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Skills-based and Practice-oriented Curriculum Development for Sustainable Upland Agriculture in Northern Laos – Reaching Ethnic Groups and Women

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Abstract

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) of the Lao People's Democratic Republic had set up a working group that analysed the situation of agricultural education in 5 specialised colleges since 2006. This working group came to the conclusion that the existing agricultural education was not enough practice-oriented and that the graduates did not have the skills required on the labour market. Therefore a project was planned in 2008 and its implementation started in early 2009. Within this project (SURAFCO) funded by SDC a method for participatory curriculum development was developed with the aim to make it skills-based and practice-oriented, and also to reach ethnic groups and women. The present paper describes the steps that were implemented to achieve a skills-based and practice oriented curriculum.

The method developed started with a framework analysis and an analysis of professional profiles: possible professions and positions that the graduates might work in after graduation were identified, and professionals in the public and private sectors interviewed. This step resulted in an overview of professions and related professional skills and competences. Then a first tentative structure of the curriculum was developed, with three majors (crop production in the uplands, livestock production in the uplands, and agribusiness). The professional skills were reformulated in a way that they could be included in the revised curriculum, while a modular structure was elaborated. Different module types for theoretical, mixed or practical topics were shaped, and the skills allocated. The next step consisted in the elaboration of the modules, with description of the main elements required to achieve the expected skills and competencies. Finding the right mix between theory, applied theory and practice is a major challenge. Finally, the detailed planning of modules (including lesson planning, preparation of teaching aids, teaching methods, etc.) was elaborated. The inclusion of ethnic groups and women in the reform process are discussed.

Keywords: Agriculture education, skills-based curriculum, student centred teaching, upland farming systems