



# Best Practice: Farmer to Farmer learning for Agroforestry



**Souvanthong Namvong**  
*Department of Technical Extension  
and Agro-Processing (DTEAP)*  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry  
Lao PDR

Regional Forum about Agroecology  
Futures Meeting  
Siem Reap  
06<sup>th</sup> November 2018

# Context of upland Laos

- ⦿ Laos is a land-locked country, mountainous, with scattered population
- ⦿ Two thirds of people live in rural areas, farming employs 72% of labour
- ⦿ Xieng Khouang province in North at elevation of 1,000 metres +
- ⦿ Multi-ethnic, 481 villages, average only 100 HH each
- ⦿ Main crops in XK are rice (for consumption) and maize (for cash). Cattle is also a major income earner.



# Types of commercialisation



Chemical-intensive Agriculture



Sustainable Agriculture



# RAS Partners

- ◉ Extension services in Laos are the responsibility of the Department of Technical Extension and Agro-Processing (DTEAP). Formerly DAEC and NAFES.
- ◉ The Swiss Government (SDC) has supported the development of extension services in Laos since 2001 with two projects:
  - Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP) 2001-2014
  - Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) 2015 - ongoing



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**



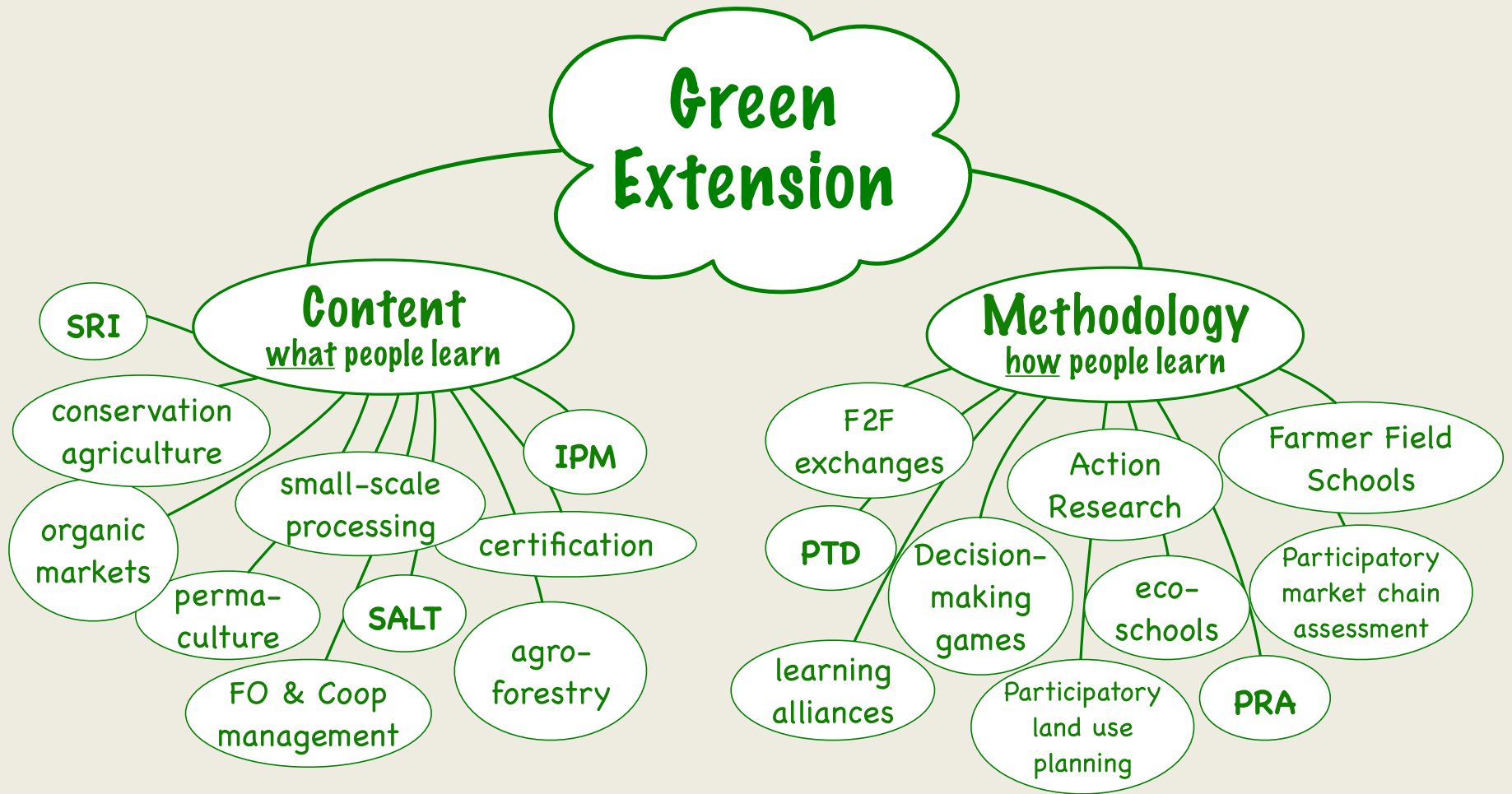
**HELVETAS**  
Swiss Intercooperation

**LAOS**



# Green Extension strategy

- ⦿ **Green extension** is a type of rural advisory service which supports the scaling up of sustainable agriculture by facilitating socio-ecological learning processes with farmers
- ⦿ **Green Extension** is a service can be provided by a range of differing organisations: government departments, NGOs, private enterprises, and by farmer groups. Everybody can contribute!
- ⦿ **Green Extension** is not a single approach or blueprint for achieving sustainability; it includes a range of methods to promote various types of content
- ⦿ **Green Extension** supports farmers in analysing local problems and opportunities, and testing alternative practices under local conditions.





# Focus on Farmer to Farmer

Some of the F2F activities of LURAS:

- Coffee production skills development
- Tea processing exchange
- Rice seed producer groups
- Fodder and cattle raising exchange
- Women Weaving groups
- Community irrigation management exchange
- Farmer trainers for organic veg production



# Agroforestry coffee F2F

- ⦿ Need assessment with coffee producer groups of Keoset village cluster facilitated by provincial and district extension staff
- ⦿ Farmers wanted to learn a number of topics:
  - ⦿ plantation management, eg soil fertility
  - ⦿ processing quality
  - ⦿ market linkages
- ⦿ Farmer representatives of 5 groups from Keoset cluster visits Bolaven Plateau Coffee Producers Cooperative (CPC) in October 2017
- ⦿ On return, F2F training at village level to share the lessons from the study visit, facilitated by extension staff with support of LURAS.
- ⦿ Later, expert farmers from CPC visited Keoset cluster to conduct advanced training.



# Coffee F2F (continued)

🕒 Keoset farmers stayed with CPC farmers in Champasack



# Coffee F2F (continued)

- Knowledge applied by farmers after they return





# Coffee results

- ⦿ Existing coffee gardens have been improved: pruning, soil fertility, shade management etc.
- ⦿ Nurseries have been established to expand production to more than 40 villages
- ⦿ Processing centre has been constructed and is now managed by farmers
- ⦿ Purchasing contract has been negotiated with private sector, giving organic and social premiums to producers
- ⦿ Farmers have started their own research to help them identify further ways to improve yield
- ⦿ Keoseth farmers are training other farmers in Xieng Khouang province
- ⦿ Connection with farmer cooperative in south of country (CPC) is being sustained, as a long-term source of advice, inputs and market links.



# Agroforestry tea F2F

- ⦿ Similar experience to coffee....
- ⦿ A need assessment was conducted with tea producer groups in the Phousan mountain area facilitated by extension staff. Result show that priorities for F2F learning are:
  - ⦿ plantation management (eg. pruning)
  - ⦿ processing quality
  - ⦿ market opportunities
- ⦿ Farmer representatives of 4 groups from Phousan area had study visits to farmer groups in Phongsaly and Oudomxay provinces
- ⦿ On return to the own villages, F2F follow-up training was carried out to share the lesson from the study visits

# Tea F2F (continued)

- Farmers from Phousan area in Xieng Khouang visited Phonsaly and Oudomxay to learning new techniques



# Tea F2F (continued)

- Knowledge applied by farmers after they return



- Changes in processing facilities (paid by farmers) led to improvements in quality and better market opportunities

# Focus on tea F2F (continued)

- ◎ Women farmers have become trainers for Phousan tea!





# Advantages of F2F

- ⦿ F2F involves communication among practitioners from a similar social group: fewer language barriers, less propaganda and a higher level of trust;
- ⦿ F2F involves the sharing of techniques that have already been tested by farmers under local condition, thus more likely to be relevant and feasible;
- ⦿ F2F is usually more holistic. Learning not only techniques, but also labour requirements, sources of inputs, typical yields, market demands etc.
- ⦿ F2F can strengthen farmer organisations and help build networks that enable farmers to provide services to each other on a sustained basis.
- ⦿ F2F exchanges that includes homestays are likely to be less costly than training courses at other venues.





# Challenges for facilitation of F2F

- ⦿ F2F require good facilitation process:
  - ⦿ Needs assessment before the exchanges
  - ⦿ Careful selection of participants
  - ⦿ Good communication with host organisations and trainers
  - ⦿ Follow-up meetings in the community
- ⦿ Selection of participants is especially important to prevent benefits being captured by farmers who have better resources and connections.
- ⦿ Also, without affirmative action, women may not be selected for F2F activities outside their community. But the cases of tea and coffee in Xieng Khouang show that it is possible for them to participate... and become expert farmers!
- ⦿ In short, F2F needs *New Extensionists!*

# Sustainability of F2F

- ⦿ Until now, the cost of these F2F activities have depended on projects such as LURAS
- ⦿ In future, it is hoped that farmer organizations will play an important role in organising similar activities, using their own resources.
- ⦿ And with the expansion of mobile phone networks, farmers who have learned from each other during projects like LURAS can contact each other when they need advice in the future.





# Take home messages

1. A range of Farmer-to Farmer (F2F) learning activities have been carried out and are part of a Green Extension strategy in Laos
2. F2F has been especially useful in promoting agroforestry systems – such as tea and coffee production - that generate income at the same time as protecting the environment.
3. To be effective, F2F must be seen as a process, not a single event, which requires careful facilitation.
4. The role of an F2F facilitator is consistent with the GFRAS concept of the 'New Extensionist'.



Thank You!