

Final Report

Title: **Young Tea Expert Program**

1. Background

The Young Tea Expert Program is a continuous intervention launched from December 2024 and will end at the end of the project in December 2025.

Here is the background before this intervention:

The Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) is a project of the Government of Laos and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by Helvetas in partnership with the Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

Since 2014, LURAS has been supporting Green Extension in the North of Laos, which helps farming families to learn sustainable agricultural practices, thereby contributing to increases in production and income. Among other activities, the project supports forest friendly value chains, especially coffee and tea. Three projects managed by Helvetas (COPE, LURAS and BioTrade) have been working with local communities to ensure they benefit as much as possible from the opportunity that tea provides as an income generating activity considering the growing demand.

LURAS supported three farmer groups with processing and drying facilities, giving farmers the ability to process and store a saleable commodity rather than acting as pickers for other enterprises. This reduces their dependency on outside buyers, particularly in the rainy season when there is less demand for fresh leaves. Community-owned equipment and buildings also provide a focal point for collective action and group development. The three centres are used as learning centres for the farmers among themselves and for others to learn.

The project seeks to deepen work in clusters across all target provinces to enhance performance and sustainability of the tea value chain, including further enhanced collaboration and engagement with the private sector in providing extension services. LURAS will facilitate the development of business models and plans as part of the exit strategy for the Tea Learning Centres to ensure their continued operation post-project. Producers at the Centres should be further strengthened in basic skills, including entrepreneurship and investment for their businesses. Additionally, lessons learned and best practices from the development of the Centres will be assessed, documented and shared with other stakeholders, while creating synergies and linkages between the Learning Centres and other projects.

Currently, there are three tea learning centers established by the project with the main purpose:

- Collective processing: having processing facilities at the learning center, farmers can process their tea and sell the dry tea when there are no buyers or when the fresh leaf get very low prices. Farmer groups can do processing as a groups business.

- Shared Resources: Groups can use better processing equipment and training which individual farmers might not afford on their own. Apart from collectively use, individual farmers can rent the facilities for processing their tea.
- Knowledge Sharing: Skillful farmers who were trained by the project can facilitate other members their knowledge and best practices and help members improve their processing techniques and quality products. As well as a farmer to farmer learning center, where others come and learn about tea production and processing.
- Access to Markets: Organized group production can more easily access larger markets and establish direct relationships with buyers, bypassing intermediaries.

However, since establishing the learning centers and farmer group creation, market access is still their main problem particularly in rainy season (June to September) and after rain (September and November). In dry season, the tea (which is called spring tea), the farmers sell fresh leaf to local processing companies for a good price.

As requested by farmers, LURAS seeks to support them to address market problems in rainy season and after rain, as well as making the most use of learning center which means increasing of processing their own tea and sell as group produce whole year around. Experience in supporting the producer group we found that the work of accessing to markets is very challenging for the group leaders. It is changing the mindset in selling what they produce, producing what they can sell. To market the tea as a quality tea, farmers need knowledge, e.g., expertise about quality tea and tea processing skills (at the level of EXPERT), understand the market preferences, be able to do business planning, branding and marketing including online marketing, networking, customer services and financial management.

As one of the interventions to support farmers overcome these many challenges, LURAS seeks to focus on incorporation of the rural youth and young farmers to the groups and build their capacity in tea to support the groups with the different knowledge needs. Many of the youth in the target villages are very active in tea sector. Some of them are well educated, and most of them have knowledge in media tools. To build the expertise within the villages and to create income generation opportunities for youth in the tea sector, the project seeks to rollout a “Young Tea Expert Program”.

The support to the XK learning centers will help them to be able to become part of the Green Cup project. The youth program will transition the learning centers to the Green Cup activities. The support to the Thamlatai center, focuses on the sustainability of the learning center in HP in cooperation with commercial partners.

2. Purpose the purpose of the intervention from March to June 2025

The National Tea Expert was contracted to provide technical support to LURAS activities in the tea sector and prepare for the GREEN Cup project. He will continue to lead the Young Tea expert program and the development of business plan and remodeling of the learning center in Hiem, HP.

3. Key Responsibilities

The National Expert is responsible for the tea interventions in LURAS to support:

1. LURAS Tea activities with DAFO HP in coordination with XK based tea expert of LURAS
2. Facilitate the young Tea expert program
 - a. Prepare standardized processing procedures
 - b. Each learning center has SOPs and poster of tea processing
 - c. Media on young tea expert uploaded on social media platforms
3. Business plan and remodeling of Hiem Business plan
4. Prepare for the Green Cup project; explore scaling of the LURAS work in XK and HP and at national level

4. Expected Deliverables, Results & Outputs

1. 15 young experts with increased capacities about tea (baseline, capacity assessment).
2. Capacity enhancement in quality and quantities of tea farmers, include youth. through collaboration with Private sector
3. Simple business plan Hiem District learning centre
4. Remodelling of the HP learning centre

5. Achievement

Standardize tea processing

The youth from 3 learning centers, Ban Nyot Pieng, Ban Phone, and Ban Thamlatai learn the standard tea processing procedures and become tea processing expert in the future. There are new generation within each group working on tea and becoming tea experts.

The training is focus mainly on the processing of Mao Cha (sun-dry green tea) and black tea since they are the processing that need good care and attention.

Name of learning center	No. of Participants	No. of Young farmers	No. of Young female farmers	SOP knowledge status
Yordpieng	7	5	3	Skillful in processing
Phone	10	8	4	Moderate. Need more training
Thamlatai	5	4	2	Very basic. Need a lot of training

Kindly find tracking the expertise and in formation of the young farmers in [the Follow up forms and the report on Training Tea processing SOPs](#)

Photo: The tea processing manual developed by LURAS is used for the training SOPs.



Photo: Young tea farmers are being trained at Yordpieng Tea Learning Center



Photo: Young tea farmers are being trained at Ban Phone Tea Learning Center



Photo 6,7&8. Young tea farmers are being trained at Thamlatai Tea Learning Center with the observation of DAFO staff from Huaphan.



Media on young tea expert uploaded on social media platforms

The consultant tried to encourage the youth to create their FB page to promote their tea and tea activities within the groups. Ban Phone group create their FB page on December 8, 2024 by Ms. Buasee, (one of the young tea farmers) here is the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/16A5SXg5YP/>. Since creation, the youth have been quite actively posting their activities.

Yordpieng created FB page on 30 March 2025 (<https://www.facebook.com/share/1ANW2NenzP/>). Since creation there have been no activities posted. There is no FB page created by Thamlatai youth yet.



ຊາບ້ານໂພນ BanPhone Cha

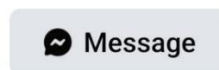


18 likes • 63 followers



ຊາບ້ານຍອດປຽງ

5 likes • 10 followers



Thamlatai business plan

As a discussion with the group, 2.000 Kip per 1 fresh kg is agreed for using the center facilities. The group would keep this contribution for maintenance of the center. What the real practice is should be followed.

Thamlatai was linked to SoGreen Laos Company who interested to buy 1 tons of the dry tea and would love to start with 500 kg in spring and 500kg in rainy season and after rain: black tea 300kg, white tea 200 kg, silver needle 100kg. However, first puck came late so the order was reduced to 310kg first in spring tea: 200 white tea and 100 kg black tea, 10kg of silver needle (150.000kip/kg of white and black tea and 1.000.000/kg of silver needle).

In real practices, the group could supply black tea 100 kg, 20 kg of white tea, and refused silver needle. The sale= $115 \times 150.000 = 17.250.000$ kip

Thamlatai learning center is expanded and renovated.

The former drying area was changed to whithering area (10*7m). It was changed from damaged clear plastic roof into zinc roof. The extended area (7*20 m) is for drying area and roofed with plastic film.

Photo: Removing old broken plastic roof...



to new zinc roof



Photo: The extended drying area will be roofed by plastic film.



Observation:

- 15 kg of white tea has an odor smell (the smell of rotten tea). This is because they were not aware of drying process (thick laying of the fresh leaf resulted in rotten tea and produced odor smell). Black tea is accepted in good quality.

- The delivered tea to the buyer was packed in black bag which is not a normal practice because the bag has strong plastic smell. The bag should be the clean bags for dry products.

What to do next? The consultant supported communication with the producers and the buyer. The group has to pay more attention to their processing of white tea, particularly the drying process. The smell is from thick-layer drying process of the fresh leaf. They should be trained on tea processing particularly white tea and green tea.

Although Thamlatai group has tea processing facility available, there is no plan that they will do collective processing or make the most use from their facilities. There are only a few families of the group leaders and a few youth participate in tea processing and selling to the buyers. Farmers in this group still keep their tea plantation but less activities in it since they focus to maize plantation which brings them quite a lot of work and income.

Lesson learn from the farmer visit to Yodpieng and ban Phone groups, the group leaders and the youth acknowledge that there are no clear responsibilities within the group organization and there is no clear plan to manage the group.

Find more information in [the report on Training Tea processing SOPs, and farmer visit report.](#)

Prepare for the Green Cup project; explore scaling of the LURAS work in XK and HP and at national level.

As the consultant work for both LURAS and Green CUP project, all of the LURAS work with the learning centers and Young Tea Expert Program are presented to Green Cup tea team. Within this 2025, Green Cup has some activities that are built up on what have been done by LURAS. Here are some of Green Cup intervention:

- Establish Tea Cooperative at Ban Phone
- Setting up an organic standard system at Ban Phone in preparation for EU markets
- Supporting Young Tea Expert to be farmer trainers on tea and organic standard.

Report on the youth activities attending meetings and events.

1. Attending Cooperative Day at NAFRI in Vientiane 12-13 May 2025. At this event, 3 young tea farmers (1 girl) from Thamla Tai group took their tea for exhibition and sale. 1 youth joined event for 2nd time, and it was the first time for the rest. There was little sale at this event, however there were a lot of visits from Minister of MAF, his colleagues and MAF staff.

- Product sold: 3 big bags and 4 small bags of white tea, 1 big bag and 1 small bag of green tea, 4 big bags and 5 small bags of black tea. Total sale= 1.000.000 Kip.
- What they learnt: tea brewing, tea serving and communication with customers.
- What did they do well: They are active and responsible.
- What to be improved: tea brewing, tea serving and communication with customers.
- Observation: The youth were quite shy in communication with the visitors. They did not know much about tea.

Photo: Youth from Thamla Tai group join Cooperative Day event





2. Serving tea at Green CUP meeting in Xiengkhuang 19 May 2025. 3 young tea farmers (1 girl) from Ban Phone group were invited to serve their tea at the meeting since Ban Phone is one of 9 target village of Green CUP.
 - b. Product sold: 30.000 Kip.
 - c. What they learnt: refresh their skills in tea brewing, serving and communicate with the guests.
 - d. What did they do well: They are active and responsible. Their skills in tea brewing, tea serving, and communication were improved.
 - e. What to be improved: 1 youth joined event at the first time. He is first learners and should improve more on communication skills.
 - f. Observation: The youth from this group remember what they have learn before and quite confident in communication with the guests.

Photo: Youth from Ban Phone group serving tea at Green CUP meeting



3. One woman youth from Ban Phone group was invited by Green CUP project to serving tea at the meeting in Vientiane on 26 May 2025.
 - Product sold: 100.000 Kip.
 - What they learnt: Improve her skills in tea brewing and serving from other tea producers from Xiengkhuang and Nyot, Ou Phongsaly.
 - What did they do well: Only one girl could manage serving tea to the participants.
 - What to be improved: She should train other youth on serving tea alone.
 - Observation: It was a good opportunity for the youth to learn from tea expert from Nyot Ou and from the processing company in Xiengkhuang.

Photo: Youth from Ban Phone group serving tea the meeting in Vientiane



Next Steps to support young tea experts:

Upcoming Activities	Key Deliverables
<p>1. Follow-up Training Sessions</p> <p>g. Conduct advanced training on tea processing (e.g., roasted green tea, black tea) for Ban Phone and Thamlatai groups, focusing on areas where they need improvement.</p> <p>h. Include hands-on practice sessions to reinforce skills.</p> <p>i. Training of Trainers for youth and group leaders to encourage their confidence and expertise to deliver their knowledge to others.</p>	<p>Improved tea processing skills across all groups.</p>
<p>2. Capacity Building and support the learning center ready for being trainers</p> <p>a. Provide additional training for Thamlatai's two leaders to improve their teaching skills.</p> <p>b. Support the group in training more youth to reduce dependency on the two leaders.</p> <p>c. Support Ban Phone Learning center leaders and the youth develop create modules for the topics that they can provide training services to other groups in Green CUP areas, and also for services to other organizations.</p>	<p>Improved tea processing skills for satisfied dry tea for the buyers.</p> <p>Training modules (Consolidated from learning material developed by LURAS)</p>
<p>3. Digital Marketing Support</p> <p>a. Train youth on social media management (e.g., FB page optimization, content creation) to promote their tea products.</p> <p>b. Assist Thamlatai in creating and maintaining an FB page, similar to Ban Phone</p>	<p>Increased activity and reach of FB pages for all centers.</p>
<p>4. Business Development</p>	<p>Thamlatai's business plan in action with measurable outcomes.</p>

<p>a. Help Thamlai tai group develop more practical business plan by using the template from EDC.</p> <p>b. Help Thamlatai to implement their business plan, including market linkages and product quality.</p>	
<p>5. Community Engagement</p> <p>a. Encourage youth to document and share their learning experiences (e.g., videos, photos) to inspire others.</p> <p>b. Organize local tea-tasting events or join events to showcase products and attract buyers.</p>	<p>Inspiration in tea production through media</p>