



Working Group on Agricultural Information Management (AIM)
4th Meeting – March 1, 2007



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1. Introduction

Over the last two months a group of staff from NAFRI and NAFES have been preparing a draft strategy and plan for the NAFRI/NAFES Working Group on Agriculture Information Management. The strategy is based on a number of assessments carried out in 2006 and discussions at different levels as to how the working group could most effectively contribute to the goals of MAF.

Thus, the 4th meeting of AIM focused on presenting the overall AIM concept and plan and developing an action plan for 2007.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Review the overall concept and plan of the Agriculture Information Management Working Group
- Agree upon a set of joint activities for a 2007 workplan and responsibilities from NAFRI and NAFES
- Discuss possible joint training and capacity building
- Agree on next steps for formalizing working group.

These notes provide an overview of the main discussions of the meeting as well as some next steps (see Annex 1 list of participants).

2. Discussion on overall AIM concept

Bandith presented the overall concept and strategy for AIM (see Annex 2). In general, it was felt the strategy is sound and builds upon discussions and issues already raised. It was generally felt that the strategy is an important part of building institutional linkages between NAFRI and NAFES as this is the first non-project focused working group.

Some of the key points raised regarding the presentation:

- The plan is solid and provides a good short term perspective on where we need to go in the next year or so. However, there is a need to look at the long-term and the real challenge for AIM will be find ways to work effectively (or form linkages) to the provincial and cluster level. If the group is going to have any real impact it is going to need real working mechanisms to be able to link to and support other levels.
- The concept focuses a lot on “explicit” knowledge, finding ways to improve information management and supporting development of materials from information already produced. However, there is a need to think about how to bring out “tacit” knowledge or the knowledge that is in people’s heads.
- Tapping ‘tacit knowledge’ will be important if we are going to work at different levels. The issue is not about disseminating information but forming a network of specialists. A good example of this is LaoFAB network where we are trying to capture people’s experiences and knowledge rather than just organizing written documents. More types of activities have to be done in Lao and for Lao staff at different levels.
- In relation to there is a need to link different levels and individuals. One area where AIM can work is to support the process for better clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different actors. We just don't need activities but have to identify who will be working in information at different levels in order to

form a network of information workers. This could be at the district or the provincial level. If we can come up with a model this can be proposed to MAF to help support the current change process underway in MAF.

- There is also a need to find ways to tap the local knowledge of farmers. Farmers have a lot of knowledge but it is not written down. Thus, a priority, particularly at the district/cluster level, is to find ways to document “best practices” of farmers.
- In regards to mapping knowledge there is also a need to map out what is needed for different Agro-ecological zones of the country. This can be done through the extension network of NAFES.

3. Discussion on AIM Workplan

It was mentioned that the workplan is quite ambitious and there is a need to prioritize activities at different levels. The following priorities were proposed:

- National level: Use of LAD and NALIS as a way to collect and disseminate information
- Provincial level: development of provincial level agriculture center for extension (PALACE)
- District level: clarifying role of technical service center at the cluster level.

In addition the following observations were made about the proposed activities:

- There is a need to simplify the workplan and make it less complicated. Try to develop key areas of work and who will be responsible for them rather than getting into the minor details.
- There was discussion about the usefulness of a separate website for AIM. Currently there is the laolinks website. It was decided that this should be kept at the moment and that links should be made from the NAFRI and NAFES website. In light of the limited staff availability this website should be kept simple as a way to provide information on AIM activities
- There was discussion on LAD and NALIS. As this is a priority, staff from NAFES need to be trained in managing and using LAD and NALIS. For NALIS it was mentioned that NAFRI should visit NAFES to introduce staff to NALIS and see if the current library database can be imported into NALIS.
- The issue of dissemination was raised and the need to develop simple system for disseminating information to the district and provincial levels. There is a need to streamline the current system at both NAFRI and NAFES and better coordinate this since many people receive similar information through both channels. Again, this is where it is important to have staff at the provincial level and district levels assigned so that they can be links for passing on information, rather than sending it to the Head of each division
- In terms of provincial level activities it was proposed that:
 - There is a need to develop a short concept on what we will do there and how we will go about this.
 - Based on this concept we need to get agreement with PAFO/Oudomxay that they are willing to commit at least 2 staff members to work full time on information
 - There is a need to not only think about provincial level information systems but also incorporate district and cluster level into any strategy or plan developed in Oudomxay.
 - There is a need to for both provincial and district level focal points to be able to capture what knowledge is available at different levels.

4. Joint Training

It was also proposed that joint training be organized based on some of the needs identified below. The plan was approved in principle and it was suggested that training should not only be for NAFRI/NAFES staff but also for district and provincial staff.

Area	Skill needed	Type of training
Info Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Managing IT systems ▪ Website design & content development ▪ Inputting data and organizing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LAN and IT management maintainence ▪ Training in LAD and Nalis ▪ Web-design and management
Information Production & dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and layout of publications ▪ How to create content ▪ Packaging of materials for different target groups ▪ Use of radio, video and other alternative media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training on developing materials for farmers and extension staff ▪ Training in video or use of other communication mechnasims
Improving linkages to different levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding lessons in participatory communication and roles & responsibilities at different levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study tour to look at community based communication and information systems

5. Next steps

- It was agreed that the concept and plan would be revised based on the comments above and a final draft prepared.
- It was agreed that the Khamphay and Somxay would sign the final draft and present this to senior staff at NAFRI and NAFES as well as at MAF.
- It was agreed that in terms of developing a plan for the provincial level that a concept would be developed before Lao New Year and that agreement sought with PAFO to assign staff to work on information activities.

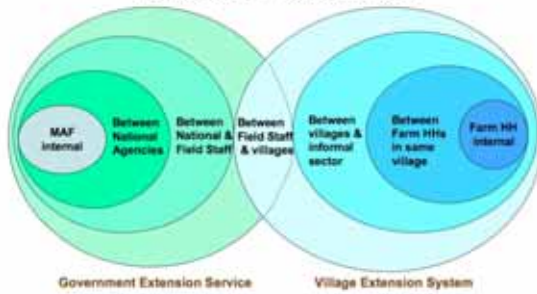
Annex 1: List of Participants

NAFRI		NAFES	
1. Khampay Manivong	Head of IMD	1. Somxay Sisanonth	Head of ESU
2. Bandith Ramangkoun	Head of ISU	2. Chaluen	Master Trainer
3. Pome	Head of Library	3. Khampuey	Master Trainer
4. Khanhkham	Publications section	4. Andrew Bartlett	Adviser (LEAP-CTA)
5. Phetsamone	Publications section	5. Andrea Schroeter	Adviser (LEAP-TA)
6. Khanthamaly	Publications section	6. Phout	KM officer
7. Sonekham	ICT	7. Julienne Inchiene	Master Trainer
8. Joakim	ICT adviser	8. Varth	Master Trainer
9. Michael	Adviser (Info serv)		

Annex 2: Presentation on AIM Concept and Plan

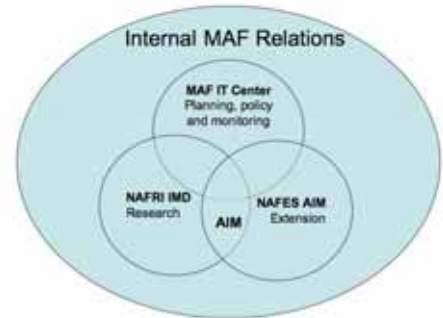
<p style="text-align: center;">NAFRI-NAFES Agriculture Information Management Working Group</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Meeting to Agree on Concept and Workplan March 1, 2007</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Meeting objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present draft AIM concept • Agree on overall workplan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Review proposed activities – Assign roles and responsibilities • Identify training needs and possible joint training activities • Next steps to approve AIM plan for 2007
<p style="text-align: center;">AIM Activities in 2006</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings were held of AIM • Studies carried out by students to assist with the assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inventory of information resources at NAFRI and NAFES – Impact of extension to local knowledge systems – Information needs and communication preferences study in Namong and Phonxay • Cooperation in supporting ICT development at NAFES • Cooperation in disseminating materials through wisdom bag • Cooperation in disseminating NAFES newsletter • Development of AIM concept and draft workplan 	<p style="text-align: center;">Issues and opportunities identified from assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no central place (at different levels) to know what is being produced • No clear responsibilities between different levels (central, provincial, district, gum ban) • Few mechanisms to disseminate technical information to farmers or extension agents • Information is produced based on needs of projects • Few mechanisms to answer technical questions of farmers or extension staff • Opportunities to use alternative media to disseminate information such as radio, TV farmer cross visits, farmer groups, etc
<p style="text-align: center;">How AIM will contribute to goals of MAF?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist to develop mechanisms to share information between different levels • Clarify roles and responsibilities of different line agencies and levels • Provide technical support to Gum Ban Pattana Level • Ensure that information is being disseminated to extension agents and farmers 	<p style="text-align: center;">Goals and Objectives of AIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The purpose is to improve extension staff and farmers' access to agriculture related information</i> • Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop mechanisms to improve information sharing between NAFRI and NAFES – Provide district and provincial staff with better access to information and knowledge – Develop mechanisms to improve communication channels between different levels – Build capacity of staff and linkages among them at all levels

Focus on Lao AKIS

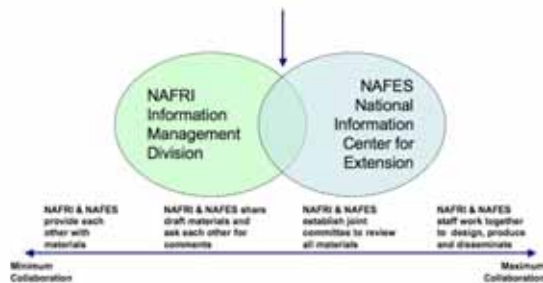


Use AKIS because we want to improve information and communication mechanisms at different levels rather than just working at NAFRI-NAFES level

MAF Internal Relations



Different levels of Collaboration



Working principles of AIM

- Focus on improving extension staff and farmers access to information (not just central level linkages)
- Add value to activities already being carried out. Avoid new activities
- Information, ideas and knowledge are shared openly
- Activities avoid duplication and ensure effective use of human resources
- Based on MAF strategy, in general:
 - NAFRI to focus on producing information for PAFO subject matter
 - NAFES for DAFEO
- Encourages projects at NAFRI/NAFES to share new results and materials

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Key activity areas

- Information Management (LAD, NALIS, collection of materials, etc)
- Production and dissemination (joint material development and repackaging of information)
- Facilitating learning and sharing: workshops and learning processes
- Technical advisory services: directory of expertise, call center, etc.

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Roles and Responsibilities at different levels

Level	Info Man	P & D	Sharing events	Tech Advise
Central				
Provincial				
DAFEO				
Gum Ban				

This will need to be clarified over the next year.

Working Processes

- Working Group functions through NAFRI IMD and NAFES NICE
- At least 3-4 meetings a year
- Work teams will be formed between NAFRI and NAFES to carry out agreed activities
- Staff from other projects encouraged to participate and contribute
- At end of each year there will be a review to check progress and reflect on lessons

Key priorities for this year

- Work out information collection and sharing arrangements for LAD at NAFRI and NAFES
- Develop and implement methodology for working with provincial staff (start in Oudomxay and expand to other provinces)
- Clarify working mechanisms and roles and responsibilities between national, provincial, district information
- Dissemination of Uplands sourcebook (provincial level workshops)
- Process for workshop and materials on contract farming

Discussion

- Is the concept clear? What changes or revisions could be made?
- What do you think the priorities for this year should be?