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## The Impact of Agrarian Transformation on Rice Sufficiency in Northern Lao

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effects of agrarian change on rice sufficiency in Xayaburi province, Lao PDR through a meso-scale and actor-oriented approach with data collection at both district and household level. Increasing market accessibility in rural areas facilitates cash crop trade leading to agrarian change from subsistence to commercial agricultural systems. This transformation raises concerns about rice sufficiency as farmers are likely to grow cash crops intensively and in place of food crops such as their staple rice, leading to lower rice production. Meanwhile incomes from cash crop trade are highly vulnerable to market uncertainties and may not be sufficient to compensate the losses of rice production.

In Xayaburi province, commercial agriculture has largely taken place since 2000 due to improved market accessibility and intensified cross-border trade with Thailand, especially in the southern part of the province which is endowed with level terrain and major border-crossings to Thailand. Farmers specialise in growing maize for markets in Thailand. Contrary to the widely held concern that agrarian change has a negative effect on food security, we found that though farmers in the south of Xayaburi give priority to growing cash crops, they do not suffer from rice insufficiency. The key to this achievement is their strategy to keep a part of their land for growing rice to meet their minimum consumption needs and prevent the risk of rice insufficiency. Out of an average household agricultural area of 4 ha, they allocate around 0.8 ha for rice production. This strategy is facilitated by availability of a sufficient amount of arable land due to the prevalence of level terrain. Farmers' reasons to keep rice also include the fact that rice can be grown both as food crop and as cash crop, that it is suitable for a variety of environments, and also its spiritual value. Moreover, improved market accessibility can mitigate the risks of market uncertainty and create enough income to compensate for and overcome losses in rice production.

**Keywords:** Agrarian change, Lao PDR, market accessibility, rice sufficiency