Partnerships and Participatory Approach

Introduction

The USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forests (USAID LEAF) project, implemented by SNV in Laos, sought to establish cooperative partnerships to resolve complex land management issues with a broad range of stakeholders. The successes of USAID LEAF would not have been possible without the collaborative response and participatory approach of the project. One of the essential lessons learned from the project was the importance of working with local government counterparts and village participation in ensuring sustainable interventions.

Cooperative Partnerships

From the outset, the USAID LEAF project sought to involve government institutions in project implementation, not just to ensure positive relationships, but also to build a sense of ownership over the project and develop capacity so that the project approaches could be sustained beyond 2015.

Relevant government representatives from branches including the Provincial and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices, the Provincial and District Offices of Natural Resources and the Environment, and the Lao Women’s Union were invited to join in the process of surveying and implementation. SNV Laos, through the USAID LEAF project, provided management, planning, and capacity building to partners from these offices, but government staff members were in control of many aspects of delivery, including leading trainings at the village level.

In Houaphan province, government partners provided feedback on past livestock project experiences, which helped shape the structure of the livelihood work. They reported that previously the number of veterinary trainees per village was too few, and they could not afford equipment, so much of the methodology was not implemented. Thus, the USAID LEAF project built upon these lessons by choosing a larger selection of trainees, including village heads to ensure leadership involvement, and establish veterinary funds and management committees to keep supplies available.

Thus, the key implementers in the project were government bodies, with the project in a more supervisory and supportive role, which resulted in local buy-in and ownership. This has already had promising results in terms of project continuation, an example of which can be seen in the Nam Xam NPA, where local authorities are very enthusiastic about future management plans and securing funding sources for the protected area.
Ties with other development projects in Houaphan

As USAID LEAF was a relatively modest project in size, it also tied activities in with larger and longer-term activities in target areas, to encourage continuity.

CLiPAD Project (Climate Protection through avoided Deforestation)

- Jointly engaged in the planning process for the provincial REDD+ strategy in Houaphan province
- Cooperated on biomass assessment training in Houaphan

Nam Xam NPA

- Collaborated on planning, coordinating, and implementing all project activities
- Technical knowledge and funding provided by USAID LEAF
- Participants, logistical coordination and base level implementation by Nam Xam NPA staff

WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society) in Nam Et Phou Louy NPA

- Jointly organized a study tour for Nam Xam NPA staff to visit and explain the WCS-funded ecotourism project in Nam Et Phou Louy
- Shared technical knowledge about NPA patrolling and management

Ties with other development projects in Attapeu

ADB Biodiversity Corridor project

- Closely shared information about respective actions and interventions in five common project villages
- Consulted about enrichment planting in shared villages to spread activities to different areas and avoid repetition
- ADB provided an additional 4,000 seedlings to USAID LEAF project villages to strengthen their interventions
- ADB project members attended USAID LEAF Gender Awareness Raising Workshop and Community Forest Management training
- Shared information about REDD+ project components

Sanamxay District Government

- Government staff acted as coordinators between villagers and project to facilitate discussion
- Shared responsibilities for planning, implementing, and monitoring processes