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## LAO UPLAND RURAL ADVISORY SERVICE (LURAS) PROJECT

The Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS) Phase III promotes a demand-driven pluralistic extension system, involving various service providers including self-determined farmer organizations. It has been established to support inclusive and resilient farming systems and agribusiness, which in turn creates fair and sustainable jobs and incomes for rural youth, farmer households, and local vulnerable communities. With a vision of a green and prosperous future for smallholder communities, the project aims to support the development of healthy and sustainable livelihoods for farming families and a vibrant inclusive rural economy in upland areas of Laos.

### WHY IS THIS PROJECT NEEDED?

The ongoing agrarian transition, growing crops for own consumption to commercial agriculture in the uplands of Laos, creates opportunities and threats to the livelihoods of farming families. Larger investments in upland areas of Laos have often led to unsustainable agricultural practices, which can severely impact the environment and local communities. Farmers require additional knowledge, skills and access to resources to organize themselves within the ongoing agricultural socio-economic changes and the effects of climate change.

The 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025 centers on a green growth strategy, promoting climate resilience actions, including clean, safe and sustainable agriculture. With this, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has promoted the implementation of the Green Extension concept, developed under the previous phases of LURAS, which is a type of rural advisory service that supports the scaling up of sustainable agriculture by facilitating socio-ecological learning processes with farmers.

### WHAT DOES THE PROJECT DO AND HOW?

LURAS collaborates with a range of partners from Government, private sector and civil society to improve the profitability and sustainability of agricultural production, processing and marketing activities carried out by farming families and producer organizations. This involves community-based learning activities in selected districts and institutional capacity building at the provincial and national levels. The key strategic elements for the intervention of Phase III are (a) promoting innovation through Green Extension to help small farmers increase incomes and improve product quality; (b) creating decent employment and income opportunities for rural youth through the

Agripreneurs for Green Rural Enterprises and Employment (AGREE) scheme; (c) supporting win-win partnership between farmers and responsible enterprises; (d) focusing on value chains for quality products with stable premium prices such as specialty coffee and forest tea; and (e) implementing community-based adaptation to climate change through the Climate Resilient Extension Development (CRED) process.



**Green extension** is a type of rural advisory service which supports the scaling up of sustainable agriculture. This approach facilitates learning processes with farmers considering the environmental and human aspects of practices in and around farming. It includes a range of participatory methods to test and promote different sustainable agricultural production systems and explores market opportunities informed by an analysis of local challenges and opportunities.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROJECT'S MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS?

#### Green Extension

Transformation is vividly seen in the coffee sector in the village of Keoset cluster in Xieng Khouang, where farmers embrace organic cultivation methods and adopt integrated pest management techniques. By partnering with private companies, farmers gained access to technical expertise and secure contracts. Farmers were able to climb up the value chain, moving from selling raw cherries to processing parchment and green beans. This shift diversifies their income sources, protects them from market monopolies, and significantly boosts community earnings. LURAS supported with community-managed facilities, including nurseries and processing centers. This not only ensures higher-quality coffee but also transforms the village into a vibrant learning center, drawing farmers from other regions as well as other public and private actors. The learning centre coupled with a range of educational materials makes Keoset a model of green extension,



#### Youth Entrepreneurship

LURAS AGREE (Agripreneurs for a Green Rural Economy and Employment) aims at providing profitable and creative opportunities for rural youth in Laos. Young people were supported through technical training, business planning workshops, and start-up grants, allowing them to establish their own micro-enterprises. In partnership with the Lao Youth Union, the program trained 231 youth (100 female) in various agricultural activities. 156 (64 female) received grants to start their businesses to implement innovation and the use of new technologies, such as veterinary services, agricultural product processing, machinery repairs and animal feed production. AGREE has become a model for similar initiatives by other donors, such as SDC and Helvetas, demonstrating its success in empowering rural youth and strengthening local economies.

#### Policy Dialogue and Farmers Voice

LURAS, as the Secretariat for the Sub-Sector Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness (SSWGFAB) which is co-chaired by the Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperatives (DAEC) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), provides a dialogue platform to identify lessons regarding agribusiness development and smallholder services. LURAS supports a wide dissemination of information on agriculture and rural development through LaoFAB, a digital forum with a repository of more than 6000 documents, and a social media presence. Additionally, LURAS has collaborated with the Lao Farmer Association (LFA). LFA provides a voice for small farmers, allowing them to analyze their challenges and present their concerns directly to policymakers.

<b>Project Name</b>	Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS)
<b>Project Duration</b>	Phase I: December 2014 – November 2017/ Phase II: December 2017 – November 2022 Phase III: December 2021 – June 2026
<b>Donors</b>	Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC)
<b>Main Partner</b>	Department of Agriculture Extension and Cooperative (DAEC)
<b>Goal</b>	To promote a demand-driven pluralistic extension system to support an inclusive and resilient farming systems and agribusiness, which creates fair and sustainable incomes for local communities
<b>Target Groups</b>	Smallholder farmers, rural youth, farmer organisations
<b>Target Areas</b>	Xieng Khouang, Huaphan, Luang Prabang and Oudomxay
<b>Budget</b>	CHF 5,385,000 (Phase III)
<b>More Information</b>	<a href="https://www.helvetas.org/LURAS">https://www.helvetas.org/LURAS</a>

