

Update from GPAR Xiengkhouang!



GPAR Xiengkhouang Newsletter

Greetings to all from GPAR Xiengkhouang!

The Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) project, Xiengkhouang, which is part of the national Governance and Public Reform programme, is led by the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA). The project was established in July 2005. Full-fledged implementation commenced after the inception activities were introduced from September 2005 to March 2006.

The project works out of the Office of the Governor of the Provincial Administration of Xiengkhouang. The project is guided by the Leading Committee for GPAR, headed by His Excellency Mr. Viengthanom Phommachan, Vice Governor of Xiengkhouang.

Our overall goal is to strengthen public administration for poverty reduction and equitable growth. The project has pursued a wide range of activities to address the needs of the Provincial Departments and District Administration in Xiengkhouang. These included:

- ◆ Piloting new procedures and reforms with technical assistance;
- ◆ Building capacity through formal training, mentoring and study tours;
- ◆ Providing limited amount of critical office equipment;
- ◆ Strengthening coordination in the province and with Central ministries;
- ◆ Improving awareness about good governance among officials and public.

Reforms: The project assisted the administration to introduce reforms in expanding and financing agriculture extension, implementing the National Accounting System, initiating a human resource database and establishing a provincial governance information centre.

In addition to the in-house team of technical advisors, the project provided services of an agriculture development advisor, a team of ICT consultants from the GPAR Central project, and a public communication consultant. The project also facilitated support from PACSA, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare, and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.



Mm. Bounpheng Mounphoxay addressing GPAR meeting

Capacity building: Specialized training on strategic management, project management and process mapping for senior officials of the administration has been organised throughout 2006. Some senior officials were sponsored to attend courses in Vientiane and Japan on themes such as leadership and local development.

Numerous provincial officials were given training in the use of information technology (68) and English speaking (49). Key officials participated in study tours to the GPAR projects in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Saravane, to national projects in Luang Namtha

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01/07 Newsletter

Dear Reader

Governance and Public Reform Project, Xiengkhouang entered the new year after a very successful experience in 2006. The project team has the privilege to present an update on our recent work and plans for 2007 in this issue of the newsletter.

We introduce the reader to some of our key activities and achievements. These are the result of the intensive efforts of our dedicated partner offices, who strengthened the performance of their offices and supported the project. We are grateful to the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for their close cooperation during 2006.

We hope you will find the information we share here useful and insightful. As always, we look forward to your continuing support and advice.

Team GPAR Xiengkhouang

Agriculture Development Support Fund

Agriculture in Xiengkhouang

When people visit Xiengkhouang, they are always impressed by the green hills, small valleys and villages that are scattered over the countryside. Around 93% of the province's population of 220,000 people, live in rural villages, that are often scattered in small clusters, many of which are inaccessible by road. GDP per capita in the province is 316 US-Dollars. About a third of these households have been identified as very poor. Any effort to improve the quality of life of these poor households depends very heavily on agriculture development.

Agriculture development efforts

The provincial administration is making efforts on several fronts to accelerate agriculture development through the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFEOs). In addition to promoting new technologies, these offices offer services to improve cattle breeding, providing fingerlings for fisheries, training for farmers, etc. The province has allocated 165 Million kip (about \$16,800) for agriculture development activities during 2006-07, in addition to providing salaries for all staff.

Supporting agriculture development

Xiengkhouang province has received significant international assistance for agriculture development. The United Nations (UN) assisted projects for opium eradication and International Fund for Agriculture Development

(IFAD) assisted projects to improve rural infrastructure and agriculture have made large investments. More recently the large Nam Ngeum Watershed project has commenced work. Technical interventions to promote market oriented agriculture by the Small-scale Agro enterprise Development for Uplands (SADU) project, and new approaches for forage development through Project De National Agro Ecology (PRONAE) are also taking place.

Strengthening extension

The significance of agriculture at this juncture lies in its ability to serve large segments of the population, including the very households, to better utilize the little land and assets they have, without large capital investment or infrastructure creation. The Lao Extension Approach (LEA) has been developed by the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) to guide extension services. This approach has been piloted in two villages of Khoum district and is ready for expansion through the province. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is helping provincial and district offices to restructure extension services, and make available more staff to work closely with village clusters.

Funds for extension services

Many projects in Xiengkhouang have supported development of infrastructure and pilot testing new technologies. But very little effort has previously been made to build on these lessons, and extension services have been normally provided



through project only. Hence, the GPAR project established the Agriculture Development Support Fund (ADSF) primarily to provide small block grants to help DAFEOs directly provide extension services during 2006, with guidance of PAFO. The block grants were maintained at a small size (\$1500 per district) in order to help them gain experience with this modality. Since sustainability is a key priority, the strategy was to expand slowly with funds from the normal provincial budget leading the way, and GPAR supporting them.

The DAFEOs were provided with simple management tools to prepare work plans, manage funds and report on work progress. This enabled small teams (usually one experienced and one new staff member), to initiate and deliver extension service in two villages, and share the lessons with the rest of the DAFEO. In addition to providing services to these villages, the approach enabled capacity building in the new staff through mentoring and sharing insights from experience in the region.

The leadership of the provincial administration has assessed the results, and allocated approx \$16,000 to scale up extension services using the ADSF approach across all 8 districts. Hence, all districts will receive some support from the provincial budget to address their priorities, without having to depend completely on international assistance. This step by the administration is a key achievement of GPAR Xiengkhouang in 2006.



After evaluation of achievements at Nong Het District

First Provincial GPAR Convention

The purpose

The first Provincial GPAR Convention took place on November 23rd, 2006. GPAR Xiengkhouang organized this convention with the aim of:

- informing national and provincial stakeholders about project progress
- providing provincial stakeholders with lessons learnt during 2006;
- enabling non-partner offices to identify aspects of mainstreaming
- sharing information with other GPAR projects

The participants

The workshop was chaired by Mr. Khampian Sinouanthong, Head of Provincial Committee for Organization & Personnel (PCOP) of Xiengkhouang. Members of the GPAR Steering Committee of Xiengkhouang, a representative from PACSA, and Project managers from GPAR projects of Luang Prabang and Saravane, attended the Provincial GPAR Convention.

The participants were drawn from all the different provincial departments,

the eight districts, and the GPAR team, which amounted to 44 people, of which 7 were women.

The results

The GPAR team provided an overview of the main achievements. Thereafter, GPAR Coordinators from each

partner office made presentations, about the main activities carried out by their office in relation to the project during 2006, and outlined the plans being prepared for 2007.

Participants sought clarifications on several activities. Representatives from non-partner offices wanted to know if assistance of the GPAR project could be provided to them.

Mr. Seud Soulinhaddej, Director General of Local Administration Department of PACSA, in his comments



Provincial GPAR Convention, 2006 at Xiengkhouang

opined the Convention was an excellent opportunity to share lessons, and that this approach should be continued. He pointed out that resources are often a constraint, but no project would be able to support such a wide set of activities across a province. He suggested that pilot activities which are seen as very useful need to be scaled up with resources of the administration wherever possible, and that such initiatives are going to be critical for the rapid development of Xiengkhouang.

Reports and tools being developed

Although the primary aim of the GPAR project is to facilitate the implementation of governance reforms in Xiengkhouang, many of the lessons from the experience are relevant to other provinces as well as strengthening national policy. Hence, the project is making specific efforts to document experiences and reports by technical experts, in a reader friendly format, so that it can be shared widely.

The basic documents are being compiled by the project and related policy papers collected from government to provide potential users with an integrated set, that can be put to use. Professional services are being secured to ensure that documents are well designed, and convenient for users.

These outputs will also be made available through the provincial website in a suitable format.

An important part of the effort will be in disseminating these resources locally. The project has plans to share key documents with partner offices, and encourage these offices to maintain technical libraries, in hard copies and electronic form, for use by staff and consultants in the future.

The documents being compiled are:

- ◆ Public Communication Strategy for Xiengkhouang province (Consultant report: November 2006)
- ◆ Agriculture Development Support Fund for Xiengkhouang province (Special Report being prepared)

- ◆ Functional Analysis of Provincial Dept. of Finance (Consultant report: August 2006)
- ◆ Introduction of Human Resource Databases and Payroll Systems (Special Report being prepared)
- ◆ Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming in Human Resource Management (Study Report being finalized)
- ◆ Extension Services to Promote Non-Timber Forest Produce (Study Report being finalized)
- ◆ Opportunities for Small & Medium Enterprises for Women in the Agriculture Sector (Study Report being finalized)

Some Key Activities and Initiatives in 2007

Trade & Investment

A key activity of the GPAR project is to support economic growth in Xiengkhouang. An international consultant is expected to assess the status of trade and investment, and provide suggestions for strengthening the institutional support by offices of the provincial administration in this regard. In the course of his work, the consultant will meet with officials in the ministries, traders and investors in Xiengkhouang and with key agencies such as UNDP, The World and ADB. The recommendations are also expected to strengthen the information available on trade and investment in Xiengkhouang.

The consultant will provide advice on establishing a public private task force, which would assist the provincial administration to promote investment in Paek district. The experience with establishing associations of business and Chambers of Commerce will be applied here.

Village Development Funds

A strategic tool of the Govt. of Lao PDR to assist poor households in their efforts to improve livelihoods is the Village Development Fund (VDF). These funds have been introduced in Xiengkhouang, and have been provided to targeted households in selected villages. The project will build

on an initial assessment of the performance of the Village Development Funds with the help of a national consultant, to identify strategic next steps. The recommendations are expected to provide the provincial and district administration with approaches to effectively monitor the delivery and management of funds, and to strengthen sustainability of the fund.

The project will also use the opportunity to strengthen the involvement of the Committee for Planning and Investment in monitoring the progress of Village Development Funds. An effort will also be made to see how the selection of villages for expanding extension services could be aligned to delivery of VDF support.

Service delivery assessments

Xiengkhouang province will be part of the assessment of service delivery being organized on behalf of the three provincial GPAR projects by UNDP. The other provinces where the assessment will be carried out are Luang Prabang and Saravane. PACSA is providing overall guidance for the assessment, which will be the first of its kind carried out in Lao PDR. The focus of the assessment in case of Xiengkhouang will be agriculture related services. The survey will take place in selected villages in the three partner districts, with support of DPI and PAFO.

Findings from the survey will provide the province with baseline information on the status of service delivery, and provide benchmarks for assessing improvements. It is also expected to provide diagnostic information for planning project activities.

One-Stop Service Centre

After the study tour to Vietnam and India, there is wide interest in the administration to establish One-Stop Service Centres in the province. A study visit to the similar Centre, set up in Saysetta district in Vientiane, will be followed by a feasibility study on establishing a pilot One-Stop Service Centre in Xiengkhouang. The recommendations from the feasibility study will go into designing the scope and activities of the pilot which is expected to come up in Paek district.

The Centre is also expected to be the nodal point for meeting the information requirements of households and business' in the district. Hence, the scope of the Service Centre will be multi-purpose, and seek to serve a broad range of requirements of households and business in Paek district. This will be implemented with support of provincial departments and district administration in Paek.

Welcome to GPAR Xiengkhouang (cont...)

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and international study tours to Vietnam and India.

Equipment support: The project counterparts were provided with basic office equipment to effectively support project implementation. This included motor-bikes, desktop computers and filing cabinets, The Office of Governor, Dept. of Finance, Provincial Committee for Organization and Personnel have been provided with desk top computers and filing cabinets to enable effective implementation of reforms.

Strengthening coordination: The provincial administration has worked with key ministries to implement the re-

forms. The work on human resource management has been carried out with the support of PACSA and Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare, the National Accounting System with Ministry of Finance, and agriculture extension expansion with Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The project supported better local coordination by organizing Information Sharing workshops for all projects, at the provincial level and in three districts.

Good Governance Awareness: Project activities helped to widen the benefits and impact of reforms by improving awareness. Thematic workshops on public expenditure management, and strengthening service delivery, were well attended from the province and

districts, and provided a forum to assist other provinces namely Luang Prabang and Huaphanh.

The project initiated steps to support greater role and effectiveness of women staff working on agriculture extension in the districts. in 2006. We also promoted governance awareness through an essay and speaking competition in English among school children and government officials.

The Provincial GPAR Convention was organized in December to inform all departments and districts about the content and progress of GPAR in Xiengkhouang. A newsletter for Nai-bans (village chiefs) is being prepared to reach every village.



GPAR Xiengkhouang Project Team

GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM PROJECT XIENKHOANG



Office Of the Governor, Xiengkhouang
Phonsavang Village, Paek District,
Xiengkhouang Province, Lao PDR
Phone: +856-(0)61-213-212/3
Fax: +856-(0)61-213-214
Email: gparxk@laotel.com

GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM: XIENKHOANG

GPAR Steering Committee of Xiengkhouang Province:

Chairperson:

Mr. Viengthanom Phommachanh, Vice Governor, Xiengkhouang

Members:

Mr. Khampian Sinouanthong, Director, Comm. for Orgn. & Personnel
Mr. Douangchit Xayvang, Director, Dept. of Planning & Investment
Mr. Bounton Chanthaphone, Director, Department of Finance
Mr. Bouasone Dalavong, Director, Provincial Agriculture and Forestry
Mr. Somsouk Saengkhamyong, Director, Department of Commerce
Mr. Somvandy Sisouphanh, Director, Office of National Assembly

Project Duration

Date of commencement: July 7, 2005

Expected date of completion: July 6, 2009

Partner Offices in Province

- ◆ Office of Governor
- ◆ Provincial Committee for Organization & Personnel
- ◆ Dept. of Planning & Investment
- ◆ Department of Finance
- ◆ Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
- ◆ Department of Commerce and Industry
- ◆ Paek Districts
- ◆ Khoun District
- ◆ Nong Het District

Supporting us in Xiengkhouang



GPAR Xiengkhouang – Strengthening Public Administration for Poverty Reduction and Equitable Growth was established with support from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV).

The donors saw potential of linking rural development, poverty and governance. Xiengkhouang provided an ideal opportunity to accommodate the government's request for support within an area, that is of importance for the continuing effort to ensure sustainable development in Lao PDR.



As the project of its work in governance sector, UNDP supported the design and implementation of GPAR Xiengkhouang at the provincial level to strengthen administration with emphasis on coherent decentralization and effective delivery of public services. It coordinates support of other donors to the project.

SDC, which is co-funding the project, is active in Xiengkhouang, supporting two agricultural projects in the province: Small-Scale Agro-enterprise Development for the Uplands project (SADU) and Lao Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP). GPAR Xiengkhouang thus provided the opportunity to increase SDC's activities within the area of agriculture, but this time from the perspective of a sustainable and long term engagement with

the provincial administration in development.

The project is also supported by the SNV Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), who are providing technical assistance to the project. This contributes to the provincial administration by making available suitable advisors who help build capacity in the provincial and district administration in Xiengkhouang and assist in implementing the various activities of the project on the ground.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Govt. of Lao PDR, officers of the Provincial and District Administration and our donors for their strong and continuing support.

