National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI)

Lao Swedish Agriculture and Forestry Research Program (LSUAFRP)

“Village Land Use and Livelihoods Issues Associated with Shifting Cultivation, Village Re-location and Village Merging Programs in the Uplands of Phonesay District, Luang Prabang Province”

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1. Introduction

The Land Management component of the Lao-Swedish Upland Agriculture and Forestry Research Program (LSUAFRP) is undertaking action research on land use issues in project target villages in the uplands of Phonesay and Na Mo Districts. The study villages are located in lower-lying areas where land use is affected by the relocation of people from more isolated highland villages as a consequence of district plans to eliminate/reduce shifting cultivation and opium production. The District has introduced programs to consolidate or merge villages to facilitate the provision of better infrastructure and government services such as road access, commodity markets, village water, schools, health posts, and agricultural extension as alternatives to existing agricultural production systems in the highlands.

Action research has been undertaken by the Land Management component staff in close cooperation with the relevant District agencies and Development Committees, in particular the District Governor's office and associated units and the District Agricultural and Forestry Office (DAFO) to understand the difficulties facing both the communities and the district authorities as a consequence of villager re-location to more accessible locations.

This case study focuses on a small group of target villages in Phonesay District, namely, the "host" village of Huay Maha, (Khamu), and the "re-locating" villages of Ban Pha Toup, and Ban Phou Soong Noy (Hmong) and Pah Cha Norm.

2. Background Information

2.1 Relevant Government Policy and Rural Development Programs

A number of village level development programs arising from government policies are relevant to and influence village relocation and village merging activity plans at district level. These include:

- **The Focal Site Strategy and Village Consolidation Program**: this is the cornerstone of the Government's rural development policy. It is officially viewed as a necessary means to reduce shifting cultivation. It specifies that a village unit may comprise no fewer than 50 families which often results in the re-location of small settlements.
• **Opium Cultivation Elimination Program**: the emphasis of this program is on in situ alternative development rather than relocation of villages from opium producing areas. However, differing interpretations and application of the policy at district level sometimes results in the relocation of opium producing villages.

• **Shifting Cultivation Reduction and Alternate Occupations Program**: the program objectives are to stabilize shifting cultivation, stop indiscriminate logging, regenerate forests, and improve the living standard of upland people through the adoption of permanent land use systems.

• **Land and Forest Allocation Program**: MAF Instruction No. 822/1996, set general principles, specific targets and implementation procedures. Land allocation is often viewed at district level as a mechanism for reducing shifting cultivation which in some cases has resulted in the allocation of insufficient land to families.

### 2.3 Brief Description of Study Villages

#### 2.3.1 Ethnic Composition

The village of Huay Maha is a Khamu road-side settlement comprising two village groups, Huay Maha and Phoung Pao, which were amalgamated when land and forest allocation (LFA) was undertaken in 1997.

The villages of Pha Toup, Phou Soong Noy and Pha Cha Norm are inhabited by ethnic Hmong who have resided in the high country in the hinterland of Huay Maha. They started to migrate to Huay Maha in the year 2000 as a consequence of the district re-location plan. Since then families have continued to settle at the new Huay Maha site and the old Poung Pao village site nearby.

#### 2.3.2 Village Livelihood Systems

The Khamu group wish to retain a secure livelihood at their present location based on upland agricultural production, supplemented by handicrafts, some commercial tree crops (teak), non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and the raising of small animals and harvesting stream fish. They have a future interest in large animals such as cattle and buffalo but have few animals at present.

The Hmong villagers aim to attain a secure livelihood at their re-settled location in Huay Maha, mainly from upland agricultural cropping close to the road, and in suitable areas
within their old village boundary. They are experienced cattle raisers and wish to continue that activity on lands within their old village area, and/or in areas zoned for cattle production within the Huay Maha village area. They also wish to improve the education levels of their children so they could seek outside employment. Their plans included the phasing out of opium production BUT the villagers emphasise the importance of retaining land for cattle grazing to provide livelihood security while they adopt other commercial production activities.

### 2.4 Relocation and Village Merging Plans in Phonesay District

The Governor's Office indicated that the plan for relocation and village merging in Phonesay District aims to reduce the total number of 72 villages to 41 villages by the year 2005.

An examination of the District Relocation and Village Merging Plan - Phonesay District 2001-2005, indicates that this would entail the movement of the following populations between the year 2001 and the year 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>2,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/2003</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>7,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>1,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,725</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,472</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relocation may be justified and undertaken for any one of the following reasons.

- villagers live in sensitive or critical watersheds,
- villagers grow opium in mountainous areas,
- provision of extension and development activities is difficult,
- settlements have less than 50 families, and
- villages are located outside of "focal sites" or "growth centres".

The plan is not supported by any livelihood or land use analysis and leaves much of the responsibility for relocation with the communities themselves as indicated by an extract from the plan presented below.
Table 1: Extract from the District Relocation and Village Merging Plan - Phonesay District
2001- 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year for Resettlement</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Huay Pian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td>Two villages find one location and form 1 village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sun Gang</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mok Chong</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>01/02</td>
<td>Four villages move to the Nam Bak area and form one village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Huay Lon</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>01/02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kiew Ya</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>01/02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nong Khan</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>01/02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Huay Port</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td>Five villages find a location to form one village. The idea is they move to Sop Gia area, but this is not yet certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Huay Xiua</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Phan Ta Long</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mok La Hang</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Huay Soy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Phou Soong Noy</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>03/04</td>
<td>Five villages find a location and settle as one village (Huay Maha). Some are now moving to Pak Xeng Dist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Phou Cha Norm</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>03/04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Long Yom Yai</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td>Most have moved already to Long Ngat &amp; Long Sa Ao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Long Yom Noy</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>02/03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The plan includes the re-location of a total of 180 Hmong families from Pha Toup Tai, Phou Soong Noy and Pha Cha Norm to Huay Maha.

3. Research Activities

The action research activities followed the process indicated in the research procedure below.

3.2 Research Methodology

Field research was based on assessing the carrying capacity of lands available to the existing and projected population, both in the ‘host village’ of Huay Maha village and the villages being re-located, Ban Pha Toup, Phou Cha Norm and Phou Soong Noy, in order to assess the consequences of re-location, and, in consultation with district authorities, formulate possible solutions to problems identified. The process is summarised below.

Activity 1: Gathering secondary data from District Authorities and target villages

Activity 2: Verification of current village populations and projection of population trends in villages in which relocation is occurring

Activity 3: Verification and mapping of existing village boundaries of project target villages and adjoining villages with DAFES staff and villagers

Activity 4: Calculation of agricultural land available in ‘host’ and ‘neighbouring’ villages

Activity 5: Approximation of carrying capacity of the available land in both the host village and neighbouring villages
Activity 6: Livelihood discussions with representative farmers from each of the villages concerned to identify future farmer livelihood and land use strategies

Activity 7: Assessment of land requirements based on projected populations and livelihood strategies

Activity 8: Adjustment and demarcation of host village boundary to incorporate adequate land from neighbouring villages to support the projected population

Activity 9: Land and forest zoning using appropriate land use zoning criteria

Activity 10: Land management and use agreements for the expanded host village management area

4. Benefits Derived by Villagers

Representatives of the Hmong new settlers indicated they would derive the following benefits from moving to Huay Maha

- access to roads and transportation
- access to markets to buy and sell commodities
- improved access to health services, better educational opportunities
- access to better domestic water supplies

5. Issues Identified

Meetings with district authorities and the villagers identified the following issues and problems associated with re-location program in general and also with merging the Hmong and Khamu populations at Huay Maha.

4.1 Main Issues

- The District Authorities acknowledged that the district lacks adequate staff resources and budget to provide the infrastructure required for re-location on the scale outlined in the plan

- Re-location and land allocation programs are managed and implemented by different district agencies. This creates land allocation confusion when large numbers of new settlers occupy land in a host village.

- There is limited dialogue between concerned agencies and with Village Authorities when preparing the re-location plan.

- The land use strategies of the Hmong settlers and the District Authorities appeared to be similar, however, the livelihood options expressed by the District (vegetables and coffee) were not comparable with the strategies of the villagers (cattle raising, and rice, maize and job's tear production).
While some families accept re-location others wish to remain in their old village sites because they have economic assets there such as grazing land and cattle.

Population increase has been rapid. In 1997/98 Huay Maha/Poung Pao comprised 58 families with a population of 337 persons. By the end of the year 2002 the number of families had risen to 92 with a population of 647.

New settlers are using a variety of ways to access agricultural land including, borrowing fallow or "spare" land and paying the land tax instead of the original owner, renting land, and purchasing land from families migrating out of the village.

Land carrying capacity within Huay Maha village was inadequate for the number of Khumu and Hmong families planned for re-location there.

It would be necessary to expand village land areas beyond the boundaries of Huay Maha to enable the allocation of adequate arable land to new settlers.

Transportation of produce from far lands to the road head would need to be considered in the district strategy. Villagers stated they were ready to work with the District Authorities to build an access road for small vehicles.

Identification of village management areas (village boundaries) in both the host village of Huay Maha and the re-settling villages would be necessary to facilitate appropriate land use zoning.

4.2 Specific Land Use & Social Problems Being Encountered By Villagers

Most Khamu families have fewer plots of agricultural land to use; in the past they normally farmed 4 or more plots in rotation.

Some of the recent arrivals do not have parcels of land, ie, they have not been able to claim land in their new location.

Less quality agricultural land is available for some families forcing them to choose less fertile agricultural land.

The established rotational land cycle by families with 4 parcels or more has been disrupted or reduced because new settlers have acquired numerous parcels.

New settlers borrow land and pay the land tax to the Lands Office instead of the former owner with the aim of establishing claims to the land.

Farmers have adopted practices such as the sub-division of parcels and crop rotations as an alternative to plot rotations. Villagers referred to this as prayat din (save land). The
new land use practices on the one plot of land may involve continuous cropping for three years before returning the land to fallow.

- Imperata cylindrica grass has started infesting cropping fields.
- Significant numbers of land parcels allocated to Khamu residents by DAFO in 1997/98 have been vacated which will necessitate a re-distribution of land parcels.
- The mortality rate of Hmong settlers in Huay Maha, particularly children, had increased beyond normal levels since they moved from higher elevations, ie, nine deaths in the last two years.
- The Khamu families moved from Poung Pao to "new" Huay Maha have encountered several difficulties, including; being further away from farming lands, having to vacate their houses in the old village and build new houses, abandoning the permanent water supply at the old site for an incomplete supply at the new site. Hmong settlers are occupying land in the village area vacated by the Khamu.
- There have been eight cattle mortalities because Hmong cattle owners had to move and secure livestock in a small fenced enclosure at Huay Maha where there is very little grazing land; the animal losses were valued at Kip 6,400,000.
- The influx of Hmong families is associated with the original Khamu residents vacating allocated land. To date 121 hectares of allocated land has been vacated by 26 families who have migrated out. About half of the land has been acquired by Hmong families.

4.3 Villager Proposals for Resolving Land Shortage in Huay Maha

The villagers proposed the following solutions to overcome land shortages:

- Expand the village boundary of Huay Maha to include land in the village areas from which they are migrating.
- Allocate land so that families have some plots in the area adjacent to the road and other plots in the management areas of their old villages. A system of exchanging land between the villagers of Huay Maha, Ban PaToop, Phou Soong Noy and Cha Norm was suggested, ie, "laek plian din".
- Plant crops such as upland rice, maize and job's tear in the old village areas where soils and climatic conditions were more favourable.
- Pool labour to improve the walking track to the highland areas so that the transportation of cereal crops by horses and farm tractors to the main road and markets was made easier.
• Raise goats, cattle and buffalo in areas further away from the road, ("far fields")
• Construct fish ponds and undertake fish pond and frog culture in the areas near the road ("near fields").

4. Conclusions Arising from Action Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Development Strategy</strong></td>
<td>• The District Development Strategy (<em>pan utasart</em>), based on the policies for shifting cultivation reduction, opium reduction, and increasing forest cover, results in the concentration of populations in the more accessible areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Plan to Arrange Watersheds and Relocate Villages (<em>pan ngarn jut san prum nam le tau hom ban</em>) contributes significantly to this population concentration and land use confusion between the two ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Rural Development Planning</strong></td>
<td>• District planning time-frames are oriented towards achieving policy and programs targets by 2005/06, which results in a lack of focus on securing sustainable livelihood systems for villagers. This limits the effectiveness of programs to address and alleviate poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The decentralisation of responsibility to the local levels is severely straining the institutional capacity of district agencies including rural development planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Management at District Level</strong></td>
<td>• It is observed that inter-agency dialogue and planning of the district programs is limited, eg, the village re-location program and the land use planning and land allocation programs are managed and implemented by different district agencies and are not very well integrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Village Merging or Consolidation Program</strong></td>
<td>• The re-location plan is too large and rapid for the limited district resources to manage effectively, the plan being for the movement of 35 villages, 1,725 families and a population 11,472 by the Year 2003/04.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The villagers have strategies for coping with re-location which are similar in some ways to the District Administration’s strategies. However livelihood options are different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects of Re-location in Huay Maha Village</strong></td>
<td>• Confusion exists over land occupancy and use (see 4.2 above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Villagers have identified several problems and proposed solutions which if addressed by district Authorities would ameliorate the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population Growth, Land Availability and Land Demand in Huay Maha Village</strong></td>
<td>• The demand for land for upland cropping could be between 1,920-2,400 hectares by the year 2010 and between 2,400 and 3,000 hectares by the year 2020 if the re-location of families followed the proposed plan. The arable area of land in Huay Maha is only about 1,225 hectares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Village Livelihood Considerations</strong></td>
<td>• Consideration of village livelihood systems does not feature in the planning of re-location programs. Villagers have strategies and coping mechanisms that government staff should consider which would improve village merging programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Zoning and Land Allocation</strong></td>
<td>• Land re-zoning and land re-distribution or re-allocation will require quite detailed planning with Hmong and Khamu villagers because of the confused land use situation created by the re-location of Hmong villagers to Huay Maha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Village Land Use Agreements and Inter-Village Networking</strong></td>
<td>• Village land use agreements, and land use maps, will be essential tools in developing inter-village natural resources management networks based on appropriate groupings of villages within the small watershed of Huay Maha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Recommendations

District Development Strategy

- The strategy would be greatly improved if it was not bound by policy and development targets and re-orientated to match the limited availability of staff resources and funds. Available resources to implement a strategy should be a prime consideration in developing long-term development plans.

- Access to production land within reasonable distance of village sites should become a primary consideration in village consolidation programs, for, without a secure food based livelihood system the villagers will gain limited benefit from re-location if services promised are not delivered by the District Authorities, which is the case in Huay Maha.

District Rural Development Planning

- Villager participation in future planning needs to be increased to ensure that village livelihood objectives and strategies are incorporated by district staff in village land use and development planning.

- On site community planning and alternate development approaches to reduce village opium cultivation as practised by UNDCP supported projects, should be considered in the planning process at district level.

Land Management at District Level

- In future, inter-agency involvement in land management research should be strengthened to facilitate a bridging between the concerned district agencies implementing land management and land use programs.

- Building improved planning capability at district level should be addressed by:
  a) developing and implementing improved land use planning procedures with district staff and villagers.
  b) formulating possible solutions with the District authorities to address the potential negative consequences of the district re-location plan.
  d) demonstrating improved methods of land use planning that are “livelihood friendly” in selected sites for evaluation by district and provincial authorities.
The Village Merging and Re-location Program

- A re-think of the re-location targets and provision for larger village production areas should be considered so that the growing populations have access to adequate land in the future.
- Alternatives to re-location should be considered, including the construction of access tracks and small rural roads with villager assistance to enable villagers to retain production areas near old village sites. The provision of land tenure entitlements in agreed production areas, and the development of forest and land management agreements would need to be integrated with access road construction.
- The planning, costing and funding of infrastructural development and the provision of services at road-side locations should be undertaken prior to re-location. This also should be weighed up against the cost of bringing services to the people, through the construction of rural access tracks.

Population Growth and Land Demand

- Population growth projections and arable land area availability calculations should be incorporated in planning for village consolidation, because the present criteria of merging small settlements to achieve 50 families per village near roadsides isolates villagers from production areas, creates land shortages in the more accessible areas, and restricts production and livelihood potential and opportunities in the hinterlands.

Land Zoning and Land Allocation

- Responsibility for "land redistribution" and "land re-allocation" should be worked out by villagers, both Hmong and Khamu, with guidance from staff, to ensure that host village families are not being disentitled of their allocated land by the influx of new settlers and that new settlers receive fair allocations, using land re-zoning approaches (see below).
- Where village merging is undertaken, land and forest zoning and land allocation should focus on securing sustainable livelihoods within an "integrated village management area". In the case of Huay Maha, for example, the integrated village management area could include suitable lands in Huay Maha, Pha Toup Tai and Phou Soong Noy.

Village Land Use Agreements and Inter-Village Networking

- In re-location villages, Village Land Use Agreements should be prepared with villagers after land re-distribution and re-zoning is completed to encourage inter-village co-operation in agricultural land and forest management and use.
References


