SNV in Laos, went beyond traditional REDD+ project activities to seek solutions to strengthen stakeholder resilience and ease pressures on forest areas. To strengthen livelihood outcomes, USAID LEAF focused on an integrated approach to livestock health and management and participatory land use planning with four villages, two of which are surrounding the Nam Xam NPA.

Why livestock?

Based on socioeconomic baseline surveys and livelihood options assessments, livestock was identified as an important source of income and nutrition for local communities. However existing livestock suffered a high incidence of disease and death, due to a lack of medical supplies and skills.

A Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) confirmed livestock improvement as a suitable way to improve livelihoods in these villages. Veterinary care will reduce livestock mortality and raise incomes, and together with better land use planning and grazing management, will reduce degradation of forest resources and facilitate sustainable natural resource management.

Improving veterinary practices

Village representatives were selected by village authorities and trained as Village Veterinary Workers (VVWs). Skills taught to the VVWs included: animal housing, forage management and feeding, drug and vaccine application, livestock disease prevention, and healing. General technical training on the raising of goats, cattle, buffalos, pigs, and chickens was also conducted for interested villagers. A total of 41 people were trained as VVWs. Village leaders were included to encourage support from authorities and to facilitate strong connections with neighboring communities. The VVWs then trained an additional 75 people in their communities on general animal husbandry and a study tour was conducted among the VVWs to observe achievements from a similar project in Khammouane province. USAID LEAF also established a veterinary medicine and equipment fund to ensure the sustainability of the veterinary efforts.
Success

Most community members have reported an increase in income, or an expected increase once they sell their animals. Villages also reported a decrease in livestock mortality.

“My main crop is upland rice. I also raise two pigs and one goat. I would like to stop doing upland farming and change to goat and pig raising instead, which is why I came to join this training. I am very happy to be able to join the training and it is very useful for my family and relatives. Before the training on VVW, there were many sick and dead animals, but afterwards, I have been using vaccines and medicines to prevent and cure them, as well as growing grass for feed. So animal death has drastically reduced from before.”
-Mr. Khamphoud, 29 (Tinphou village)

Over the past year, chicken deaths declined from 43% to 10% in Tinphou village, and pig deaths were reduced from 49% to 2% in Sobpeng village.

A two-pronged approach: Participatory Land Use Planning

To support efforts to improve livestock health and management, Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) was also carried out with local villages. Previously there had been no clear differentiation between zones for raising animals, agriculture, timber extraction, and for conservation. The lack of community land use plans had resulted in forest encroachment, unsustainable harvesting, and conflicts between villagers and authorities.

The PLUP process was carried out in 2014-2015 in four villages in Xam Tai and Viengxay districts. In total, 205 households were involved in Houaphan, representing 1,214 people and covering 10,000 hectares. PLUP was conducted together with the Department of Forestry, the Provincial and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices, and the Provincial and District Offices of Natural Resources and the Environment to secure land rights, reduce border disputes, and increase local awareness on forest protection.

Local Viewpoints
Community Members Share Thoughts about PLUP

“...the future benefits of the environment will be guaranteed.”
-Viengxay DAFO official

“We had these zones from before but they were not clearly defined in terms of land use. We just talked about it informally, and said something like, ‘this is yours and this is mine.’”
-Na Heua village representatives

“Before, whoever wanted to encroach on the forest could do it. Now we have rules and boundaries. We know how many [resources] we should use this year and next year. Before, nobody knew.”
-Sobheng village families

“[As a result of PLUP, there is] more cohesion in the village. We do it together...before this, 2-3 houses here and 2-3 houses there. There was no unity. When we arrange the forest into protected, use or production areas, everyone has high responsibility. We are full and happy.”
-Sobpeng villagers