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Mori Grant Report

PESTICIDE-RELATED RISKS TO PUBLIC HEALTH:

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR LAOS?

Case study: Savannakhet

1. Fieldwork in Savannakhet

Table 2. Key indicators of the visited villages

	Village 1 Ban Xok	Village 2 Ban Pakkha	Village 3: Ban Nakae (near Savannakhet- Mukdahan Bridge)
Population	5154	2532	NT
Houses	865	552	NT
Family	924	491	NT
Agricultural Population	95%	NT	10%

- Interviews with 11 local farmers at Village (1) and (2)

Table 3: Village (1):

	Produce	Consumption Destination	Use of Pesticides	Health impacts	A0 awareness
Farmer 1	Rice, peanut, cucumber, spinach	Self consumption Sale at Savanh market	Yes	No	No
Farmer 2	Sticky rice cabbage	For sale	Yes	Tired, dry throat, suffocation and rash	No
Farmer 3	Rice, cucumber, cabbage	-Self consumption -For sale at Savanh market	Yes	tired	No
Farmer 4	Rice, vegetable, peanut, coconut	-self consumption -For sale at home	Yes	No	No
Farmer 5	Morning glory, coconut	-Self consumption -For sale	Yes + fertilizer	tired	No
Farmer 6	Rice,	-Self consumption	Yes	Tired,	No

	vegetables	For sale	(Fohidol, Kordon)	suffocating	
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Table 4: Village (2)

	Produce	Consumption Destination	Use of Pesticides	Health impacts	AO Awareness
Farmer 1	Rice, corn, animal food	Self consumption Sale at market Sale to a Thai company (corn)	Yes	No	No
Farmer 2	Rice, corn, animal food, vegetables	Self consumption (vegetables) Sale at market at Savanh or Thailand Sell corn to a Thai company	Fertilizer provided by Thai company	No, but he knows the negative impacts on lung and liver	NO
Farmer 3	Herbs, husbandry, rice	For sale at home and at market	No	No	No
Farmer 4	Rice, banana	Self consumption For sale	Yes	No	No
Farmer 5	Rice, corn, cucumber, vegetables	Self consumption Sale (corn)	Yes (hormone)	Headache	No

2. Observations:

(1) The use of pesticides is often decided by the farmers' own judgment, not suggested by any program (pesticides started being widely used in 1990s even though Green Revolution was promoted in 1960s. Before 1990s, the system of agricultural cooperatives by Soviet Union as well as USAID rice seed were abandoned in Laos!)

(2) Laos has an almost identical policy for economic development as Vietnam's Doi Moi.

(3) Most of the pesticides purchased are from Thailand at quite expensive prices

(4) The subsistence economy is being replaced by the introduction of market economy in certain areas.

(5) Pesticide-related health problems are not yet a concern/ not yet "visible" to local farmers. Therefore, protection measures are not seriously taken.

3. A possibility

Learning from what Vietnam has gone through, I believe that the more Laos is market-oriented and integrated into the regional and international environment (AFTA, 1997), the higher the pressure will be created on its agricultural sector. The increasing abuse of pesticides and

other toxic chemical will be inevitable. This, as a result, will soon lead to serious pesticides-related health problems like Vietnam or Thailand. Laotian farmers will be asked (by groups of experts) to decide between “cash then health” or “health then cash”.

4. Hypothesis:

The introduction of market economy into Laos is speeded up and spread to both central and rural areas, not by the central government, but through the intensive border trade with Thailand along the Mekong River. This, in return, will promote the use of pesticides in agriculture in Laos, resulting in related public health problems.

Relevant facts:

- Thailand has a border about 1,810 km long with Lao PDR. The Thai-Lao border has 36 crossing points including 2 Friendship Bridges².
- The flow of people between Thai and Laos has increased tremendously
- Thai traders “attack” Laos market with cheap commodities and introduce the use of pesticides through TV programs, or by bringing them to Laos market
- Thai companies encourage Laotian farmers to turn to “cash crops” (example: producing corn for Thai companies)
- The self-subsistence ability is eroding. The local farmers are relying more and more on markets, and thus on cash crop and cash income. At the same time, they have to compete with Thai cheap agricultural products at local markets by increasing the productivity in the shortest time and lowering the price.
- The promising border trade has attracted farmers to turn away from their farms and start doing trading at the border instead→ Shrinkage of agricultural population, which creates higher pressure for maintaining the productivity on the rest of the farmers.

¹ Dominuqe Van der Borght, p.11

² Srawooth Paitoonpoing, 2007: Thailand’s cross-border Trade in the Greater Mekong Sub-region: Selected Social Issues, CCAS Working paper
<http://ccas.doshisha.ac.jp/publications/WP9srawooth.pdf>