Since the introduction of forages for livestock production in 1995, smallholder farmers in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) have begun to fatten cattle, buffalo, pigs and goats on a regular basis for local and export markets (Stur et al. 2002). Increased livestock production has brought many livelihood benefits to rural households (Millar et al. 2005). However, these benefits are unequally distributed according to geographical location, ethnicity, family structures, prevalence of livestock disease and poverty levels. This paper draws on case study research and development literature to examine the social and cultural implications of scaling out livestock production in the Lao PDR.
Social and cultural implications of scaling out livestock production in the Lao PDR

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Key words: forages, livestock production, scaling out, cultural diversity

Introduction

Since the introduction of forages for livestock production in 1995, smallholder farmers in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) have begun to fatten cattle, buffalo, pigs and goats on a regular basis for local and export markets (Stur et al. 2002). Increased livestock production has brought many livelihood benefits to rural households (Millar et al. 2005). However, these benefits are unequally distributed according to geographical location, ethnicity, family structures, prevalence of livestock disease and poverty levels. This paper draws on case study research and development literature to examine the social and cultural implications of scaling out livestock production in the Lao PDR.

Materials and Methods

Social research methods have been used since from 2004 to capture and evaluate emerging production and livelihood impacts using semi-structured interviews and case studies (Yin 1994). Twenty six provincial and district extension staff were trained to conduct interviews, interpret digital images and develop case studies across five districts in two upland provinces (Millar et al., 2005). Table 1 summarises the 32 case studies according to ethnic group and livestock systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No of ethnic group households</th>
<th>Livestock systems</th>
<th>Forage systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pek</td>
<td>3 Hmong</td>
<td>Buffalo, Cattle</td>
<td>Grasses- cut and carry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonghet</td>
<td>11 Hmong</td>
<td>Cattle, Buffalo, Pigs, Horses</td>
<td>Grasses and Stylo- cut and carry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak Ou</td>
<td>3 Lao Loum</td>
<td>Pigs, Poultry, Goats</td>
<td>Stylo-fresh and in feed mix Grasses and Stylo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xieng Ngeun</td>
<td>3 Lao Loum, 3 Hmong, 4 Lao Theung, 1 Kasak</td>
<td>Cattle, Buffalo, Goats, Pigs</td>
<td>Grasses, Tree Legumes, Stylo/Sweet Potato, Maize, Cassava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Prabang</td>
<td>3 Lao Loum, 1 Hmong</td>
<td>Pigs, Goats</td>
<td>Stylo/Sweet Potato, Grases and Tree Legumes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Summary of case studies

Results and Discussion

The case studies revealed differences in cultural and social preferences for livestock systems according to ethnicity, relative wealth, location, gender and family structure. For example, there has been rapid expansion of forages and livestock fattening in Nonghet district near the Vietnam border due to the historical association of Hmong people with cattle and pig husbandry, and a lucrative cross border trade in cattle and buffalo. Strong family and clan ties amongst the Hmong has facilitated knowledge and information exchange between districts and provinces. In contrast, expansion of livestock production in some lowland areas has been slower or less permanent due to cash crop or employment alternatives. Very poor households are less likely to benefit from forages because of limited land or labour.

Conclusions

Ethnic traditions are closely related to environmental conditions and limits to agricultural production. However, traditional associations with livestock are changing as villages move from upland to lowland, and different ethnic groups amalgamate into villages (Thongmanivong and Fujita, 2006). Strategies are needed to ensure all ethnic groups and poor households are able to benefit equally from scaling out of livestock production in Lao PDR.

References


