

Fostering site-specific market options to improve rural livelihoods in Laos

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Development challenges

Upland environments and livelihoods in Southeast Asia are heterogeneous. In Laos, the varied mountainous landscape and ethnic diversity are home to the poorest farming communities (Figure 1). Many development intervention strategies have been suggested to increase household income and to reduce rural poverty. However, development policies and projects tend to be insensitive to locality, often overlooking diversity in production environments, market contexts and cultural groups.

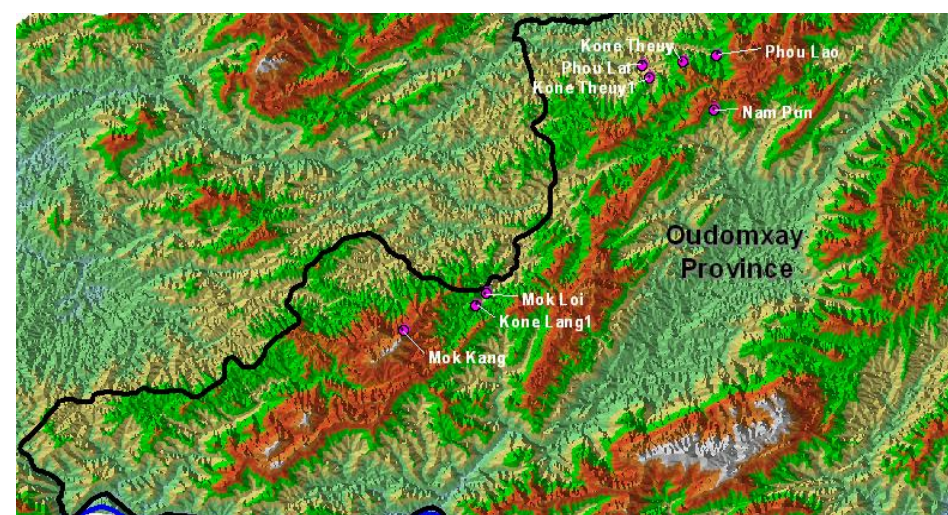


Figure 1. Digital elevation map Oudomxay Laos (90 meter resolution)

Broad-based efforts are likely to benefit only certain areas and peoples while marginalizing others. Hence, no single strategy can significantly improve the livelihoods of all upland dwellers. A site-specific portfolio of options must be identified and implemented according to the capacities of the production environment, interest of people and market demand. In addition to agricultural activities, a key livelihood strategy of rural dwellers is the collection and sale of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Figure 2 demonstrates the diversity of land uses in Oudomxay.

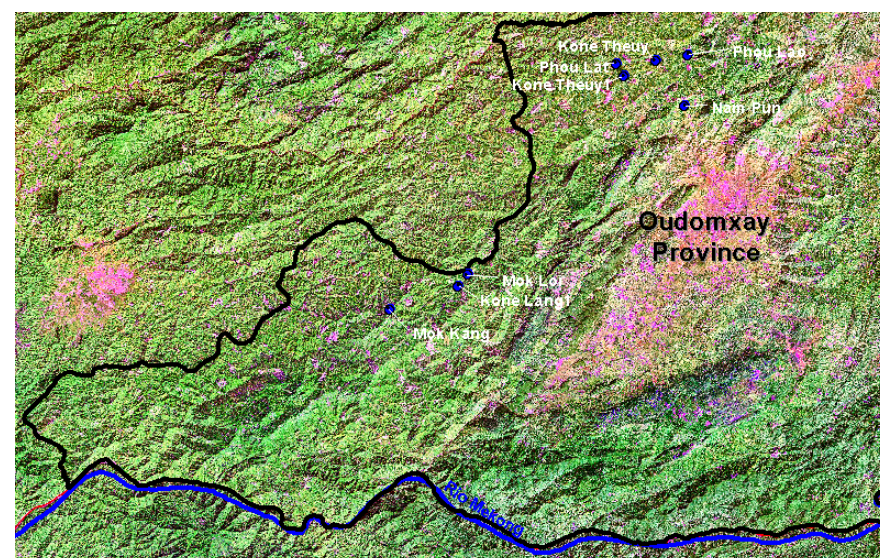
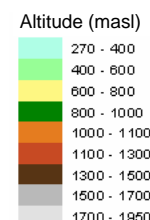


Figure 2. Landsat 2000 image of Oudomxay, 14-metre resolution. Agricultural fields are coloured in pink

Project objectives

The objective of this research project is to enable rural dwellers to effectively engage in market activities while maintaining and enhancing the productive capacity of their lands. To achieve this, the project comprises three inter-related components:

- 1) collaborative action research with partners, e.g. government ministries, village committees, the private sector, and IFAD*
- 2) participatory assessment of local livelihood and natural resource constraints and opportunities,
- 3) local capacity building to link farmers to markets.

*International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) project: 10 years, Euro 15m

Expected outcomes

The project hypothesizes that: (a) the systematic organization of site-specific information on natural and socio-cultural resources will facilitate (b) effective project interventions and policy analyses that, in turn, will (c) enable communities and development practitioners implement strategies that are appropriate to local conditions for equitable and sustainable development.

By doing so, the project approach supports the achievement of three UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1),
- ensure environmental sustainability (MDG 7),
- support the development of global partnerships for rural development (MDG 8).



Further information

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