



**Lao Extension for Agriculture Project**



# **Knowledge capitalization: Agriculture and Forestry Development at “Kum Ban” Village cluster level in Lao PDR**



**Consultancy Report**

**Joost Foppes**

**Vientiane, October 2008**



## Executive Summary

### *Background*

The “Kumban Pattana” Village clusters are a priority policy of the Lao Government since 2004, but what does it really mean? What lessons can be learned so far from field experience? How can agricultural extension build on this experience to serve producer groups more effectively?

Foreign aid donors wish to support the adoption of the Government Extension System to deliver services at this new level of clusters of villages. However the concept of village clusters is not well understood. This makes it hard for donors to make decisions on what type of organization building processes they could consider to support. What support mechanisms for village cluster development would be best suited to achieve goals of national development, especially in poverty alleviation? How can we avoid information centers becoming “white elephants”, empty building with no sustainable systems for funding staff and activities?

The Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) supported by SDC, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, at the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES), part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Lao PDR, commissioned a knowledge capitalization study to learn lessons from the experience to date with Kumban development in the provinces.

### *Methods*

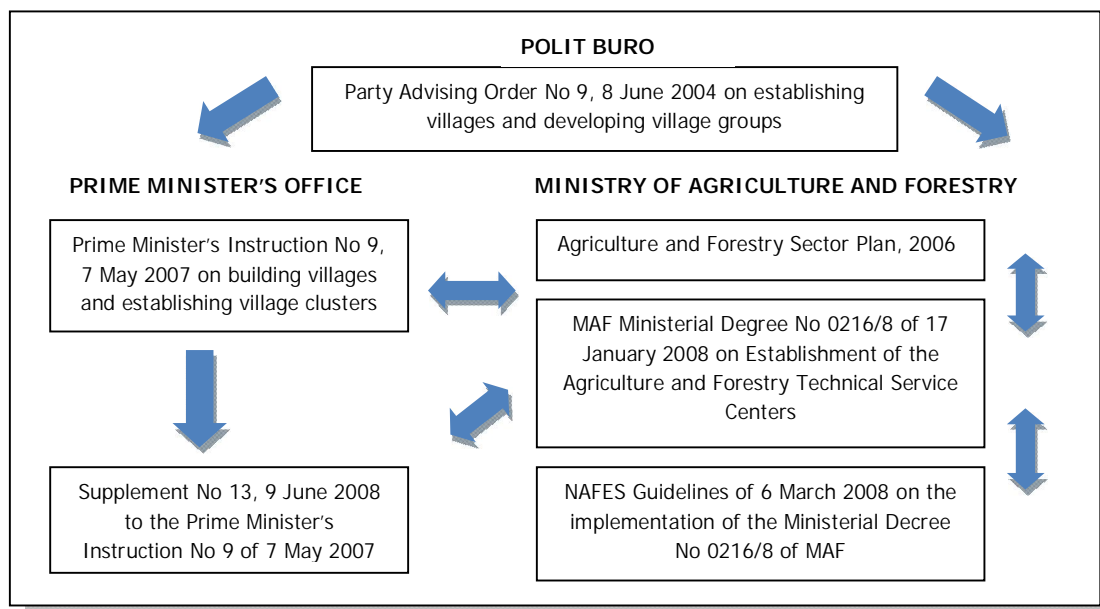
A consultant was recruited for two months (May-June 2008) who reviewed policy documents relating to Kumban, interviewed stakeholders and visited eight different Kumban centers in six provinces, wrote a report on lessons learned from Kumban development and presented findings in a workshop. The report consists of three parts:

1. Normative part: describing the Government objectives, structures and functions of Kumban organizations and the various interpretations of the Kumban concept among stakeholders
2. Descriptive part: including profiles of Kumban settings, an inventory of Kumban activities, a typology of facilities and an overview of financing mechanisms
3. Prospective part: describing opportunities and pitfalls, with recommendations for follow-up activities.

### *Part One: Normative Aspect*

#### *Government objectives*

The Lao Government wishes to promote the establishment of a new organizational level, half way between the village level and the district level. This type of organization is referred to by the Government as “Kumban Pattana”, Village Development Cluster. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has a policy to establish “Information Service Centers” in each cluster to provide Government services, stationing district officers closer to villagers. The aim is to reduce travel time of extension officers and improves their efficiency as they work with producer groups, instead of individual farmers. The diagram below illustrates the key policy documents that prescribe the establishment of “Kumban Pattana” village clusters and Technical Service Centers:



From these documents, the Government's objectives can be summarized as:

- *Political Reform*: Strengthen party leadership at grassroots level is the overarching goal
- *Service Delivery*: Efficient delivery of Government services in rural development, among others, through service centers delivering services to producer groups
- *Settlement*: Settlement in places with easy access and consolidation of villages into clusters of economic size
- *Security*: Better coordination in local security and decentralized military capability for national defense
- *Economic development*: engaging farmers into market-based production for rural income and employment
- *Cultural development*: preserving local cultural identities, but also basic services e.g. education and health

### *Structures and Functions*

Villages are grouped into clusters of on average nine villages per cluster, by Province and Government taskforces. The grouping largely follows a pre-existing structure called "khet", which is used to organize political meetings among groups of village leaders at sub-district level. The main structure for governing village clusters is the Kumban committee. All members of the committee have to be Party members. Most committees have 7-8 members, roughly half are district officials, the other half village leaders. Members are selected, not elected; the leader is always a senior district official. The committee meets at least every month. Kumban committees may have a small Kumban office. In some Kumbans there is also a Kumban police station, a Kumban health post or an Agricultural Technical Service Center.

The main function of the Kumban committee is to produce the Kumban Development Plan, which is submitted to the District with a request for funding to support local development activities. Districts sometimes provide funding, depending on their available budget. The Kumban committees can be assisted by a temporary taskforce of District Technical Specialists "long hak than". Other functions of the Kumban committee include dissemination of Government policies, implementing the Kumban plan, local conflict resolution and support of producer groups. In one case, a farmer group enterprise was established by leaders of three Kumbans (Si Don Nyeng, Bokeo).

### *Stakeholder Interpretations*

Through review of existing documents and interviews with various organizations supporting Kumban development, the following expectations were identified on the roles of Kumban village clusters in rural development:

- *Decentralized Planning*: Village cluster plans as a tool for efficient decentralized planning
- *Empowerment*: Creating citizen's representative organizations, local governance
- *Information Networking*: For villagers to access information they need to develop themselves
- *Land Use Planning and Conflict Resolution*: Kumban as platform for conflict resolution in land use planning
- *Private Sector Development*: Producer groups, Rural enterprises, Market Information Systems
- *Government Service Delivery*: Bringing Government services closer to the people, with agreed standards for these services, integrating services from different departments
- *Technical Service Centers*: Providing sustainable, effective extension services to farmers

## *Part Two: Descriptive Aspect*

### *Implementation of the Kumban policy to date*

At the time of the study (May-June 2008), 1,026 Kumbans had been formally set up in 137 districts, covering 9,668 villages. On average there are nine villages or 4,904 inhabitants per Kumban. Province and District agricultural extension departments have 4,904 staff available to service the Kumbans, on average four officers per Kumban. In most of the six provinces visited during the study, targets have been set for the numbers of district staff to be deployed at Kumban level and officers were actively being transferred to Kumban level. Most Provinces have only started to implement the Kumban policy this year, with attention usually focused on developing one to three Kumbans per province, located in province focal zones for development in the poorest districts.

### *Profiles of Kumbans*

Eight case studies were prepared on Kumbans and Technical Service Centers, annexed to the report. From these case studies, key parameters that define the profile of a Kumban could be summarized as:

- *Landscape potential*: Rich, promising plains or poor, difficult mountains
- *Access to markets*: Maize, rubber, vs. NTFP
- *Donor support or not*: Determines whether there is a center, a budget to do activities

- *Coordination between departments:* a good example was found in the IFAD Project in Attapeu, where a manual for working at Kumban level was prepared
- *Training support for extension officers:* There are big differences between the technical and social competences of extension staff working at Kumban level

### *Inventory of Activities*

Main activities of Kumban Committees and Technical Service Centers are:

Kumban Committees	Technical Service Centers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Kumban plans</li> <li>• Regular political meetings</li> <li>• Setting up police posts</li> <li>• Organizing producer groups</li> <li>• Developing farmer group enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Demonstrations:</i> Pig farming, pastures, zero-tillage maize, cassava, peanuts, silk</li> <li>• <i>Production of inputs:</i> Fish fingerlings, fruit tree seedlings, piglets</li> <li>• <i>Credit delivery</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting producer groups:</i> Chicken, rice, cattle vaccination</li> <li>• <i>Land use zoning and allocation</i></li> </ul>

### *Typology of facilities*

At Kumban level, the following facilities could be found: Kumban offices, Kumban police posts and Kumban Technical Service Centers. There was a big difference between high-investment donor-funded Centers and low-investment Centers, build with local support. The design of the centers often seemed to focus on office buildings, where as staff actually need sleeping quarters. The design of these centers could be improved. There seems to be no direct relation between the investment in the buildings and the level of extension activities performed by the team. Some centers maintain technical demonstrations on the station, others maintain on-farm trials on farmer fields. The latter would seem more effective in disseminating technologies that farmers can adopt.

### *Financing mechanisms*

Lack of running budgets is the key constraint, both for Kumban Plans and for Technical Service Center. It costs \$9,000 per year to have three extension officers implement a full extension program. Most centers only get \$200- \$3,000 per year. This issue will have to be resolved for extension services to be able to operate. Some options proposed by stakeholders include reviewing the use of local tax revenues to fund the running costs of agricultural extension.

## *Part Three: Prospective Aspect*

### *Decentralized Planning*

Participation of village leaders in the preparation of Kumban plans contributes to an effective implementation of the Government policy to decentralize planning. However a number of challenges remain:

- It is still difficult for village leaders to come up with a plan that is more than the sum of a series of village plans, to identify actions that are more efficiently done at the village cluster level. Fragmentation remains an issue, how to improve coordination between sectors could be a tool for efficient decentralized planning?
- The process is dominated by policies and targets set at central level; how could bottom-up targeting be improved?
- Instruments of community participation only vaguely addressed and little adhered to, how to improve?
- Often, the District can only provide a fraction the budgets requested by Kumbans to implement their plans, how can more budget be made available to empower local planning?

### *Empowerment*

To what extent can Kumban organizations become citizen's representative organizations, strengthening governance at local level? In its present form, the Kumban is primarily structured as a political organization which is part of the People's Party, not an administrative organization. The benefits of this structure are rapid approval and decision making, as well as good alignment to Government policies. Not being an administrative institution also reduces overhead costs. Some issues would seem to merit more attention:

- The requirement for committee members to be Party members may exclude disadvantaged groups such as women and ethnic minorities who often cannot read or write.
- Putting district officers in charge of the committees weakens their potential to be truly representative organizations of local communities. In case of a conflict of interest between Government and local communities, there is no independent judiciary body where people could appeal, how could more accountability be built in? The need remains for alternative inter-village organizations.

- The emphasis on “settlement” in larger communities often involves great social and physical costs. How to reduce this high social and physical cost, now often carried by communities? Resettlement removes labor force further away from agricultural production areas, how can this risk be reduced?

### *Information networking*

To achieve the Government’s objective of transforming the agricultural sector from subsistence agriculture to market-oriented agriculture, farmers must have access to market information networks. To what extent can Kumban organizations become a platform for information networking? There was one case (Sidoneyeng, Bokeo) where Kumban structures are being used to relay information on prices and quality requirements. In the other cases information networking still needs to be developed; more capacity building support is clearly needed.

- How can Kumban leaders learn to collect and disseminate information from within their own area?
- How can Kumban producer groups be linked to Market Information Systems at Province and National level?
- Who would be responsible for building information networking capacity at Kumban level?

### *Land use Planning and conflict resolution*

In none of the eight cases visited, was land use planning brought up as a task for Kumban clusters to get involved in. However in all cases, farmers are confronted with many choices regarding the use of their land as companies offer contracting arrangements for planting annual crops like maize or long-term investments such as rubber. This topic is quite complex as well as urgent; it would merit a special study.

### *Private Sector Development*

Development of producer groups and rural enterprises is a key priority for agricultural extension at Kumban level. Various stakeholders raised some key challenges yet to be overcome:

- Extension seems to focus mainly on providing inputs, credit, not on selling products. How could market skills of producer groups be strengthened?
- How to reduce the risk of village leaders spending too much time on Kumban political work when they could be more productive in farm enterprises?
- It is not clear what Kumban organizations can really contribute to farmer enterprise development. What should they do and what should they not do to promote farmer enterprises?
- The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC) is strongly supporting Small and Medium Enterprises. How could the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) cooperate better with MIC to improve SME support to farmer producer groups?

### *Government Service Delivery*

Bringing Government services closer to the people, with agreed standards for these services, integrating services from different departments and building the capacity of district staff to deliver these services are the ambitious goals of the Lao Government. Some key challenges remain to be addressed:

- What are the minimum standards for Government Service delivery in each sector? Who is accountable?
- Extension officers only reach a few families, how to scale up their impact?
- Extension officers and Kumban leaders still need a lot of capacity building to be effective, how to organize?
- Input delivery, buying and transporting products is usually done more efficiently by the private sector than by Government. What is the role of the extension service, how to avoid duplication?
- How could payment for these services be found and made sustainable on the long term?

### *Technical Service Centers*

Building technical service centers at Kumban level is the new strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to ensure provision of sustainable, effective extension services to farmers. Strengths and Weaknesses of these centers are presented in a SWOT diagram below. Key issues that remain to be addressed include:

- How to balance location of centers between rich areas with high production potential and vulnerable areas where poverty is high?
- Too few new messages are developed; how to work with innovative farmers to ‘harvest’ innovations?
- How to motivate staff to work on “on-farm” trials, rather than “in the centre” demonstrations?
- How to get a sustainable source of funding for travel, fuel for motorcycles, to visit groups?
- How to address low skills level of staff? How to link Kumban groups and centers to knowledge providers?

*SWOT analysis of Agricultural Technical Service Centers at "Kumban" level*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
+ Technical Service Centers bring extension staff closer to farmers + With a good visit schedules and budgets, extension officers can reach more farmers + Many centers have demonstration plots in farmer fields, this promotes mutual learning	+ Extension shows tangible benefits to farmers income + Impact of extension could be bigger, if more focused on farmer group enterprises + Good potential to develop new extension messages building on farmers knowledge + Research Centers have experienced staff who could support Kumban Centers
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Threats</b>
- Centers are often built in rich lowland areas, how can this reduce poverty of poor farmers in hills? - Producer groups are often seen as a tool for disseminating orders, not as a "clients" to be served - Staff have no skills in and are not provided with any agro-enterprise development methods, this makes it hard for them to be strong at supporting farmer enterprise groups. - Too much focus on building buildings, not on building service delivery systems - Much effort spent on producing inputs inefficiently	- Most activities now are financed by donor-funded projects, not sustainable - Hardly any Government budgets are available for implementing activities at Kumban Centers. Centers risk becoming empty shell if this issue is not addressed - If Centers do not perform, rural development will become dependent on private sector, leaving out the poor and vulnerable groups - If officers are not paid well, they may either leave or become an economic burden to villagers that could create resentment towards the Government

**Recommendations**

The main support needs for Kumban village clusters are: capacity building in participatory planning skills and sustainable funding for implementing Kumban Development Plans. The main support needs of Agricultural Technical Service Centers are: capacity building in participatory extension skills and sustainable funding for operating costs. Specific recommendations for extension, research and policy include:

**Recommendations for policy makers and donors:**

- Explore strategies to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups in Kumban committees
- Introduce the concept of standards-based Government service delivery
- Create an enabling policy environment for rural enterprise development
- Support local security services to reduce crimes, drug abuse and human trafficking
- Promote rural information networks
- Explore alternative modes for inter-village organizations
- Explore options for developing sustainable funding mechanisms

**Recommendations for extension (NAFES):**

- Develop a strong training system specifically aimed at Kumban level extension workers
- Provide training on Planning and Proposal Writing Skills for Kumban level extension workers
- Take a lead in knowledge networking for Kumbans, institutionalize Knowledge Capitalization
- Promote pilots for participatory technology development to diversify the extension "menu"
- Mainstream agro-enterprise training in the Lao Extension Approach
- Support scaling up from producer groups to group enterprises and farmer associations/cooperatives

**Recommendations for research (NAFRI)**

- Develop group leadership and organizational strengthening training methodologies specifically geared towards Kumban level organizations
- Develop effective mechanisms for information networking at Kumban level
- Linking Province and National Research Centers to Kumban Technical Service Centers as mentors
- Specific studies: e.g. on role of Kumban in land use planning and conflict resolution, sustainable funding mechanism for service delivery at Kumban level, leadership development at Kumban level, etc.

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
1 Introduction .....	10
2 The Normative Perspective on Village Cluster Development .....	11
2.1 “Kumban Pattana” village clusters: the Government concept .....	11
2.2 Village clusters as the cornerstone for decentralized planning.....	12
2.3 The agro-forestry sector plan 2006-2010.....	13
2.4 Expectations on village clusters for community empowerment .....	13
2.5 The Ministry of Agriculture Directive to establish Technical Service Centers.....	14
2.6 Reports on village clusters for economic development.....	15
2.6.1 GPAR Agricultural Extension Pilots at Village Cluster level in Xiengkhouang .....	16
2.6.2 Farmer Group Enterprise Approach of VECO in Bokeo .....	16
2.7 On-going study on village cluster organizations as a platform for participatory land use planning and conflict resolution.....	17
2.8 Summary: different interpretations of the Kumban policy .....	18
3 Descriptive Perspective on Village Cluster Development .....	19
3.1 Lessons learned on Kumban as basis for decentralized planning.....	19
3.2 Lessons learned on Kumban as a tool for empowering local people.....	20
3.3 Lessons learned on village clusters as information networks .....	21
3.4 Lessons learned on village clusters as a more efficient instrument of delivering Government services for rural development.....	22
3.5 Specific lessons learned on Technical Service Centers.....	24
3.6 Lessons learned on village clusters for producer group and rural enterprise building.....	26
3.7 Lessons learned on village clusters as a platform for conflict resolution on land use planning at zonal or watershed level.....	28
3.8 The issue of sustainable funding.....	28
4 The prospective for village cluster development .....	30
4.1 Village clusters as an entry point for local governance?.....	30
Strengths and weaknesses of the Kumban approach (SWOT) .....	30
Alternative approaches to strengthen village cluster organizations.....	31
4.2 Fostering agricultural extension at village cluster level .....	31
Strengths and weaknesses of the technical service center approach .....	31
Alternative approaches for agricultural extension at village cluster level.....	32
4.3 Recommendations for policy support to strengthen governance at Kumban level .....	32
4.4 Recommendations for supporting agricultural extension at village cluster level .....	33
Annex 1: List of people contacted.....	35
Annex 2: TOR of the mission.....	38
Annex 3: List of references .....	40



## Acknowledgements

*The author wishes to thank all individuals who so generously shared their ideas and experiences, there is a list of people met attached to this report. Specific thanks go to Ms. Barbara Boeni for coming up with the idea for this study and Mr. Andrew Bartlett for his conceptual leadership, moral support and active participation in all phases of the study. At NAFES, Mr. Somxay Sisanonh, Ms. Thongsavath Boupha, Mr. Bounthan Mounhalath, Mr. Bouali Phamuang and Ms. Andrea Schroeter also provided invaluable support.*

*Others who contributed substantial inputs include Mr. Michael Victor, Dr. Nathan Badenoch, Mr. Peter Jones and Mr. Bandith Ramongkhoun from NAFRI, Ms. Iris Richter and Mr. Rudi Luethi from Helvetas, Mr. Sibounthan, Governor of Sangthong district, Mr. Bounmi Rattanatray, Mr. Sayavong and Mr. Frederic Julien from PCADR-PASS, Mr. John Connell, Mr. Lao Tao and Dr. Keith Fahrney from CIAT, Dr. Suresh Balakhrisna, Mr. Harald Kreuzscher, Mr. Viengsavang Manivong, Mr. Phouva and Mr. Adam Folkard from GPAR, Mr. Somboun from ADB Nam Ngum, Mr. Jos van der Zanden, UNIDO, Mr. Stuart Ling from VECO, Mr. Tony Taucher from Luxembourg Development, Dr. Kulwant Singh from IFAD and Mr. Inphan from MAF.*

*Last but not least, many thanks to all the district officers, village leaders and farmer group members who shared their experiences so patiently!*

## 1 Introduction

The Lao Extension Approach Project (LEAP) is aimed at mainstreaming a new demand-driven responsive approach to agricultural extension in Lao PDR, through the National Agricultural Extension Service (NAFES), with support from the Government of Switzerland. One core element of the approach is a Village Extension System (VES), where village extension workers support producer groups in applying innovative farming methods. The other core element is the Government Extension System (GES) of province and district level extension officers who provide technical support to village extension workers through a system of training events and exchange visits<sup>1</sup>.

The Lao Government is keen to improve the efficiency of the delivery of Government Extension services. The present system of district officers covering dozens of isolated village communities is too much dependent on their limited ability to make long travels and leads to infrequent visits to only a small number of villages. The Government wishes to promote the establishment of a new organizational level half way between the village level and the district level. This type of organization is referred to by the Government as “Kumban Pattana”, Village Development Cluster. Information Service Centers are to be established in each cluster to provide Government services, stationing district officers closer to villagers.

Donor-supported projects like the LEAP wish to support the adoption of the Government Extension System to deliver services at this new level of clusters of villages. However the concept of village clusters is not well understood. Is the “Kumban” policy only about political and administrative reform, or can it have a real impact on poverty reduction in rural areas? What lessons can be learned from village clusters established already? What is the scope for such a Government-driven organization to empower villagers to develop themselves? There is confusion on the various aims and options for village cluster organization development. This makes it hard for donors to make decisions on what type of organization building processes they could consider to support. What support mechanisms for village cluster development would be best suited to achieve goals of national development, especially in poverty alleviation? How can we avoid information centers becoming “white elephants”, empty building with no sustainable systems for funding staff and activities?

The LEAP therefore engaged a short consultancy mission to explore the various visions on the concept of village cluster development in Lao PDR between March-May 2008 (see TOR attached). The consultant worked together with senior staff from NAFES as a knowledge capitalization team. The team visited a number of Kumbans, selected on the basis of available information on on-going Kumban activities. The team gathered information through interviews with Kumban leaders, villagers, District and Province officers providing services to Kumbans and entrepreneurs and traders who make contracts with Kumbans. A simple set of checklists for these interviews were prepared to facilitate the identification of lessons learned. An itinerary of the mission and a list of people contacted are also given in the Annexes.

This report provides a ‘normative’ perspective on the different expectations of the village cluster concept among stakeholders, through a summary analysis of key policy documents. Secondly, it provides a ‘descriptive’ perspective of lessons learned from eight case studies on village cluster development in seven provinces of Lao PDR. This includes a typology of technical service centers working at village cluster level and an inventory of agricultural extension activities carried out at village cluster level. There is also delineation of current and proposed financing mechanisms for activities at these centers. Finally a short prospective outlook is provided on possibilities for future interventions, possible pitfalls and some recommendations for follow-up activities.

## 2 The Normative Perspective on Village Cluster Development

This section summarizes how various organizations describe their expectations from village cluster development, what 'norms' are being raised. It gives an overview of the Government structure and functions of the "Kumban Pattana" concept and it summarizes the different interpretations of the Kumban policy among stakeholders.

### 2.1 "Kumban Pattana" village clusters: the Government concept

The main document guiding the establishment of "Kumban pattana" village clusters is an instruction from the politburo of the Communist Party dated 08 June 2004<sup>i</sup>. The main objective of the instruction is to strengthen the political infrastructure to advance rural development. The main purpose is to bring smaller villages together in larger units, as a more efficient basis for local administration and planning. Settlement in village clusters is the main instrument for fundamental construction of the state-party and needs to be completed by 2010. The new village clusters will focus on:

1. *Strengthening the political system*: strong leadership, educating and training people in the policies of the party and regulations of the state, living in harmony without division.
2. *Security*: better coordination between village security forces to eradicate crime (activities of bad people, spies, thieves, gangster, drug traders and prostitutes), so that people can live peacefully and can move on with their development. Secondly, the aim is to have a standing army unit in every village cluster for national defense.
3. *Economy*: village clusters will make it easier for families to increase their income. The aim is to complete settlement of at least two thirds of all poor people by 2010. They can develop producer groups or cooperatives, they can focus on a particular product in which they have a comparative advantage (one village cluster, one product), they can have cluster funds such as rice and cattle banks, they can work at cluster level to improve basic facilities such as clean water, electricity and road access. These activities will reduce the burning and destruction of forests and the cultivation of opium.
4. *Cultural and Social Objectives*: to facilitate access to schools and health services, library or reading room to reduce illiteracy, to get honor to be cultural village.

A total of 1,026 Kumban groups have been established so far (see table 1 below). On average there are seven Kumban groups per district and nine villages per Kumban. An average Kumban group contains 4,904 persons (roughly 800 families). The Ministry of Agriculture has 4,080 district extension staff available to serve a population of 5 million people. Each extension worker is expected to serve between 647 to 2,671 persons, averaging 1,233 persons. This is a relatively high ratio of staff to population, compared to other countries. There is no lack of human resources to serve village clusters with extension services. The number of extension staff available per Kumban group also varies greatly from 1.37 to 13.92, averaging on 3.98 staff per Kumban.

In short, the stated goals of the Government for Kumban village clustering are strengthening the political system, improved security, economic and socio-cultural development. The last two goals are mainly expressed in terms of delivery of basic services. Kumbans have been established in all provinces and districts, on average there are 4 agricultural extension officers available per village cluster, on average there are seven clusters per district, nine villages or 800 families per cluster. "Settlement" is mentioned as a key part of the policy, it is not clear to what extent this could also involve "re-settlement", which usually brings along a whole additional set of support needs<sup>iii</sup>.

**Table 1: Summary of Kumban groups in all province. Source: NAFES, 2007<sup>iv</sup>.**

Province	No districts	No kumbans	No villages	No persons	No ext. staff	No kumbans /district	No villages /kumban	No persons /kumban	People /staff ratio	No Staff /kumban
Attapeu	5	29	197	97,000	150	6	7	3,345	647	5.17
Sekong	4	12	260	71,000	167	3	22	5,917	425	13.92
Champasak	10	66	924	558,000	315	7	14	8,455	1,771	4.77
Salavan	8	62	717	285,400	288	8	12	4,603	991	4.65
Savannakhet	15	104	1,459	748,000	666	7	14	7,192	1,123	6.40
Khammouane	9	95	601	303,000	292	11	6	3,189	1,038	3.07
Bolikhambay	6	36	304	182,000	246	6	8	5,056	740	6.83
Vientiane Province	10	94	645	319,000	378	9	7	3,394	844	4.02
Vientiane Municipality	9	56	526	583,000	326	6	9	10,411	1,788	5.82
Luang Prabang	11	102	852	406,000	187	9	8	3,980	2,171	1.83
Oudomxay	7	25	172	234,000	103	4	7	9,360	2,272	4.12
Phongsali	7	84	496	170,000	115	12	6	2,024	1,478	1.37
Luang Namtha	5	47	358	128,000	105	9	8	2,723	1,219	2.23
Bokeo	5	36	335	126,000	130	7	9	3,500	969	3.61
Houaphan	8	72	775	272,400	102	9	11	3,783	2,671	1.42
Sayabouri	10	56	477	325,000	295	6	9	5,804	1,102	5.27
Xiengkhouang	8	50	570	223,200	215	6	11	4,464	1,038	4.30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>1,026</b>	<b>9,668</b>	<b>5,031,000</b>	<b>4,080</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4,904</b>	<b>1,233</b>	<b>3.98</b>

Several visions on the need for village cluster organizations come forward from this document:

- *Political Reform:* The primary goal of the Government's policy for establishing village clusters is to strengthen party leadership at grassroots level
- *Service Delivery:* Village clusters are mainly seen as a more efficient instrument for delivering Government services in rural development, among others through the establishment of service centers
- *Settlement:* Village clusters are an instrument in "settlement" of the rural population
- *Security:* Village clusters are an instrument to improve local security and decentralized military capability for national defense
- *Economic development :* it is a goal of the policy, but not the primary one
- *Cultural development:* is seen to include basic services e.g. education and health

## 2.2 Village clusters as the cornerstone for decentralized planning

The Party Instruction on the establishment of village clusters mentions the development of "Plan for the settlement of villages and development of village groups" as the first step in implementing the Kumban policy. The departments of agriculture, communication, health and education each also seem to have policies to direct their work in rural areas to the Kumban level. All these efforts are to be combined in annual Kumban development plans. It is not clear how potential synergy between these different services is pursued in planning and execution of the delivery. It is also not mentioned how budgets would be generated to implement Kumban Development Plans.

A recent study on the Decentralization Process concluded that Kumban level plans would potentially strengthen the decentralized planning process, as village leaders can put forward their development priorities in Government Development Plans<sup>v</sup>. A number of weakness need to be overcome: the planning system is still dominated by policies and targets formulated at central level; instruments of community participations are only vaguely defined and therefore mostly not adhered to. Current practices of socio-economic planning at district and provincial level fail to integrate all sectors and do not provide for geographic focus (identification of potentials and priorities by area). Current donor support to planning processes is fragmented. Many projects fail to contribute or strengthen the prescribed national planning system. At local level, planning capacities is low.

At any rate, this clearly provides another “expectation” of the Kumban village clusters:

- Kumban village clusters as an instrument of decentralized planning

### **2.3 The agro-forestry sector plan 2006-2010**

The need for people’s organizations above the village level also can also be found in the Agro-Forestry Sector Plan<sup>vi</sup>. Following the resolutions of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of July 2006, the Ministry has set four key goals for the period 2006-2010:

1. Enhance Food Production
2. Increased Commodity Production
3. Stabilization of Slash and Burn Agriculture
4. Sustainable Forest Management

To reach these goals, the Ministry will focus on the implementation of 13 measures:

1. Establish a sector strategy, to change the mindset in the agro-forestry sector
2. Survey and allocate areas for agro-forestry production
3. Seed self sufficiency (through regional/province centers)
4. Promoting and providing Technical Services and Training (to “Kumban Pattana”)
5. Establish “Kumban Pattana” and link with agro-forestry sector development (based on Politburo order no. 9, every cluster group should have 1-2 service centers).
6. Organizing production and establishing economic structures from grass roots level (production groups, cooperatives for buying selling services, marketing, food processing, feeder communication, finance credit services)
7. Irrigation and preventing drought and flood
8. Increased productivity (promoting use of compost, fertilizers, seeds, techniques)
9. Standard production system and disease protection to ensure safe consumption
10. Finance, use of local and external resources (budgeting, donor coordination)
11. Savings on production costs (twofold increase over 5 yrs from 'spearhead products', e.g. maize, cows and buffaloes, coffee and price guaranteed NTFPs, water saving techniques, standard for quality, credit)
12. Asses implementation through Monitoring an Evaluation (fielding and training staff at district level and in “Kumban Pattana” is an urgent priority)
13. Evaluate decentralization and collaboration between Government, citizens and private sector.

From these 13 priority measures, at least two additional needs for establishing village come forward in terms of developing the agriculture and forestry sector:

- The potential for village cluster organizations as a basis for developing producer groups and agro-enterprises to promote market-based production in rural areas.
- The potential for village cluster organizations as a platform for land use planning and development of participatory forest management systems.

### **2.4 Expectations on village clusters for community empowerment**

In a stakeholder workshop titled “linking the last mile” on best practices on rural communication co-organized by NAFES and other organizations in 2007, the Kumban village

clusters were mentioned as highly relevant and important platform for rural communication<sup>vii</sup>. It was suggested that Kumban should be seen as a community tool, rather than another level of the Government. Strong community organizations are needed for sustainable knowledge and communication networks. Communication should not only be seen as providing farmers with information, but rather communities and local groups should be able to decide what information is produced and communicated.

Community learning should be promoted where communities and different sectors can come together and exchange lessons learned. There are interesting technologies and mechanisms that fit to the needs of rural communities such as satellite TV that can reach to the remotest village, community radio where local people produce their own programming. There are also interesting examples from Africa where SMS messaging on cell phones are used to provide farmers with basic market information.

This vision on village cluster organizations stresses their role as a tool for empowering local people. To what extent can village clusters serve as representative organizations, that could play an advocacy role defending the interest of rural communities vis-à-vis other stakeholders, within the national development context? What opportunities does the Kumban concept have for the inclusion of ethnic minorities, women and poor families in decision making processes affecting their livelihoods? In cases of conflict, what would be the best way to develop independent, objective panels of arbitration, or courts of appeal? How could all stakeholders be made more accountable for their actions towards each other? To what extent can these organizations contribute to the emergence of civil society, which is a vital element of good governance in any developing economy?

Donor agencies are often interested in supporting representative organizations, in promoting civil society, accountability, governance. Kumban village cluster groups could provide an excellent stepping stone to build local capacity in many of these essential concepts of a modern society.

In short, this line of thinking leads us to two additional visions on the role of village cluster groups:

- Village cluster organizations as a means to strengthen citizen's representative organizations and the notion of improving local governance, by making the Government more accountable for its actions to citizens
- Inter-village organizations as a tool for empowering communities to have access to information that they need, to negotiate more favorable contracts with the private sector and to participate in the planning of Government programs that would affect their livelihoods

## **2.5 The Ministry of Agriculture Directive to establish Technical Service Centers**

The National Agricultural Extension Service (NAFES) and its program on developing the Lao Extension Approach (LEAP) have the mandate to focus agricultural extension services to the level of Kumban village clusters<sup>viii</sup>. In many districts, extension officers are being stationed at Kumban level already. What would be the best system for these extension workers to support Kumban producer groups and forest management structures? The needs of rural communities for relevant information and communication systems were discussed in a national workshop. "linking the last mile", as already mentioned in section 3.4 above.

Many of the recommendations of that workshop seem to have been taken up in the new Government policy to establish Agricultural Service Centers at Province, District and Kumban levels (Ministerial Decree No 0216/08 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, January 17,

2008)<sup>x</sup>. The goal of these centers is to provide farmers with the ability to (1) identify their production system at household level and in producer groups that suit existing resources and produce agricultural products in the most efficient way, (2) have access to necessary information in a timely manner, (3) establish, expand and manage agricultural production by organizing strong producer groups, (4) have access to market services and production means such as collecting, processing selling, credit and other support services.

More details are provided in a new guideline for the implementation of the above decree, issued by NAFES, 06 March 2008<sup>x</sup>. Province Agriculture and Forestry Technical Service Centers (PAFTSC) would be equivalent to a division of the Province Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO). Their main task would be (1) to build capacity of district technical centers, (2) to study, collect and summarize information based on the need of districts and village clusters, (3) provide technical advice on use of inputs and (4) coordinate with other agencies to seek support in terms of credit, investments, markets, input supply etc. These centers do not need to be located in Province capital, they would have some land for establishing demonstrations and they would have offices and a training room, either based on existing infrastructures or by building new constructions. The PAFO is responsible for finding funding for the establishment of these centers.

District Agriculture and Forestry Technical Service Centers (TSC) will be set up in a similar manner, with the specific task to: (1) encourage and set up villager learning groups and producer groups, (2) promote and disseminate technology, provide training and guide villagers in production, organize knowledge sharing activities between producer groups, (3) collect and summarize information on production statistics, (4) provide inputs such as planting materials, fertilizers, pesticides, vaccines, tools and machinery as well as guidance of the use of these, (5) cooperate with villagers in on-site establishment of demonstration plots, creating coordination mechanisms with private sector and producer groups for wide spread of technical service in fast and effective pace.

TSC are expected to seek funding from forestry development funds, province and district annual budgets, grant and loan projects and other source.

Thirdly there will be "Cluster" Technical Service Centers which are not part of the formal Government extension system like the Province and District TSC, but directly managed by village cluster producer groups, private business and entrepreneurs at the Kumban level. These are units that provide services on production techniques, credit, production inputs, marketing and other services. There could be more than one technical service unit in once village cluster, depending on conditions and potential.

The actual establishment of these units will depend on good coordination with the District Agricultural and Forestry Office (DAFO), who should assign 2-3 extension officers to work in each village cluster.

This is an impressive plan to establish many centers to serve farmers. Yet it is not really clear how village cluster technical service centers would be managed by producer groups on one hand, but would "depend" on the coordination and inputs of extension workers from DAFO at the other hand. It is also not clear how all these activities would be financed.

## **2.6 Reports on village clusters for economic development**

Two reports were found that advocate the potential of village clusters for economic development:

- (1) The GPAR Agricultural Extension Pilots at Village Cluster level in Xiengkhouang
- (2) The Farmer Group Enterprise Approach of VECO in Bokeo

### **2.6.1 GPAR Agricultural Extension Pilots at Village Cluster level in Xiengkhouang**

The Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) Program is supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Xiengkhouang province<sup>xi</sup>. GPAR supports administrative reform in agricultural extension service delivery in 3 pilot districts (Khoum, Paek and Nonghet). The role of Kumban village clusters in agricultural extension is still evolving, and the capacity of villagers to develop plans at cluster level is still low. Yet the Province and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO and DAFEOS) in Xiengkhouang realize they could deliver their services to farmers more effectively by shifting gradually from having a "village focus" to having a "Kumban focus".

To achieve this, a process is adopted that integrates agro-enterprise development into the Lao Extension Approach (LEA). Village Development Plans (VD) are developed using the LEA approach, based on a prioritization of activities from a portfolio that the district agricultural office is able to support. Village Development Plans are consolidated at Kumban level, the District decides which activities it will be able to support and the plan is implemented.

The extension activities would fall into three categories: (1) direct inputs at village level, to establish new activities in 2-5 villages. This would require 5-8 staff visits per season; (2) follow-up support to consolidate on-going activities, needing not more than 2-3 visits by DAFEOS staff per year; (3) widespread information exchange, mainly through formal Kumban meetings two times per year, one meeting bringing other villages to the Kumban and one event where the Kumban group visits all villages to foster shared learning.

In this way, Kumban plans are expected to deliver extension activities delivered in 6-10 villages across two Kumbans in three pilot districts, as well as involving a large group of farmers through information exchange events. The main role of the Kumban in this program would be a platform of information exchange between villages, delivering three types of benefits: 1) farmer-to-farmer exchange, 2) ways to strengthen local business development services and 3) as a negotiation channel between farmers and traders.

An interesting aspect of this approach is that the "choice" of farmers is limited to a "portfolio" of extensions packages that the district staff can actually deliver. This corresponds to the LEAP approach to develop "menus" which farmers can choose from, consisting of field-tested training packages that can be expected to deliver reliable results.

The risk of such an approach could be that extension officers are not encouraged to develop new approaches. This risk was also signaled in the external review of the LEAP phase 2 Project, which found that the project seemed to have become "stuck" in only three packages (paddy rice, chicken and pigs), leaving little space to explore additional demands for training from farmers<sup>xii</sup>. The challenge remains to make the extension system more accountable to farmers, to strengthen the flow of information from farmers to extension workers, to refresh training needs analysis regularly and to improve the ability of the extension system to develop a wider portfolio of extension packages over time.

### **2.6.2 Farmer Group Enterprise Approach of VECO in Bokeo**

The second vision of using village clusters for enterprise development comes from VECO in Bokeo<sup>xiii</sup>. VECO supports the establishment of farmer group enterprises in clusters of villages, by strengthening producer group organizations. The project assists producer groups to improve their skills in basic business skills, financial management, business planning etc. Producer groups are also assisted in identifying options for adding value to their products through applying value chain analysis approaches, developed by the CIAT-SADU project.

Once the groups have identified business plans for adding value, the project promotes savings schemes to raise funds for investment. Then the groups are assisted in meeting conditions for registration as a company in Laos (which gives them the right to banking



services, rights to take legal action if needed etc.). Producer groups can apply for financial support from banks if they have a good business plan and at least 50% of the required funding raised by themselves through shares and community savings. Typical examples of investment projects are: corn drying sheds, storage sheds, grinders and pellet machines to make natural fertilizers; peanut shelling machines, cooking equipment; tea drying pans, processing sheds, packaging machines; Jatropha oil presses, filters and equipment to produce natural fertilizer from the seedcake after pressing

The project also encourages group enterprises to join the Provincial Chamber of Commerce for information networking to find new business opportunities. The project supports the development of a Province-level Market Information System (MIS) based on regular information flows between stakeholders (see diagram below). Farmer group take a lead, the Government's role is limited to providing technical support. This construction would seem to have the potential to become self-sustaining within a few years.

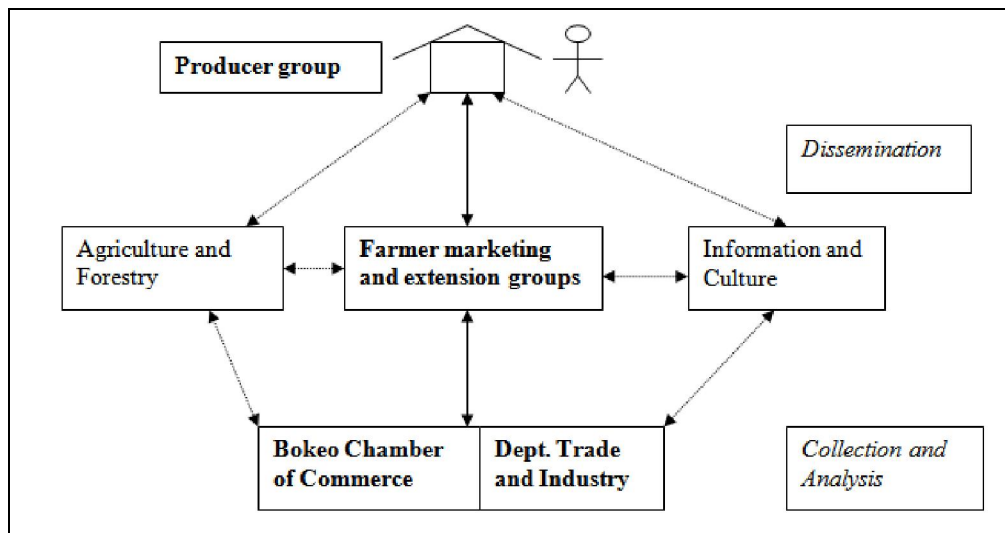


Figure 1: Organization of Market Information System in Bokeo Province (source: Ling, 2008)

## 2.7 On-going study on village cluster organizations as a platform for participatory land use planning and conflict resolution

NAFES is currently involved in a case study on the methodology of land use planning and land allocation in the Kumban of Hin Lad, Attapeu Province<sup>xiv</sup>. Villagers in this Kumban are facing a number of contrasting aims in the planning of their land use. Part of their land falls under two large protected areas: the Xe Pian National Protected Area and the Dong Houa Sao National Protected Area. Villagers depend on access to these protected areas for the collection of various Non-Timber Forest Products as a source of cash income. Private companies are encroaching on protected area land to plant coffee on the mountain slopes. Other companies try to promote rubber plantations in the lower parts of the area. There is an old irrigation scheme that could boost rice production, once its canals would be restored. The main source of cash income for most of the inhabitants seems to come from wild catches of fish from various rivers flowing through this zone.

With so many conflicting interests, it is impossible to develop land use plans on the basis of individual villages, there is a clear need for cluster-based planning. However, the boundaries of the Kumban zones do not correspond to any of the agro-ecological zone boundaries that could be used for cluster-based land use planning. What would be the best way to create a village cluster platform for resolving land use planning issues in such a case? This brings up another expectation of village cluster organizations:

- Village clusters as a platform for conflict resolution in land use planning

## 2.8 Summary: different interpretations of the Kumban policy

From this literature review, seven “interpretations” or expectations of the Kumban policy can be discerned among various stakeholders:

- **Decentralized Planning:** Village cluster plans as a tool for efficient decentralized planning
- **Empowerment:** Creating citizen’s representative organizations, local governance
- **Information Networking:** For villagers to access information they need to develop themselves
- **Land Use Planning and Conflict resolution:** Kumban as platform for conflict resolution in land use planning
- **Private Sector Development:** Development, Producer groups, Rural enterprises, Market Information Systems
- **Government Service Delivery:** Bringing Government services closer to the people, with agreed standards for these services, integrating services from different departments
- **Technical Service Centers:** Providing sustainable, effective extension services to farmers

These elements were used as guiding themes during subsequent interviews with stakeholders at province, district and Kumban level.

### **3 Descriptive Perspective on Village Cluster Development**

This section summarizes findings from nine Kumban cases in eight Provinces, which were visited in the period April-May 2008. The individual case studies are attached as Annexes to this report. Lessons learned are summarized according to the nine normative aspects identified in the previous chapter. They also provide an overview of main agricultural development activities currently being carried out at Kumban level. They provide a typology of technical service centers in terms of size, function and costs. There is also a section on financing mechanisms for activities and service centers.

#### **3.1 Lessons learned on Kumban as basis for decentralized planning**

##### ***Kumbans: a new planning level between village and district***

"Kumbans" are effectively replacing the older "khet" sub-district level grouping of villages. Where the "khet" was mainly a medium for party meetings between villages, the "Kumban" is having a more far-reaching impact, stationing district officers at village level and accelerating decentralized (bottom-up) planning.

##### ***Most provinces just starting this year***

In Sayabouli, implementation of Kumban planning was first piloted in 2006. In most other provinces, it has just started since January 2008. In all seven provinces visited, a number of district staff was officially assigned to work at Kumban level.

##### ***Plans without budget?***

Province and district officers spent a considerable amount of time developing Kumban development plans, however it is not clear how much actual budget will be available for implementation. Kumban Nong Kae in Lao Ngam district, Salavan Province, provides an interesting example of what can be expected from Kumban development, without any external support. While the district managed to construct a basic Kumban office with limited funds, with support from a local company. A Kumban plan was prepared, but the district has basically no funds available for implementation. There is no clear evidence of any services delivered by the District officers to the Kumban. How to resolve this issue?

##### ***Low Planning Capacity***

A good example of Kumbans where external support is available is the case of the technical center of Koun Lad, Paek district, in Xiengkhouan Province. Extension officers are based in the Kumban and assisted in preparing Kumban development plans. However the RRA methodology was more focused on asking what people want, rather than where they want to go. As a result, the outcomes were mainly requests for infrastructures, not for income raising or agricultural innovation. It was also observed that the center's staff seem to spend a lot of time administering credit funds, should this really be their core job?

The rapid rural analysis methodology of the PCADR-PASS project in Sayabouli proved to be very applicable in assisting neighboring districts to plan their Kumban development plans. It would be useful to document this information exchange process so that it might be applied in other provinces. It would be good if there was an organization at the national level charged with picking up such excellent examples from the field and disseminating them throughout the country.

##### ***Conclusions on Kumbans as a basis for decentralized planning***

Kumban development plans start to become a part of the decentralized planning process promoted by the Lao Government. It is not yet clear to what extent Kumban plans add any value in terms of better quality plans or increased fund raising, or actual implementation, compared to village development plans. The main bottleneck remains an overall lack of funds available for rural development. There is no clear balance between investment of staff time in producing plans and the likelihood that the plans will be carried out.

There is a clear need for a training program in planning and proposal writing skills for Kumban workers. This could be a new type of service to be developed by NAFES. While there is a clear commitment from the Government to implement the Kumban policy, there is no clear mechanism for capitalizing experiences from the field and sharing lessons learned. This could also be another function for NAFES to take the lead in.

## **3.2 Lessons learned on Kumban as a tool for empowering local people**

### ***Kumban policy is high priority for Lao Government***

The Kumban policy is promoted in every province with special support from a small liaison unit of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry delegated senior staff from Vientiane to this province to ensure a rapid implementation of the policy. This indicates the high priority given by the Government to the implementation of the Kumban policy.

### ***Main aim is to improve delivery of Government services***

“Kumban pattana” is a village cluster organization, primarily aimed at delivering Government services to citizens, it is not a “village representative organization” per se. Village leaders do contribute to the Kumban development plans, which represent village priorities to a certain extent and thus contribute to decentralized planning.

### ***Limited scope for improving governance, accountability to citizens***

However the leadership is in the hands of District Party Officials, not of the inhabitants of the village cluster. This indicates that “Kumban Pattana” is more an instrument that belongs to the Government, rather than to the citizens. Its main goal is to support the implementation of Government policies, not the development of strong farmer representative organizations. It is not clear how citizens could check or appeal against unintended negative outcomes of Kumban decisions. As such, the contributions of the Kumban policy towards creating civil society or improved local governance in Lao PDR are not very obvious.

### ***Party membership is an obstacle to inclusion of vulnerable groups***

Only party members can sit on Kumban committees. This implies a risk of excluding participation of disadvantaged groups such as women, ethnic minorities and the poor, who often cannot read and write. There is a need to develop measures to get disadvantaged groups more actively included in Kumban committees and planning processes.

### ***Gap between focus on disseminating policies and strengthening local organizations***

While the Kumban policy stresses the importance of organizing producer groups, so far there is little evidence that such groups, organized by the Government, effectively achieve more income from selling as a group. There is still quite a gap between seeing groups as a platform for disseminating policies and groups who govern themselves, e.g. as successful market oriented enterprises.

### ***The need for alternative strategies to build local organizations***

The water user group in Ta Meuang, Attapeu, is a good example of an existing form of inter-village organization, which can be regarded as a true ‘farmer representative’ organization. It already existed twelve years before the Kumban committee was established this year. There are not yet many strong farmer organizations in Lao PDR.

Strong farmers organizations are needed to develop a strong market-based agricultural sector. It is not clear to what extent Kumban committee’s could play a role in supporting existing farmer representative organizations and promote the development of new ones. There remains a need to explore alternative platforms for promoting market-oriented producer organizations in Lao PDR, beyond the “Kumban Pattana” platform.

### ***Conclusion on empowerment aspects of the Kumban policy***

The Kumban policy allows village leaders to participate in the preparation of Government development plans at village cluster level. The leadership is in the hands of party officials, which limits the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Kumban committees are mainly a tool for the Government to deliver its services more effectively. They are not a platform for developing village or farmer representative organizations. There is a need for alternative strategies to build local organizations to fully make use of the potential of market-based agriculture.

### **3.3 Lessons learned on village clusters as information networks**

#### ***Knowledge networking is essential for successful marketing***

Knowledge networking is essential for farmers to market their products profitably. The organic rice farmers in Sangthong district are able to get a better price for their rice after they learned what quality standards are expected by rice buyers. The chicken group in Oudomxay only managed to make profit over their improved chicken raising practice after they learned how to contact chicken buyers and make a contract with them according to mutual understanding. Maize farmers in Sayabouri get some of the highest incomes from farming in the country, as they learned to master a complex package of techniques that improved their productivity over time. Successful extension officers have learned to develop information networks between producer groups, linking them with the private sector.

#### ***Exchange meetings and visits***

While information is still difficult to obtain for many farmers, a variety of information networking activities are being developed at Kumban level. Information networking is most commonly taking place in the form of exchange meetings and visits between farmers. This is especially common where donor projects support extension work, such as the Pro-Rice project in Sangthong, the PCADR-PASS in Sayabouri, ADB Nam Ngeum and GPAR in Xiengkhouang, VECO in Bokeo and IFAD in Attapeu. While this mode of networking is obviously working well and needs to be scaled up, it does require some travel budgets which are difficult to find outside donor-supported projects.

#### ***Linking producer groups to Province Market Information Systems***

VECO in Bokeo supports 17 farmer group enterprises at Kumban level in various ways, one of them is to encourage enterprises to join a Province Market Information System through the Bokeo Chamber of Commerce. This is still a pilot activity, but it provides another example of the benefits of farmers joining together in groups. A group enterprise has much easier access to commercial information networks than individual farmers would have.

#### ***Mobile phone networks?***

One thing that nobody is doing yet but would seem an interesting option to explore would be the development of mobile phone or SMS- based market information systems. All district officers and almost all farmers met during this short study in eight provinces was carrying a mobile phone and connected to a mobile phone network. The rapid penetration of the mobile phone coverage to even the remotest districts should make it easy to get such a system going. NAFES could consider starting an MIS discussion group, with the aim of developing a pilot system in cooperation with the Ministries of Industry and Commerce and Communication.

#### ***Documenting local Kumban innovations and knowledge capitalization***

The IFAD project in Attapeu is producing a range of training leaflets, a newsletter and practical training materials. In all Kumbans in all provinces interesting things are happening that could be useful for farmers in other provinces to learn from, but they are not documented. As producer groups proliferate, there is a need for a more concerted effort to document and capitalize on new knowledge created by them. NAFES would seem well placed to take a lead in knowledge capitalization from Kumban experiences.

### 3.4 Lessons learned on village clusters as a more efficient instrument of delivering Government services for rural development

#### *Kumban policy brings Government staff closer to citizens*

Large numbers of district officers are working at Kumban level already, the frequency of their interactions with villagers is much higher than before. This is undoubtedly a very positive outcome of the implementation of the “Kumban” policy.

Table 2 gives an indication of the variability among Kumbans in terms of numbers of villages, families and extension officers as well as key agricultural activities. These data are based on interviews with Kumban leaders and therefore incomplete and only indicative. It is striking to see large differences in the family income from maize in different provinces, it would be interesting to have a more in-depth study analyzing the factors that cause these differences. It is difficult to find any compilation of statistics on Kumbans, there is clearly a need for MAF to provide a basic monitoring format and compile annual statistics.

Table 2: Typical indicators of Kumban activities (indicative, not complete), based on interviews with Kumban leaders

Kumban	Nalat	Ban Nong	Lad Bouak	Samphanxay	Si Boun Heuang	Si Done Nyaeng	Kep Pheung	Ta Meuang
District	Sangthong	Ken Tao	Paek	Khoune	Houn	Ton Pheung	Lao Ngam	Saysetha
Province	Vientiane C.	Sayabouri	Xiengkhouang	Xiengkhouang	Oudomxay	Bokeo	Salavan	Attapeu
No of villages	9	6	16	11	9	8	11 (4)	5 (1)
No families		882	741		1,671		441	296
No persons		4,502	3,118		8,221		2,463	1352
Families/village	0	147	46		186		110	74
Persons/family		5	4		5		6	5
No producer groups	9	64	6	6		8	5	
No members	254	882		120		130	150	
No extension staff	3	8	9	3	4	3	4	3
families/officer	85	110	82	40	0	43	38	
Kumban center	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Landscape type	valley	hills	mountains	mountains	valley	valley		
No buffaloes		1,273	1,526		632		503	503
No cattle		2,448	3,118		631		309	19
Buffaloes/family		1.4	2.1		0.4		1.1	1.7
Cattle/family		2.8	4.2		0.4		0.7	0.1
Rice (tons)	336						600	670
Maize (tons)		11,000			8,400	1,050		
Rice/family (kg)	1,323					-	1,361	2,264
Maize/family (kg)		12,472			5,027	8,077		
Family income								
Rice (million kip)	2.78			0.63		-	2.86	6.79
Maize (million kip)		168.37			54.29	6.11		
Livestock (million kip)				0.78				
Others (million kip)				1.19				
Total	2.78	168.37		2.59	54.29	6.11	2.86	6.79

#### *Agreeing on standards for the quality of Government services*

It would be useful to develop clear standards for Government services to be delivered at Kumban level. Citizens are expected to support the Kumban development process, what standard of Government services can they expect to receive in return? What quality is required, how and where could citizens make appeals when services are not delivered up to standard? More discussion is needed on this topic.

#### *Management systems to work effectively at Kumban level*

- The IFAD RLIP Project in Attapeu has developed a very practical model for district staff of all departments to work at Kumban level and provide their services effectively to citizens. Their “Manual for the Kumban worker” could be applied in all Kumbans throughout the country, especially those that have access to some external funding to implement activities.

#### *Focus should be on good systems to deliver services, not on buildings*

Successful examples like the IFAD RLIP project in Attapeu and the PCADR-PASS project in Sayabouri focus on putting a good extension system in place, not a string of office buildings.

Extension staff are all based at Kumban level, living in villages and working on farmers fields. They receive appropriate salaries, work hard and deliver good results.

This raises questions about the NAFES strategy to set up “technical information centers”. The focus should not be on building buildings, but on building good information systems that benefit farmers. How is information generated, how is it exchanged, how can extension officers best support information exchanges between farmers, traders and other stakeholders?

### ***Extension services can improve farmer incomes, but only reach a small group of farmers***

Various examples exist of the positive impact of extension services. The example of a chicken raising group in Xiengkhouang indicates a great potential for returns over investment in agricultural extension. With an investment of around 3.5 million kip, 10 families were helped by 4 extension officers working only 15 days each to raise an income of 22 million kip in one year. For every kip invested in extension, farmers gained 6 kip in income.

While this is a great case, we have to ask: how often could a similar result be achieved? The group in this village has almost reached its maximal size. Now the team will repeat the same model in neighboring villages. When will they reach the end of this cycle, how will they identify a new, equally successful intervention?

In Sayabouri, the PCADR-PASS project has managed to achieve adoption of some 20% of farmers of its zero-tillage maize cultivations system. That is a considerable success, given the complexity of the system and the time-lag between adopting the system and seeing the result. Yet we have to ask how long it would take to reach 80% or 100% of farmers through the present process, at what cost.

The ratio of extension workers to farmers in the cases examined varies from xxxx to xxxxx. Is this enough to scale up effectively? What would be the ideal ratio of technicians to farmers? How could trained extension staff have impact on a larger group of farmers, by training of trainers approaches?

### ***Government extension vs. Private Sector extension***

The private sector seems to be very efficient. For example in Sayabouri, 7 village traders can organize of 11,000 tons from 882 families in one Kumban. It raises the question: what tasks are better left to the private sector, and what tasks should the extension service focus on?

### ***Conclusions on service delivery at Kumban level***

The Kumban policy is bringing district officers closer to citizens, this is a very good thing. More discussion is needed on what would be the standards for good Government services delivered to citizens. An excellent model for organizing District workers to work effectively at Kumban level has been developed by IFAD-RLIP in Attapeu. The focus of Kumban work should be to build good systems for delivering services to citizens, not to build buildings. Extension services have proven to be able to raise income of farmers considerably, but still only reach small pockets of farmers. More effort is needed to have a large scale impact.

### 3.5 Specific lessons learned on Technical Service Centers

#### *The status of Technical Service Centers at Kumban level*

Technical Service Centers (TSC) are the main strategy promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to deliver better extension services at Kumban level. There is a large variation in the budgets spent on establishing and maintaining Technical Service Centers (TSC) at Kumban level (see table 3).

Table 3: Typology of Technical Service Centers visited during this study

Kumban	Nalat	Ban Nong	Lad Bouak	Samphanxay	Boun Lad	Si Boun Heuang	Kep Pheung	Ta Meuang
District	Sangthong	Ken Tao	Paek	Khoune	Houn	Houn	Lao Ngam	Saysetha
Province	Vientiane C.	Sayabouri	Xiengkhouang	Xiengkhouang	Oudomxay	Oudomxay	Salavan	Attapeu
No of villages	9	6	16	11	3	9	11 (4)	5 (1)
No families		882	741			1,671	441	296
No producer groups	9	64	6	6			5	1352
No members	254	882		120			150	74
No extension staff	3	8	9	3	3	4	4	5
families/officer	85	110	82	40		0	38	
Kumban center	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Building costs (\$)	\$ 200	no	\$ 33,750	\$ 8,325	\$ 4,800	\$ 18,500	\$ 5,882	no
Annual budget		\$ 19,200		\$ 2,801	\$ 3,294		\$ 3,768	\$ 4,025
Staff benefits: (per month)								
Gvt salary	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 19.00
per diems		\$ 200.00		\$ 20.83	\$ 70.00		\$ 57.00	\$ 52.94
fuel allowance				\$ 33.50	\$ 2.50		\$ 2.50	\$ 1.50
Electricity	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
Fishpond	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Fenced pastures	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
Pig farm	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Type of groups								
Rice groups	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Cattle vaccination	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Chicken groups	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no
Maize groups	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Others	silk	peanuts	pigs	no	pigs, cassava	no	peanuts	no

#### *How to prioritize zones and locations for building TSC's*

The selection of sites to establish TSC's seems to be determined mainly by an assessment of the agricultural potential of zones for market-based agriculture. These are often areas where the private sector has already started to promote cash crops successfully. These are often the areas where richer farmers live, with access to good land resources. What would be the added value of the Government extension service in such places? If the Government is aiming to eradicate poverty, should Government extension services not be focusing more on the resource poor areas, where farmers struggle to get an income from farming? The case of Houn district in Oudomxay may serve as an example of this issue (see box 1 below).

#### *What is the optimal design of a TSC?*

The cost of building TSC varies greatly (see table above). High-cost buildings, e.g. the TSC's supported by the ADB Nam Ngum project in Xieng Khouang do not always give much added functionality for the extra cost. An office is built, but no sleeping quarters for the staff, so staff end up using office space as their sleeping rooms. Low-cost centers built through cost sharing with various stakeholders often seem to be able to provide the same functionality at a quarter of the costs.

Secondly, considerable investment is put in some centers into fencing of areas for demonstrations, fish ponds, pig pens etc. TSC staff spend a lot of time tending their own farm in such centers, instead of working with farmers.

Thirdly, some TSC tend to be used by agricultural extension staff only. Other centers provide housing to a mixed team of District officers from a variety of departments: agriculture,



health, education, security etc. The benefits of coordinating the work of various departments towards villages is well illustrated by the example of the IFAD-RLIP Project (see above).

More discussion is needed on what is the best design for a TSC, facilitating district extension staff to provide a good standard of services to citizens with frequent visits to villages and demonstrations on farmer fields, less on the station.

***Box 1: Where should extension service focus: in the valley or in the hills?***

*The province of Oudomxay already has a network of 21 Technical Service Centers in all seven districts since 2005, supported by IFAD. Through their location in remote areas, they are in the right place to provide much needed basic services to the poorest and most disadvantaged communities. They were built with local materials for a modest budget. They depend on foreign funding for their working budgets, which will be difficult to sustain after the end of such funding.*

*This year, the Province of Oudomxay is starting to implement the Kumban strategy in nine priority areas. So far, the main action seems focused on building a rather costly station in one of the most prosperous farming areas of the province, the Si Boun Heuang zone of Houn district. The existing three technical service centers in remote, poor mountainous areas in the same district are going to be closed down. This raises the question what would be the best strategy for prioritization of target groups for poverty alleviation through agricultural extension. Should extension officers be mainly placed there where agricultural extension is easy or where it is most difficult? What will be the impact on the poor?*

*The experience of the CIAT-PRDU project shows that it is possible to achieve a positive impact on livelihoods through a participatory agricultural technology development approach, even in a 'difficult' place like Boun Lad, Houn district, Oudomxay. More effort is needed to disseminate such approaches in the extension service.*

***Lack of working budgets are the key bottleneck for achieving results at TSCs***

Not the building costs, but the running costs are the key bottleneck of the technical service center concept. A good example is the case of the Samphanxay center in Khoun district, Xieng Khouang. The district can pay only \$600 per year, hardly enough money to pay staff salaries. Staff salaries are only a quarter or less of the actual cost of living. In this case, a project provides a budget almost \$3,000 for extension, which occupies only one third of available staff time.

To use all of available staff time for extension might require \$9,000 per year. That is what is needed to keep one technical service center in one Kumban running full time, with three extension officers only. In the example of Khoun district, with eight Kumbans, \$72,000 would be needed each year if each Kumban is to have its own technical service center. How could districts ever cross the gap between \$600 available annual budget to \$9,000 to eventually \$72,000 needed per year?

***Training needs of Kumban level extension workers***

Most of the staff sent to work at Kumban level are young, in-experienced extension workers. They lack social skills in working with farmers, technical skills in basic farming techniques and experience in handling planning, administrative and reporting tasks. They need a lot of training and supervision to be able to deliver good quality extension services to farmers. A good training support system should be built to support these 'front-line' workers.

***No development of new extension messages, no information flow from farmers to extension***

Most centers offers only a limited set of technical options to farmers, there is no mechanism for adding new packages, or to be innovative. Extension workers need to acquire in-depth technical expertise by executing demonstration trials themselves, guided by researchers. This type of skills-based learning needs to be stimulated at technical service centers.

- Agricultural extension at Kumban level tends to be mainly focused on disseminating technologies, sending information from technicians to villagers. The reverse flow of information from villagers to technicians is not yet working well.

#### *The potential of building on local knowledge to develop new extension messages*

- Yet the impressive technical capacity of local farmer leaders in the Ta Meuang zone in Attapeu underscores the notion that extension could be so much more effective if it would use these local experts as trainers, reaching out to other farmer through local exchanges and knowledge networking. NAFES should consider developing pilot activities in places like Ta Meuang to develop models for local farmer information networks.
- The LEAP Project may want to put ore emphasis on developing systems to encourage extension officers to redo the problem analysis, identify local innovators, develop and test local solutions with farmers and disseminate them through knowledge networking.

#### *Linking Kumban Service Centers to Province and National Research Centers*

There is a wealth of Province level Technical Service Centers, who at present do not seem to have much interaction with Kumban level technical service centers. The Province Centers could be asked to “adopt” Kumban technical service centers and spend some 10-20% of their time to provide technical training and guidance to them.

There would seem to be a great opportunity for NAFES to roll out the LEA approach through a specific training program aimed at staff of technical service centers. Their closeness to villagers would make it easy to develop new extension packages, based on participatory technology development with farmers. There is a need for leadership training, basic administrative and basic planning skills for staff of technical service centers. NAFES should develop a basic training support system for district staff based in Kumban service centers.

#### *Conclusions on TSC*

Technical Service Centers at Kumban level could be a powerful instrument for delivering agricultural extension services to farmers, if the issue of funding running costs could be resolved. Staff at TSX will need a lot of training support, this could be partly delivered by province level TSC and by NAFES. The fundamental process of developing new extension messages based on farmer’s experiences needs to be re-vitalized.

### **3.6 Lessons learned on village clusters for producer group and rural enterprise building**

#### *Producer groups are mainly used as a tool for disseminating information*

Producer groups are an important element of the Kumban approach. The establishment of producer groups was mentioned in many Kumban cases as a key achievement of the Kumban committee. The main benefit cited by most groups is access to support in business planning, technical advice and low-interest credit arrangements. Many producer groups seem to be mainly functioning as a tool for disseminating information. Yet very few groups are selling products together as a group. This limits their potential to become strong tools for raising income of farmers through group enterprise action.

#### *The need for agro-enterprise training*

There are some good examples of producer groups making a profit, like the chicken group in Oudomxay (see section on service delivery above), but they are small and not likely to be scaled up to a larger group of farmers. Producer groups could benefit from agro-enterprise approach developed by NAFRI and CIAT and/or the market analysis approach developed by NAFRI and FAO, to create strong rural producer groups and group enterprises, who understand and make profit from market-based value chains.

### ***Balancing market-based enterprise development and poverty alleviation for the poor***

There seems to be a tendency among extension workers to work in areas where companies are already promoting cash crop development (see also section on technical service centers above). Government, donor agencies and Non-Government Organizations should consider how to balance between market-oriented approaches that favor farmers in resource-rich areas, and specific approaches to reach poor farmers in remote areas.

### ***Producer groups as viable rural enterprises***

There is a great potential for farmer group enterprises in Lao PDR. A good example is maize farmer's group enterprise in Bokeo (see box 2).

### ***Box 2: The Si Done Naeng farmer's group enterprise in Bokeo.***

The farmer's group enterprise in Bokeo is an interesting example of the potential for farmer group enterprises in Lao PDR. Before the arrival of Kumban policy, local village leaders had already set up a maize producer group, which is registered as a Lao export company, with a registered capital of US\$120,000. The group covers 230 families in 8 villages, crossing three Kumban areas. The group sells about 1,050 tons of maize and various other commodities directly to neighboring Thailand.

The main benefit is in increasing profit margins by direct export to Thailand, cutting out traditional exporters in the province capital. The group also strengthens local leadership, entrepreneurship, local savings capacity and investment in value adding technologies.

The administrative overhead costs of the group enterprise are much lower than those of for example Government Technical Service Centers. Poor families in remote villages also benefit from better prices for their product, obtained by the richer farmers who established the group enterprise.

Having enterprise leaders sitting on Kumban committees is rather a convenient way to avoid unnecessary red-tape. The Kumban structure does not add any new support functions to the producer group enterprise.

This case provides clear evidence that farmer group enterprise development approaches can be successful in Laos. The group enterprise concept looks like a perfect model for extension of market-based farming, which deserves more attention. NAFES should consider building on the experience of the VECO program in Bokeo to develop extension packages on the group enterprise concept.

### ***Kumban structures may not provide specific functions that foster farmer group enterprises***

It is not clear, to what extent the farmer group enterprise would benefit from the Kumban policy. Most members of the group enterprise are local village leaders, who also sit in on Kumban committees, but this does not mean that they depend on the Kumban to function as an enterprise. Working on Kumban issues could take away time from village leaders that could be spent more productively in the development of the group enterprises. How could this risk be reduced?

Do we always need extension workers to set up producer groups? What is the scope for producer groups setting up new producer groups, or investing in group enterprises? NAFES should explore options for co-operation with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce for boosting farmer group enterprises and promoting business development services aimed at Kumban level.

### ***Brokering links between farmers and companies***

The IFAD LSIP project is pioneering with large scale brokering of contracts between farmers and companies. While this is very much needed, there is a risk of 'entrapment' of farmers into making a contract with a sole buyer, who will pay a lower price than would occur if

there were several companies competing to buy farmers products. How can companies be encouraged to make contracts with farmers, without giving un-due advantage to one company above others?

#### ***Conclusions on village clusters for producer group and rural enterprise building***

Producer groups are being set up in many places, yet they are mainly seen as an instrument for disseminating Government policies, rather than enterprises aimed at making a profit for farmers. Enterprise skills training needs to be incorporated into the extension approach. Poor, disadvantaged farmers in the mountains require more assistance than resource-rich farmers in the valleys, extension programs should take select their interventions accordingly. Farmer group enterprises are an exciting option for producer groups who already have experience in marketing to gain more benefits from market-based production. It is not clear what specific advantage the present Kumban system would bring to this, except that as networks of village leaders they create a good starting point for farmer group enterprises.

### **3.7 Lessons learned on village clusters as a platform for conflict resolution on land use planning at zonal or watershed level**

#### ***Land use zoning and conflict resolution not much mentioned***

Land use zoning and watershed level planning was not mentioned much in any of the Kumbans visited. Land use zoning or mapping does not seem to be much considered as an ingredient of planning the Kumban work. Still, there are many reports on unresolved issues in village land use planning and boundary delineation. The delineation of Kumban clusters usually follows either existing “khed” groups of villages. It seems mostly villages are grouped together which can easily be reached relative to each other. So boundaries of watersheds or land use zones do not correspond to Kumban boundaries. This aspect obviously requires more study.

### **3.8 The issue of sustainable funding**

#### ***Lack of running budgets is the key constraint***

As mentioned in the section on Kumbans and decentralized planning above, many Kumbans do not get any real budget support from the Government. This limits very much the effectiveness of Kumban committees as an effective instrument for rural development. How will districts find budgets to provide basic services at Kumban level?

As mentioned in the section on Technical Service Centers, the costs of having three extension officers implement extension activities full time requires some US\$9,000 per year. In reality, most centers make do with anything between US\$200-US\$3,000 per year.

Several options for raising funds to support implementation of Kumban development plans and Technical Service Centers were proposed by various stakeholders.

#### ***Option 1: donor-funding***

The most common form of financing development activities under Kumban development plans seems to be derived from various donor-financed projects that are active in various districts. This is the case in Sayabouri, in Xieng Khouang, Oudomxay, Salavan and Attapeu. Unfortunately, all of these projects are temporary by their nature, so the source of funding always ends after a span of three to five years. This mechanism will continue to be a vital source of poverty alleviation for some time to come, but as a funding mechanism, it is not sustainable. More sustainable financing systems must be developed.

#### ***Option 2: Using tax revenues to finance delivery of Government services***

A second option would be to review tax revenues per Kumban and allow a small percentage to be used for financing Government service delivery in the Kumban. In Sayabouri, the export of 150,000 ton of maize exported to Thailand is worth around US\$35 million each

year. The Central Government collects a considerable sum of export taxes from this trade, however none of these tax revenues are spent in the districts where the maize is cultivated. Presumably, a few percents of this tax revenue would be sufficient to pay for the agricultural extension services which are the main instrument to reduce soil erosion in the area. Could such a financing mechanism be explored?

- Similarly, Districts collect land taxes, 'phasi ti din' and trade taxes, 'akone' in every village. In the case of Kumban Nong Kae in Salavan, this income amounts up to 55,000 kip or US\$ 6.50 per family per year. Could some of these tax revenues be used to finance the provision of basic Government services at Kumban level? Or could Kumbans perhaps receive tax reductions as a reward for good development plans and use the saved money to implement the plan themselves?

#### ***Option 3: Private Sector support for agricultural extension at Kumban level***

- Thirdly, large investments are taking place in the Kumbans visited in Lao Ngam, by Vietnamese companies investing in rubber and cassava plantations. They already have the technical expertise in house needed for their own plantations. To what extent could they support extension activities at Kumban level? These options could be explored, but the Government needs to be mindful not to raise unfair expectations on the social obligations of companies that may scare away investors.

#### ***Option 4: Villagers supporting Government staff working at Kumban level***

Fourthly, some district officials also mentioned that in their Kumbans, villagers are expected to provide rice to feed extension workers in Technical Service Centers, free of charge. Permitting extension officers to collect rice from villagers turns the burden of supporting them to the poorest groups, is this fair?

#### ***Clarifying the benefits of Government services in relation to budgets spent***

Looking for budgets to finance service delivery at Kumban level should go hand in hand with a clearer vision on what services the Government could actually provide at Kumban level. In Houn district, the district is moving the focus of its agricultural extension away from poor mountain villages to rich maize growing farmers in the valleys. This may give the wrong impression that the Government is more interested in seeking rent from citizens than in providing services to them. The extension service needs to explain better what services it will be able to deliver to farmers and what the benefits are.

#### ***Conclusions on funding mechanisms for Kumbans and Technical Service Centers***

Lack of sustainable funding mechanism to run Kumban activities is the main bottleneck to achieve success. Most of the Kumban level activities so far are paid for with support from various donor-funded projects. This is not a sustainable source of funding. There seems to be space in the tax revenues of the Government to support better delivery of Government services to citizens. The challenge is how to do this without creating new tax pressures that would make rural people poorer.

Budgets need to be compared to outputs as well. The Government must make it clearer what services it will deliver, in relation to the budget it makes available for the delivery of these services. As mentioned in the section on service delivery above, a discussion on Standards of Government services may help to create a common understanding on what is considered to an efficient level of delivering Government services.

## 4 The prospective for village cluster development

This section summarizes the prospective for village cluster development, the main strengths and weaknesses identified so far. Some recommendations for follow-up activities are given.

### 4.1 Village clusters as an entry point for local governance?

#### Strengths and weaknesses of the Kumban approach (SWOT)

From the lessons learned above, internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats of the Kumban approach can be identified (see table 4 below).

Table 4: SWOT analysis of the Kumban approach

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ It is aimed at improving delivery of Government services to citizens</li> <li>+ It brings Government Officers closer to the citizens whom they are supposed to serve</li> <li>+ It involves village leaders into the decentralized planning process</li> <li>+ Strong support from Government, already being implemented in all districts</li> <li>+ Increased networking between village leaders provides a basis for group enterprise development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ There are already some good models for organizing Kumban workers efficiently</li> <li>+ Clear standards for Government service delivery will create goodwill with citizens</li> <li>+ The Kumban offers good opportunities for information networking between villagers</li> <li>+ Producer groups can be linked to Market Information Systems</li> <li>+ Producer groups provide a great platform for participatory technology development</li> <li>+ Financing Kumban service delivery from tax revenues would seem an option</li> </ul>
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low planning capacity among staff and citizens at Kumban level</li> <li>- Too much focus on disseminating policies</li> <li>- No clear guidelines for planning for impact, no clear focus on poverty alleviation</li> <li>- Limited scope for improving local governance, limited local ownership</li> <li>- Kumban plans are a sum of village plans, little integration on cluster level, little coordination between departments, no links with land use planning (geographic focus)</li> <li>- Party membership requirement for Kumban committee members reduces inclusion of vulnerable groups</li> <li>- No clear guidance on what Government should do and what is better left to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basically no Government budgets are available for implementing Kumban plans. Kumbans risk becoming an empty shell if this issue is not addressed</li> <li>- Most Kumban activities now are financed by donor-funded projects, this is not sustainable</li> <li>- If Kumbans do not perform, real rural development will become dependent on private sector, leaving out the poor and vulnerable groups</li> <li>- If district officers are not paid well, they may become an economic burden to villagers and create more resentment than goodwill</li> </ul>

## Alternative approaches to strengthen village cluster organizations

The Kumban concept is one approach to strengthen organizational capacity at inter-village level. Because of its strong political nature, it has specific benefits and shortcomings. It can not be the panacea for all organizational development needs of citizens in rural areas. With the rapid influx of foreign investment in agriculture, Lao citizens should be encouraged to develop stronger civil organizations and enterprise groups, so that they may also share in the benefits of commercialization of the countryside. Space should be given to other forms of village and inter-village organization to develop outside the Kumban structure.

## 4.2 Fostering agricultural extension at village cluster level

### Strengths and weaknesses of the technical service center approach

The lessons learned about the Technical Service Centers provide a number of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats of this concept (table 5).

Table 5: SWOT analysis of the Technical Service Centre Concept

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Technical Service Centers bring extension staff closer to farmers.</li> <li>+With a good visit schedule and a budget to actually do things, extension officers can reach a much higher percentage of farmers than before.</li> <li>+ Many centers have their demonstration plots in farmer fields, not at the center, this is the right approach for effective shared learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Extension does create tangible benefits to farmer's income in many cases.</li> <li>+ Impact of extension could really scale up if focused on farmer group enterprises.</li> <li>+There is a great potential to develop a range of new extension messages building on local knowledge of farmers.</li> <li>+Province and National Research Centers have a range of experienced staff that could provide essential training and coaching support to Kumban Centers</li> </ul>
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Often rich lowland areas are prioritized in the site selection for building service centers. This bypasses poor farmers in the hills, such choices do not contribute much to poverty alleviation for the poorest groups.</li> <li>- Kumban centers are often staffed with the youngest and most in-experienced staff, with a minimum of support. This does not make it easy for Kumban centers to do good extension work.</li> <li>- Producer groups are often seen as a tool for disseminating orders, not as a group of farmers who should be served as clients</li> <li>-Staff have little skills in agro-enterprise development methods, not so strong at supporting farmer enterprise groups.</li> <li>- Too much focus on building buildings, not on building service delivery systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Most activities at Centers are implemented with donor funding, this is not sustainable</li> <li>- Hardly any Government budgets are available for maintaining Kumban services centers or implementing extension work. Centers run the risk of becoming another string of "white elephants" if this issue is not addressed.</li> <li>- Private sector extension of big companies promoting cash cropping are much more effective in reaching farmers, they may replace Government extension services if these do not produce any added value, e.g. specific attention to resource poor farmers.</li> <li>-If officers are not paid well, they may either leave or become an economic burden to villagers that could create resentment towards the Government</li> </ul>

- Much effort is spent on producing farm inputs like seeds, piglets, in an inefficient way, better to be done by private farmers	
--	--

### **Alternative approaches for agricultural extension at village cluster level**

It is very well possible to have a functional agricultural extension system without building Technical Service Centers. Such systems exist in the case of PCADR-PASS in Sayabouri and in the case of the IFAD- RLIP project in Attapeu. It is also very well possible to support farmer group enterprises without Technical Service Centers, as shown by the case of VECO in Bokeo.

It is important to house extension officers at Kumban level, but it is more important to enable them to visit farmers regularly. That means budgets should be available for per diems, fuel and motorcycles, not necessarily for buildings. The main risks of prioritizing the building of centers is that it takes away budget to infrastructures which could have been spent on funding activities. Secondly, establishing centers may divert the focus of extension workers from farmers fields to 'demonstration plots' on the grounds of the centers.

In short, the recommendation would be for districts to develop sustainable funding to make it possible for extension officers to travel to farmers, rather than building buildings. If it is possible to invest in buildings, then the focus should be on providing housing for the staff.

### **4.3 Recommendations for policy support to strengthen governance at Kumban level**

The Kumban policy remains a primarily a policy of the People's Party and not of the Government, with a primary aim to foster Party leadership at grassroots level. As such, the policy may lend itself less to direct support from donor's who usually need to limit themselves to supporting Government policies, not Party policies. At the same time, the policy does affect directly how rural development will be planned. There are a number of areas where the Government and donors have shared goals, such as good governance, that could be a good basis for future cooperation. Policy support could enhance governance at the Kumban level in several ways:

*Enhancing the inclusion of vulnerable groups:* For Kumban planning to be more participatory, the lack of inclusion of women, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups in Kumban committees needs to be addressed. Donor agencies might be able to assist here.

*Standards-based service delivery:* As to improved service delivery to citizens, donors might assist the Government in defining suitable standards for Government service delivery and basic mechanisms for citizens and Government to assist each other in achieving standards.

*Supporting local security services:* As to security, a better coordination of police and local militia at village cluster level may have beneficial effects on a range of issues of mutual concern such as reduction of crime, human trafficking, drugs abuse and terrorism.

*Enabling policy environment for rural enterprise development:* As to economic development, donor-funded programs are already taking a lead in promoting agro-enterprises and business development services. More could be done in the area of creating an enabling policy environment for farmer group enterprises, where local Government offices learn to provide efficient support to rural private sector development.

*Rural information networks:* As to Village Information Networking, there is a range of new modes of information networking that needs to be piloted, ranging from farmer radio services to market information services via mobile phones.



*Alternative modes for inter-village organizations:* As to empowering local communities, Government and donors should explore a range of alternative modes of inter-village organization, beyond the Kumban model, that may create the diverse range of leadership qualities needed for a strong economic growth in the countryside.

As to *settlement of villages, land use planning and conflict resolution*, a range of large issues need to be addressed, this is already happening via a range of policy processes involving the Land Development Department. It is not clear how the Kumban concept in its present form will play a role here.

*Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:* The single most important bottleneck to implementing Kumban Development Plans is the lack of budget. Yet there seems to be scope for developing sustainable funding mechanism by a combination of readjustments in the use of tax revenues, private sector funding and farmers contributions. Donors could support the Lao Government in exploring sustainable funding mechanisms for rural development.

#### **4.4 Recommendations for supporting agricultural extension at village cluster level**

Stakeholders proposed a number of options for supporting agricultural extension at village cluster level. Some are more suitable to be implemented by extension agencies, some require more research and are more suitable to be implemented by research agencies.

##### **Recommendations for extension:**

*Developing a strong extension training system specifically aimed at Kumban level extension workers:* There would seem to be a great opportunity for NAFES to roll out the Lao Extension Approach (LEA) through a specific training program aimed at staff of Kumban technical service centers. Their closeness to villagers would make it easy to develop new extension packages, based on participatory technology development with farmers. However, most of these 'front-line' workers at Kumban level are young and in-experienced. There is a need for leadership training, basic administrative and basic planning skills for staff of technical service centers. NAFES should develop a basic training support system for district staff based in Kumban service centers.

*Planning and Proposal Writing Skills Training:* There is a clear need for a training program in planning and proposal writing skills for Kumban workers. This could be a new type of service to be developed by NAFES.

*Taking a lead in knowledge networking:* information networking is a vital function of Kumbans, that needs to be strengthened. While research organizations should primarily develop and test such systems, NAFES could consider starting a knowledge networking discussion group, with the aim of developing pilot systems, e.g. Market Information Systems, in cooperation with the Ministries of Industry and Commerce and Communication.

*Knowledge Capitalization:* While there is a clear commitment from the Government to implement the Kumban policy, there is no clear mechanism for capitalizing experiences from the field and sharing lessons learned. NAFES should take a lead in developing this function.

*Promoting pilots for participatory technology development:* NAFES and especially the LEAP Project may want to put ore emphasis on developing systems to encourage extension officers to redo the problem analysis, identify local innovators, develop and test local solutions with farmers and disseminate them through knowledge networking.

*Mainstreaming agro-enterprise training in the Lao Extension Approach:* Producer groups could benefit from agro-enterprise approach developed by NAFRI and CIAT and/or the market analysis approach developed by NAFRI and FAO, to create strong rural producer

groups and group enterprises, who understand and make profit from market-based value chains. NAFES should mainstream these approaches into its extension approach.

*Scaling up from producer groups to group enterprises:* The group enterprise concept looks like a perfect model for extension of market-based farming, which deserves more attention. NAFES should consider building on the experience of the VECO program in Bokeo to develop extension packages on the group enterprise concept.

*Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:* The single most important bottleneck to successful agricultural extension in village clusters is the lack of budget. Almost all successful extension activities observed during this study were directly funded by donor projects, this is not a sustainable basis for serving farmers. Extension organizations need to work together with researchers and policy makers to develop and implement sustainable funding mechanisms.

### **Recommendations for research (NAFRI, Universities)**

*Develop group leadership and organizational strengthening training methodologies specifically geared towards Kumban level organizations:* While the provision of training is primarily a responsibility for extension, research organizations should take a lead in developing and testing participatory capacity building modules to strengthen leadership and administrative skills at Kumban level.

*Develop effective mechanisms for information networking at Kumban level:* NAFRI should take a lead in developing and testing mechanism by which producer groups and Kumban committees are enabled to produce and disseminate information that is needed for farmers to participate gainfully in market-oriented production.

*Linking Kumban Service Centers to Province and National Research Centers:* There is a wealth of experienced staff at Province level Technical Service Centers, but at present they do not seem to have much interaction with Kumban level technical service centers. The Province Centers could be asked to "adopt" Kumban technical service centers and spend some 10-20% of their time to provide technical training and guidance to them. NAFES should take the lead in making agreements with NAFRI and other departments in MAF to make this happen.

*Kumban and land use planning and conflict resolution:* More research is needed to evaluate the potential of Kumban organizations as a platform for participatory land use planning and conflict resolution, building on on-going work by NAFES and NAFRI.

*Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:* NAFRI's Policy Research Unit could be asked to develop and test alternative, sustainable funding mechanisms for agricultural service delivery.

## Annex 1: List of people contacted

### Vientiane Capital, National level, 14 March-9 April 2008

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail
1	Andrea Schroeter (Ms.)			020 5526277	<a href="mailto:andreaschroeter@gmx.de">andreaschroeter@gmx.de</a>
2	Andrew Bartlett	Teamleader	LEAP	020 5509001	<a href="mailto:LEAP@LaoEx.org">LEAP@LaoEx.org</a>
3	Barbara Boeni	Country Representative	SDC	020 5504800	<a href="mailto:barbara.boeni@sdc.net">barbara.boeni@sdc.net</a>
4	Bouali Phameuang	land use planning officer	NAFES		
5	Bounthan Mounhalath	Media Master Trainer	LEAP	020 241481	
6	Florian Rock	GTZ Consultant	GTZ		<a href="mailto:Florian.Rock@gtz.de">Florian.Rock@gtz.de</a>
7	Iris Richter (Ms.)	Decentralization Consultant	Helvetas	020 5729150	<a href="mailto:iris.evelin.richter@web.de">iris.evelin.richter@web.de</a>
8	Kham Sanatem	Dep. Director General	NAFES	020 5513011	<a href="mailto:khamstanatem@yahoo.com">khamstanatem@yahoo.com</a>
9	Dr. Keith Fahrney	Research Coordinator	CIAT-PRDU	020 2231399	<a href="mailto:k.fahrney@cgiar.org">k.fahrney@cgiar.org</a>
10	Lao Tao	Research Assistant	CIAT-PRDU	020 2407957	
11	Michael Victor	Information Services Expert	URFP NAFRI	020 5526693	<a href="mailto:omichael@loxinfo.co.th">omichael@loxinfo.co.th</a>
12	Dr. Nathan Badenoch	Social Science Research Expert	URFP NAFRI	020 5599562	<a href="mailto:baideanach@gmail.com">baideanach@gmail.com</a>
13	Nils Gärdek	Associate Expert	Lao Swedish Road Project	020 7847542	<a href="mailto:nilsgardek@hotmail.com">nilsgardek@hotmail.com</a>
14	Onida Souksavat	Dep. Director General	Planning Dept, MPWT	020 5500677	<a href="mailto:souksavato@yahoo.com">souksavato@yahoo.com</a>
15	Oudet Souvannavong	Institution Building Consultant	Mixay Techno	020 5513507	<a href="mailto:oudet.i3s@gmail.com">oudet.i3s@gmail.com</a>
16	Peter Jones	Agroecological zoning expert	ADB Nam Ngum Project	020 5629140	<a href="mailto:prjones@laotel.com">prjones@laotel.com</a>
17	Dr. Phouangparisak Pravongviengkham	Director General, Planning Department	Ministry of Agriculture (MAF)	020 5514042	<a href="mailto:pppravongviengkham@yahoo.com">pppravongviengkham@yahoo.com</a>
18	Si Boun Eua	National Project Director	Smallholder Project, NAFES		
19	Sisomphone	Director	Planning Dept, NAFES		
20	Somxay Sisanon	Dep. Director General	NAFES	020 2210957	<a href="mailto:somxay@LaoEx.org">somxay@LaoEx.org</a>
21	Dr. Suresh Balakrishnan	Teamleader	GPAR	020 7809685	<a href="mailto:sureshbalakrishnan1@gmail.com">sureshbalakrishnan1@gmail.com</a>
22	Thongsavath Boupcha (Ms.)	Deputy Director	Planning Dept, NAFES	020 2243400	<a href="mailto:thongsavathboupcha@yahoo.com">thongsavathboupcha@yahoo.com</a>

### Vientiane Capital, Sangthong district, 30 April 2008

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>District Offices</i>					
1	Sibounthan	Governor	Governor's Office		
2	Bounnyong Vongpachan	Head, Agricultural Office	Agriculture and Forestry		
3	Sithouan	Extension officer	Agriculture and Forestry		also Liaison officer for Pro-Rice
<i>Kumban Pattana Nalat:</i>					
4	Somdeth Bounpakham	Leader	kumban committee	020 2441763	also deputy head district agriculture
5	Phetsamone	Secretary and deputy leader	kumban committee		also staff of district agriculture
6	Souk	Coordinator of 10 rice villages	kumban committee		also village head of Ban Nalat
7	Khamphong	Defense matters	kumban committee	absent	Military commander, Tao Hai
8	Bounneua	Education matters	kumban committee	absent	District Education officer
9	Dai	Social and Cultural matters	kumban committee	absent	Party leader, Ban Nalat
10	Sithong	Security matters	kumban committee	absent	Police chief, Ban Na Thong
11	Visine	Social and Cultural matters	kumban committee	absent	Teacher, Ban Na Tiam
<i>Other kumban workers:</i>					
12	Home	Village head Ban Tao Hai	kumban Nalat		also leader of rice producer group
13	Kampheng	Village head Ban Hai Neua	kumban Nalat		also leader of rice producer group
14	Mai (Ms.)	Liaison officer Pro rice Project	kumban Nalat		also staff of district agriculture
15	Somphet	Village head Ban Houay Tang	kumban Nalat		also leader of rice producer group
16	Vanni (Ms.)	Housewife in Ban Na Tiam	kumban Nalat		also leader of rice producer group

### Ken Tao District, Sayabouri Province, 02-03 May 2008

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>District Offices</i>					
1	Bounmi Rattanaray	Project Director	PCADR-PASS	020 5599330	<a href="mailto:pass.pcadr@etllao.com">pass.pcadr@etllao.com</a>
2	Frederic Julien	Agricultural Advisor	PCADR-PASS		<a href="mailto:fjpcadr@laoconsulting.com">fjpcadr@laoconsulting.com</a>
3	Sayavong	Planning Adviser	PCADR-PASS	020 5779829	
4	Phetphixay Sounvilai	Deputy Governor	Ken Tao District	020-5493620	
5	Chantason Khamsaikhai	Research Coordinator	NAFRI-PRONAE		
6	Samai Soukkaseum	Maize exporter	Samai Import-Export		
<i>Kumban Pattana Ban Nong</i>					
7	Sikhane	Leader	kumban committee		also staff of district agriculture
8	Sonexay Vongsaya		kumban committee		also staff of district agriculture
9	Bounsou Sengchan	kumban Committee member	kumban committee		also Village Head Ban Nong
10	Phonepaseuth Inthixay	Coordinator for all PASS villages	PCADR-PASS		also staff of district agriculture
11	Sailom Sipamone	Maize agronomist	Technical Service Center		also staff of district agriculture
12	Bounyot Chantavy	Forester	Technical Service Center		also staff of district agriculture

### Vangvieng district, Vientiane Province, 04 May 2008

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
1	Thanongsi Solangkoun	Director	The Organic Farm	023 511 220	<a href="mailto:suanmone@hotmail.com">suanmone@hotmail.com</a>

**Xiengkhouang Province, 05-07 May 2008**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Khamsy Chantavong	Deputy Director	Province Agriculture Dept.	020 5561242	
2	Souvanmy Phaxay	Deputy Director	ADB Nam Ngum Project	020 5513135	
3	Somboun	Province Coordinator Xiengkhouang	ADB Nam Ngum Project	020 2345108	
4	Bouavai	Deputy Coordinator XK	ADB Nam Ngum Project	020 2340150	
5	Soulivanthong	MAF representative	Province Agriculture Dept.		
6	Harald Kreuscher	Teamleader	GPAR Xieng Khouang	020 5478002	
7	Viengsavanh Manivong	Coordinator Agriculture	GPAR Xieng Khouang	020 5666751	<a href="mailto:vsymnvl@hotmail.com">vsymnvl@hotmail.com</a>
8	Phouva	Coordinator Organizational Dev.	GPAR Xieng Khouang		
9	Adam Folkard	Consultant Agr. Dev. Funds	GPAR Xieng Khouang	020 5504299	
<i>Kumban Pattana Lad Bouak, Paek district</i>					
11	Malaiphet Tiousavan	Head	Technical Service Center	020 5661960	
12	Ms. Phouangphet	Extension Officer	District Agricultural Office		
13	Toui Oulaithong	Extension Officer	District Agricultural Office		
14	Mai	Student	Nabong, University of Laos		
15	Ms Keobouakham	Student	Nabong, University of Laos		
<i>Kumban Samphanxay, Khoue District</i>					
16	Khoua Sagnalath	Head	District Agricultural Office	020 5761862	
17	Daovone Keomanichan	SADU liaison officer	District Agricultural Office		
18	Viengthong	Head	Samphanxay Service Center		
19	Sithone	Agricultural extension officer	Samphanxay Service Center		
20	Philavan	Forestry extension officer	Samphanxay Service Center		
21	Khonesavanh	Police officer	Samphanxay Service Center		
22	Ms. Bounma	chicken group member	Ban Dok Mai		
23	Mr.Khamxay	chicken group member	Ban Dok Mai		
<i>Technical Service Center, Kumban Souy-Viengxay, Phoukoud District</i>					
24	Ms. Souliphone Oudonexay	District Agricultural Officer	District Agricultural Office	030-5171271	
25	Ms. Paothong Phimmasone	District Agricultural Officer	District Agricultural Office	030-5171271	
<b>Oudomxay, 09-10 May 2008</b>					
No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Houmpheng Sengsouli	Deputy Director	Province Agriculture Office		
2	Kamphay Manivone	Deputy Director	Province Forestry Office		
3	Keo Petsomphou	Extension Officer	Province Forestry Office	020 2375039	
4	Houmpheng Phetdala	IFAD-OCISP Liaison Officer	Province Agriculture Office	020 5481829	
<i>Kumban Pattana Sibounheuang, Houn district</i>					
5	Douangchit Mingboupha	Director	District Agriculture Office		
<i>Technical Service Center Ban Kounlad, Houn district</i>					
6	Ounkham Thongsavanh	District Agricultural Officer	District Agriculture Office		
7	Ms. Somchit Keosomlan	Student	Bou Bor Vocational School		
8	Bouaphan Leuangsofha	District Agricultural Officer	District Agriculture Office		
<i>NAFREC Research Station, Na Mo district</i>					
9	Bouaphan Somphanthat	Researcher	Northern Agriculture and Forestry Research Center (NAFREC)	081-212334	
10	Keopaseuth Yang	Researcher			
11	Chantakhone Pilakeo	Researcher			
12	Keolakhone Inthavongsa	Researcher			

**Bokeo, 12-13 May 2008**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Kheuangphet Vongchan	Deputy Director	Province Agriculture Office		
2	Stuart Ling	Country Representative	VECO	020 5614974	<a href="mailto:veco@laopdr.com">veco@laopdr.com</a>
3	Phaxay Phichit	District Coordinator	VECO		
4	Siphone Inthavong	Deputy Director	Province Communications		
<i>Maize Selling Group, Ban Si Done Nyaeng, Ton Pheung District</i>					
5	Noi Lat	Chairman	Maize Selling Group		
6	Bounnyong	Kumban Committee member	Kumban Nam Keun Mai		
7	Anousak	District Agricultural Officer	District Agriculture Office		
8	Mai Seng	Kumban Committee member	Kumban Nam Keun Mai		
9	Ms. Latsami	VECO liaison officer	District Agriculture Office		

**Bolikhamxay, 19 May 2008**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Somsangouan Souvannala	Deputy Director	Province Agriculture Office		
2	Bouali	Deputy Chief Cabinet	Province Agriculture Office		
3	Kapkeo	Deputy Director Planning	Province Agriculture Office		
4	Tony Taucher	Teamleader	Lao Luxembourg Development	020 5552626	
5	Chaiha Daophou	Community Facilitator	Lao Luxembourg Development		
6	Vanvai Sipaseuth	Forestry Advisor	Lao Luxembourg Development	020 5619609	
<i>Tha Khok Khoun Province Agricultural Technical Service Center</i>					
7	Ms. Chansouk Makpanya	Extension Officer	Province Agriculture Office		
8	Ms. Bounhieng Manlien	Extension Officer	Province Agriculture Office		
9	Ms. Ladavan Keodavone	Extension Officer	Province Agriculture Office		

**Salavan, 20-22 May 2008**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Khiphachan	Chief of Cabinet	Province Agriculture Office		
2	Anousak Champakhone	LEAP coordinator	Province Agriculture Office		
<i>Lao Ngam District Office</i>					
3	Somxay Keovongsa	Extension Coordinator	District Agricultural Office	020 2436256	
4	Somxay Silaphet	Tax Collection Officer	District Finance Office		chairman, Kumban Nong Kae
<i>Keo Pheung Technical Service Center</i>					
5	Khamled Soulignavong	Extension Officer	District Agricultural Office		
6	Phouvan Nabongkham	Extension Officer	District Agricultural Office		
7	Somchit Sovorachet	Extension Officer	District Agricultural Office		
8	Ms. Khamson Phansanit	Student			
<i>Te Mi Beng District Technical Service Center</i>					
9	Ms. Vongmani Keodouangdi	Extension Officer	District Agriculture Office		
<i>Wang Yen Aquaculture Station</i>					
10	At Ketthongkham	Director	Province Agriculture Office		

**Attapeu, 23-24 May 2008**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Telephone	E-mail or remarks
<i>Province Offices</i>					
1	Vongsay	Director	Province Agriculture Office		
2	Bounseuth Sethilath	Deputy Director	Province Agriculture Office		
3	Inphan	MAF coordinator	Ministry of Agriculture		
4	Viengsavay	MAF liaison officer	Province Agriculture Office		
5	Savansi	MAF liaison officer	Province Agriculture Office		
6	Seuth	LEAP coordinator	Province Agriculture Office		
7	Soulichanh Phonkeo	National Project Director	IFAD RLIP		
8	Dr. Kulwant Singh	Chief Technical Advisor	IFAD RLIP	020 2291121	<a href="mailto:kulwant.dr@gmail.com">kulwant.dr@gmail.com</a>
9	Bounnyong Malayong	Forestry Advisor	IFAD RLIP	020 6660160	
10	Phousi Phongsavath	Microfinance Advisor	IFAD RLIP	020 9889257	
<i>Sayssetha District Office</i>					
11	Vantha Phommasane	Director	District Agriculture Office		
12	Boualai	Extension Officer	District Agriculture Office		
<i>Kumban Pattana Pa Meuang</i>					
13	Sikha Phetkeola	Village Head	Ban Som Ket		also Kumban committee member
14	Waeng Sayaseng	Village Head	Ban Wat Luang		also water user group chairman

## **Annex 2: TOR of the mission**

### **Terms of Reference:**

#### **Knowledge capitalisation on agricultural & forestry development at the kumban level**

##### **Background**

The 'kumban pattana' is currently understood to be a cluster of between 5 and 10 villages, with each District consisting of between 5 and 10 clusters. The idea of the kumban as a platform for development activities emerged in 2004 as a result of the Political Bureau's Order No 09/PB.CB which sets out guidelines for the implementation of resolutions made three years earlier at the VII Party Congress.

Although the kumban pattana is not a fully established administrative layer in the Government structure, it is the intention of the Government that coordination of development activities should be carried out through a kumban committee that represents key ministries - agriculture, health, and education - and the security services. The head of the kumban committee is appointed by the Party and reports to the District Governor.

The importance of the kumban in the planning and management of development activities in the agriculture sector was elevated after the annual conference of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 2006. Most significantly, MAF initiated a process of moving field staff from the District offices (DAFOs) to technical service centres located at the kumban level. The current target is to establish 300 cluster service centres by the end of 2009.

Since 2006, a number of donor projects in the agriculture sector have constructed service centres at the kumban level. There have also been a number of attempts to carry out project activities at the kumban level; for example market chain development or watershed management activities that involve representatives from a number of villages in the same cluster. For the most part, these efforts have been independently planned and managed, with very little consistency in design or methodology.

In January 2008, MAF issued Directive 0216 on "Establishing Agriculture and Forestry Technical Service Centers". This Directive helps to clarify the functions of the service centres, but operational details - including staffing, funding, and technical support - are still being developed.

Like a number of other projects, LEAP would like to support the Government in improving the delivery of services at the kumban level and below. In order to provide this support, the project management need to acquire a better understanding of the Government's policy regarding the kumban, as well as the lessons that can be drawn from practical experience over the past three years.

## Objective

To gain a better understanding of the role of the kumban (village cluster) in agricultural development projects and programmes, by capitalising on work already carried out by the Government and its development partners at the kumban level.

## Activities

Under the supervision of the CTA of LEAP and in consultation with the Deputy DG of NAFES, the consultant will undertake the following activities:

- a) **read** Govt Policy documents relating to Kumban
- b) **interview** stakeholders, both at national level and those working at kumban level
- c) **visit** at least 5 different kumban centres in different parts of the country
- d) **write** a report following the outline given below
- e) **present** findings at a meeting to be organised by the projects

## Output

The consultant will produce a report of at least 25 pages with detailed information on the following three perspectives of Kumban development

### 1. Normative

- summary of Govt **policy** documents on role of kumban in socio-economic development
- summary of Govt **structure and function** at the Kumban level
- summary of the different **interpretations** of the kumban policy among stakeholders

### 2. Descriptive

- profile of example kumbans, showing typical socio-economic and agro-ecological characteristics
- inventory of agric dev activities currently being carried out by different projects at kumban level
- typology of facilities: with examples of kumban service centres (size, function, costs etc)
- delineation of current and proposed financing mechanisms for activities and centres

### 3. Prospective

- positive: opportunities for further interventions
- negative: possible pitfalls
- recommendations for follow-up activities

A one-day workshop will be carried out at the end of the assignment to discuss the findings and get feedback on the draft report prior to finalization.

## Schedule

This consultancy will require 40 working days starting 24 March 2008 and completed by the end of May 2008. Approximately half of the time will be spent in carrying out field visits to at least 5 Provinces.

APB, 24 Mar 08

### **Annex 3: List of references**

---

- <sup>i</sup> Reinhard, Peter, Esther Oettli, Khamphay Manivong, Tienne Vannasouk and Silinthone Sacklokham, 2004. Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP), Project Document, Phase 2 (January 2005-December 2007), Helvetas
- <sup>ii</sup> Political Bureau of the Central Committee, Lao People's Revolutionary Party, 2004. Advising Order on Establishing Villages and Developing Village Groups (Kumban), No 09/PB/CP, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2004.
- <sup>iii</sup> Alton, Charles and Khamphan Rattanavong, 2004. Service Delivery and Resettlement Options for Development Planning. Final Report, Livelihoods Study, Lao/02/A01, UNDP ECHO.
- <sup>iv</sup> Various unpublished tables assembled by the National Agricultural Extension Service, 2007.
- <sup>v</sup> Richter-Funke, Iris, 2008. Governance and Civil Society in Lao PDR. A Study with Special Reference to Decentralized Planning. Consultancy Report, Helvetas Laos, 30 pp.
- <sup>vi</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2006. Report of H.E. Sitaheng Rasphone to the Politburo and Party Central Committee Secretariat on the implementation and application status of VIII Party Congress' Resolution on Agro-forestry Sector (4 goals and 13 measures), July 2006.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ministry of Agriculture e.a. 2007. Linking the last mile: best practices in rural communication to improve farmers' and communities' access to information. Summary Workshop Report, Ministry of Agriculture, National Land Management Authority, National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service, National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute, Village Focus International, August 2007.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, 2007. Agreement of H.E. the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry on the Organization and operation of the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES). Agreement No. 1063/MAF, 23 October 2007.
- <sup>ix</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2008. Ministerial Direction (Decree) on Establishing Agricultural and Forestry Technical Service Centers, No 0216/08, January 17, 2008.
- <sup>x</sup> National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service, 2008. Guideline on the implementation of the Ministerial Decree No 0216/08 of MAF on the establishment of Agriculture and Forestry Technical Service Centers". Guideline NO. 0645/NAFES 08, 06 March 2008.
- <sup>xi</sup> Connell, John G. 2006. Formal Monitoring and Evaluation Report for the Agricultural Development Support Funds and Strategic Plan from Agriculture, 2007. Governance and Public Administration Reform Programme Xiengkhouang, December 2007.
- <sup>xii</sup> Tarnutzer, Andreas, Rita Gebert, Ny Luangkhot and Pany Keodaravong, 2007. External Review of the Lao Extension for Agriculture Project, LEAP Phase 2. Version 1.2, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, National



---

Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service, Helvetas, Swiss Association for International Cooperation, Vientiane, March 2007.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ling, Stuart, 2007. Update on Market Approach followed by VECO. Unpublished document, Vredeseilanden-COPIBO (VECO), Bokeo, November 2007.

<sup>xiv</sup> Jones, Peter and Phamuang, Bouali, forthcoming. Review of village land use planning and boundary delineation, case study of Kumban Hin Lad, Sanamxay district, Attapeu Province, NAFES.