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Community Participation in the Namha Catchment Area Development Project in Luang Namtha, Lao People's Democratic Republic

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Abstract: The study determined the nature and extent of community participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases of the Namha Catchment Area Development Project at the village level in Luang Namtha District, Luang Namtha Province, Lao PDR. It also determined the factors that affected community participation and the latter's relation with the attainment of short-term and long-term goals of the project. A total of 120 respondents from Nam Gnaene and Namha villages in Luang Namtha district were selected randomly using the Slovin's formula. Data were gathered through individual interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Chi square test, and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that community participation in the various project phases at the village level was

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generally of the cooperation type, a form of genuine participation. The level of community participation of the households was highest in the planning phase, followed by the implementation phase, and lowest in the monitoring and evaluation phase. A total of 16 independent variables (age, educational attainment, household size, household income, labor capacity, land size, decision-making, project perception, leadership, communication, resources, power structure, community cohesiveness, policies, training, and incentives) were found to be significantly associated with the nature of community participation in the project. The nature of community participation in the project was significantly associated with the attainment of long-term and short-term goals of the project. Suggestions are provided for planners, implementers and researchers of community participation in agriculture and rural development projects in Lao PDR.

Keywords: *community, participation, development project, types of participation*

INTRODUCTION

Participation has become a catchword in the lexicon of development today. After capital-centered development was found to be insufficient for improving the lives of marginalized people, people's involvement in the development process was considered as an alternative approach to development. Phrases like "people-centered development", "participatory development", "participatory management", and "alternative development" were developed. Theoretical understanding of these alternative approaches was built by a considerable number of authors since the 1970s. One idea that has emerged from the major reappraisal of development is the need for greater participation of rural people in the development process (Oakley, 1991).

The participatory approach, which has become a popular approach/strategy in third world countries, have different names and mostly applied in the rural and agricultural development.

Participation is interpreted in different ways by different authors. Uphoff (1995) defined participation as the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations that enhance their well-being. Constantino-David (1982) stated that participation is the mental and emotional involvement of persons in group situations that encourage them to contribute to the group's goals and share responsibilities for them. Meanwhile, Honadel (1980) saw participation as a necessary condition for any meaningful development effort. In the development process, participation implies motivating individuals to take the initiative and mobilizing people to work for overall societal goals. Participation also includes the allocation of resources to achieve them and the voluntary execution of resulting programs and projects.

Castillo (1983) stated that people's participation in the institution and systems that govern their lives is a basic human right and is also essential for economic development. Rural development strategies can realize their full potential only through the people's active involvement, including the least advantaged strata, in designing policies and programs and in creating institution for implementing them.

According to Khan (1993), there are four kinds of people participation in the community development process. They are 1) participation in decision-making; 2) participation in project/ program implementation; 3) participation in the benefit; and 4) participation in evaluation. He also stated that there are three indicators for the participation of women: 1) membership in an organization; 2) attendance in community activities; and 3) training received in income-generating projects.

Khieu (1995) stated that authentic participation should heighten people's awareness of values, issues, and the possibility of making choices. It should influence the content of development, generate new ways of doing things, and also safeguard the people's right to an equitable share in the fruits of development. It remains an elusive aspiration, but once it becomes a reality, it may well in the end prove the central requisite for development, enabling a society to function over the long-term for the well-being of its members.

Community participation is a new approach and strategy in agricultural and rural development programs in the province of Luang Namtha where over 80 percent of the country areas are mountainous. Over 55 percent of the people in Luang Namtha district are in the upland and about 34 percent of them are farmers. Many households survive predominantly by subsistence. Difficulties are especially acute for ethnic minorities in the northern uplands where over 20 percent of the population are cut off geographically and by language from other parts or groups.

With around 85 percent of the population of Lao PDR living in the rural areas and approximately 90 percent of them relying on agriculture almost exclusively for their livelihood, numerous institutional reforms have been carried out. A turning point was in agricultural and rural development.

Many rural development projects have been implemented by the government in cooperation with other international organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the province. With government funds, the integrated rural development program of Luang Namtha government was conducted beginning in the 1990s. In the context of innovation, some approaches/ strategies have been promoted in the rural development projects. Community participation approach has been considered as a key

strategy for planning, implementing, and evaluating the rural development program. The successes and failures of these rural development projects depend on this approach/strategy where farmers/households have a stake in the projects.

The high growth rate achieved by the Luang Namtha district since the introduction of economic reforms after the mid-1980s has resulted in a steady decline in poverty. The incidence of poverty shrank from about 46 percent in 2005 to about 33 percent in 2008 (Country Report No. 05/393, 2010). Yet, the district remains as one of the poorest and least developed in Luang Namtha province. Although social indicators have also shown an improvement, they are still among the lowest in the region. This is so because the attainment of the living standard objective was a longer-term objective and may be realized through time.

The Luang Namtha district is more rural in character than any other district in the province. More than three quarters of the total population live in these areas and depend on agriculture and natural resources for survival. Poverty is particularly concentrated in rural areas. While agriculture is the mainstay of the district's economy, farming is largely practiced at a subsistence level. A substantial amount of the district's mountainous terrain is suitable for cultivating crops and productive conditions for farmers are generally good.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the community's participation in the Namha Catchment Area Development (NCAD) project towards poverty alleviation in Luang Namtha district, Luang Namtha province, Lao PDR. Specifically, it aimed to: 1) describe the characteristics of the household participants and the community in the NCAD project; 2) determine

the project organization support to people's participation in the NCAD project; 3) discuss the nature and extent of participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project; 4) determine the factors that affect community participation in the NCAD project; and 5) assess NCAD project's attainment of poverty alleviation goals in rural development.

METHODOLOGY

The NCAD project covered nine villages from two districts of Luang Namtha and Viengphoukha in Luang Namtha province. The study, however, focused only on two villages that participated in the project in Luang Namtha district, namely: Nam Gnaene and Namha villages (Figure 1). The villages have a total land area of 1,895 square kilometers populated with around 2,211 people in 492 households.

The respondents were randomly drawn from the number of beneficiaries. The total number of respondents was determined using the Slovin's formula (Sevilla, 1993) with five percent (5%) margin of error. Of the 145 household beneficiaries in the two villages, 120 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling with the villages as the strata.

Primarily, coordination with concerned government agencies was done. Necessary communication letters were prepared regarding the matter. Primary data were gathered through personal interviews of the respondents using a structured questionnaire, which was translated from English into Lao language. The interview schedule was pre-tested to 15 members of the Thongchai village in Luang Namtha district, who were not part of the sample for its reliability. Based on the results of the pre-test, changes were made on the interview schedule before the actual data gathering.

Three enumerators were hired to assist in gathering the primary data. An orientation was conducted among the enumerators for them to be familiar with the research instrument. Secondary data were obtained from NCAD project reports.

The results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentage, means, range, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were used to determine the relationship between variables with factors on community participation and NCAD project activities and goals as the dependent variable.

The nature of participation was determined based on the participation model by Deshler & Sock (1985). There are two types of participation, namely: pseudo and genuine participation. Pseudo participation consists of two types: domestication and assistencialism, while genuine participation involves cooperation and empowerment. In this study, types of participation were measured through responses to situations that describe the types of participation under the pseudo and the genuine participation. The responses to the questions were in four choices representing domestication, assistencialism, cooperation, and empowerment. The nature of participation was determined with the use of a set of categories of participation as follows:

0.1 - 0.5 domestication	0.6 - 1.5 assistencialism
1.6 - 2.5 cooperation	2.6- 3.0 empowerment

To determine the association/relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables, the non-parametric Pearson Chi-square test using an alpha of 0.05 was employed. In cases where the Pearson Chi-square may not be a valid test, the P-value of the Fisher's exact test was used for a more accurate value. The Phi value was used to determine the intensity or strength of relationship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Study Areas

The Namha Catchment Area Development Project (NCADP) was established as a 'pilot project'. The project's budget, which came from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and German Agro Action (GAA), totaled USD 471,843.70. Its overall objective was to support the target villages to adopt sustainable systems of sedentary agricultural and forest land uses that alleviate poverty through enhanced food and income security. At the same time, these sustainable systems will conserve the biodiversity habitat and protect the watershed. Land development with appropriate skills training is believed to be the key to establishment of sustainable systems of agriculture/forestry (Final Report No. TA 4434, Namha Catchments Area Development Project, 2008).

The NCAD project covered nine villages: seven in Vienphouka District and two in Luang Namtha District. The two villages in Luang Namtha District are Nam Gnaene and Namha. In terms of area and population, Nam Gnaene is larger compared to Namha. The former's agricultural land and forest area are likewise larger than the latter. However, more households (44%) from Namha participated in the project than in Nam Gnaene (26%) (Table 1).

The respondents from Namha are relatively older than the respondents from Gnaene as shown by their mean age of 45 and 42, respectively. In both villages, most of the respondents have finished elementary, but the mean year of schooling is higher in Gnaene (5.5 years) than in Namha (3.6 years). Majority of the respondents belong to the Taidan ethnic group, while those from Namha are from the Khmu tribe. In both villages, the average family size is four. The average income of the respondents from Nam Gnaene is

relatively higher at 8.2 million LAK compared to those in Namha at 6.5 million LAK (Table 2). However, both groups belong to the moderate income category.

Nature and Extent of Participation in NCAD Project Activities

The nature of community participation in the NCAD project was based on the respondents' responses to situations that reflect the types of the participation in three phases (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) of the project. For each of the project phase, four to five concerns were identified where community participation could be elicited.

Community participation in the project was based on the Deshler and Sock's framework of participation (1985), which reflects the types of participation categorized on the basis of the degree of control exerted by participants. The metaphor they use to illustrate this concept is a ladder with eight rungs representing: 1) manipulation, 2) therapy, 3) informing, 4) consultation, 5) placation, 6) partnership, 7) delegated power, and 8) citizen control. Deshler and Sock then grouped these categories into four classes based on the relationship between extent of control or power and community participation in the project, namely: 1) domestication (D), 2) assistencialism or paternalism (A), 3) cooperation (C), and 4) empowerment (E). D and A are considered pseudo-participation while C and E are indications of genuine participation.

Participation is Type 1 (domestication) when power and control over a given activity are in the hands of outsider (e.g., Project Management Committee, the DAFO Extension Staff, the International and National Specialists/Experts, Administrators). Domestication is a type of participation where people in the community act or respond to what the outsiders feel or perceive as

important. Participation is Type 2 (assistencialism) when power and control still remain in the hands of outsiders. Members of the participating group receive information and are consulted, assisted, or placated.

Participation is Type 3 (cooperation) when people work with the outsiders to undertake activities intended to benefit the participants. Decision-making takes place through dialogue between insiders and outsiders. Participants are also actively involved in implementation. Power and control are shared throughout the project, which are ideally an inductive bottom-up process rather than a top-down one. Participation is Type 4 (empowerment) when people hold complete power over outsiders and are in full control of a program. This includes decision-making and administrative activities. Participation occurs at the political, social, cultural, and economic levels.

For the planning phase, the NCAD project activities included were problem analysis, goal/objective setting, decision-making, rule and regulations formulation, and yearly planning.

The respondents' nature and extent of participation in the implementation of the NCAD project was measured using four activities. These included conduct of monthly meeting, setting up of the project's organizational structure, promotion of the project, and implementation of project activities.

For monitoring and evaluation, the activities included selection of monitoring and evaluation staff, monitoring and evaluation activities, monthly financial report, and other information for monitoring and evaluation.

For each activity in the project phase, the respondents were given four choices representing domestication and assistencialism

for pseudo-participation, and cooperation and empowerment for genuine participation. To determine which type of participation the respondent was exhibiting, it was imperative that the response type of the respondent's frequent answers would fall into this category.

Planning phase. Under the NCAD project, the most important activity in the planning phase was micro-land use planning (or village/household planning) for allocated agricultural and forest land.

Normally, village and household planning were conducted through an initial meeting in the village to explain the project. This meeting was intended to raise awareness and provide motivation to the villagers so they participate in the project. It was also intended to raise awareness on the criteria for participation in various project activities, and the importance of women's participation. Further, it provided an opportunity for the villagers to choose their extension farmers and other members of the Village Management Committee. The villagers were asked to prepare a map of existing village land use, focusing on the allocated agricultural lands. Afterwards, the villagers discussed the village's situation and problems concerning land use.

Then, the Village Management Committee and selected extension farmers attend a training session on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and planning process to be used in the village. The training course provided training materials and booklets for village and household plans, which served as guidelines for the planning process.

The extension staff spent two days in the village to facilitate the participatory planning process and to provide technical information and guidance to the villagers. The first day was a participatory assessment of the existing and potential agriculture

development situation for the village's allocated agricultural lands. On the second day was a participatory assessment on the development of the general village plan.

The village extension farmers then assisted every household in preparing individual household plans. As soon as the household plans were completed, the extension farmers summarized the seed crop and seedling requirements according to species and quantity needed in developing the village nursery plan and then submitted these for the DAFO project plans.

Community participation in the planning phase focused on five selected activities, namely: problem analysis, goal/objective setting, decision-making, rule and regulations, and yearly planning for the households.

Results show that most of the respondents participated in planning activities under a genuine participation (cooperation and empowerment). More than half (59.2%) stated that they actively participated in problem analysis, goal/objective setting (94.2%), rules and regulations setting (95.8%), and in yearly planning activities (66.7%) in village project plans. Majority also indicated that the people in the community were the sole decision makers in the project activities. About one-fourth of the respondents averred that the problems were fully analyzed by the local people themselves.

As to the nature of community participation in the two villages, Nam Gnaene village (2.6 mean score) was more active in the planning phase than the Namha village (2.5 mean score). In general, community participation in the planning activities showed a genuine type (cooperation and empowerment) with a mean score 2.6 (Table 3). The participatory planning approach and the training courses might have provided the knowledge as well as motivation

for the people in the villages to participate. The role of village chief or assistant, group chief, extension staff, and extension farmers (as key persons) are important elements in making the local people activity participate in the different planning activities.

Implementation phase. Community participation in the implementation phase of the project includes involvement of the respondents in activities such as conducting meetings to discuss about the project, setting up of organizational structure of the project in the village, promotion of the project activities, and implementation of the planned activities.

Majority of the respondents (65%) indicated that they shared ideas with the Project Management Committee in the conduct of the meetings while some (20.8%) assisted in the meetings. About three-fourths (69.2%) of the respondents participated in setting up of the project organization structure. The respondents were also involved in promoting the project in the village (57.5%) and in the general implementation of the project activities (58.3%). In general, the overall nature of community participation in the implementation phase of the project was in the sphere of cooperation. There were some respondents who did the activity by themselves, which is an indication of empowerment.

Although there were different levels of community participation in the villages, the overall nature/extent of their participation in the project was in the stage of cooperation (2.5 means core). The Nam Gnaene village had a higher level of participation (2.7 mean score) in all activities in the NCAD project implementation phase.

Participation in the conduct of meetings in the NCAD project was in the nature of genuine participation in the form of cooperation (2.4 mean score). The Nam Gnaene village was more

active in this activity with a mean score of 2.5, a level of cooperation which is a form of genuine participation, while the Namha village also exhibited the same type of participation (2.3 mean score).

In setting up the NCAD project organizational structure, Nam Gnaene was again the more responsive group in this activity, showing a high level form of participation (2.6 mean score), which is empowerment. As a whole, the respondents in both villages exhibited a cooperation level of participation (2.4 mean score).

Together with the planning of the project, village meetings were held to promote the project's activities. 'Decision agriculture' was used as a technique in selecting the households to participate in the project. The selection criteria, roles, and responsibilities were also clarified for various types of village participants such as extension farmers, demonstration farmers, etc. In this activity, the respondents showed a general level of participation by cooperation (2.4 mean score).

Participation in the implementation of the project activities in the two villages were in the area of empowerment (2.7 mean score). However, the Nam Gnaene showed a higher level of participation in this activity, which is empowerment also (2.8 mean score), compared to Namha (2.5 mean score), which represents a cooperation type of participation.

As a whole (Table 4), the nature of community participation in the villages in all activities under the implementation phase reflected a genuine participation in the form of cooperation (2.5 mean score). The knowledge and experiences gained from the training courses, their active participation in the planning activities, and the participatory approaches used in promoting the project activities were the possible ingredients for their effective participation in this phase of the project.

Monitoring and evaluation phase. Monitoring and evaluation was considered an important phase in the NCAD project. Previous agricultural development projects, rural development projects, reforestation projects, and other projects in Lao PDR suffered from the implementers' lack of experience in the monitoring of project activities. Monitoring and evaluation in the project was conducted on the quantity and quality of agriculture. The DAFO staff, village extension workers, and village management committee members play an important role in the monitoring and evaluation activities of the project.

Community participation in this phase included activities pertinent to the selection of the monitoring and evaluation staff; conduct of monitoring and evaluation activities; preparation of monthly financial report; and collection of information on the activities of the project.

Majority of the respondents (60.8%) said that they were actively involved in coordinating with Project Management Committee (PMC)/outsider in the selection of monitoring and evaluation staff, in the conduct of the monitoring and evaluation activities, and in providing information for monitoring and evaluation purposes (70.8%). These activities were assessed to be at the stage of cooperation.

The villages showed community participation in the form of assistencialism/cooperation. Both villages, however, showed a mean participation score of 1.9 in the selection of the evaluation staff, which is at the level of cooperation, a lower form of genuine participation. The Nam Gnaene village had higher level of participation in the form of cooperation (1.9 mean score), while the Namha village also showed a cooperation type of community participation in selection of monitoring and evaluation staff (1.8 mean score).

In the case of monitoring and evaluation of activities such as giving information about the quantity and quality of plantation area during the duration of the project, the incentives (rice, crop, fertilizer, seedling), the rate of progress of the agricultural planting and other activities, and the overall level of community participation was at the cooperation stage (2.1 mean score). Almost both villages had the same level of community participation, ranging from 2.0 to 2.1.

The Village Management Committee was responsible for collecting information from the extension farmers and households for the preparation of monthly progress and financial reports. They classified, synthesized, and made a report to the DAFO during the regular monthly meeting. The project participants contributed and also monitored the information to the extension farmers. The participants were assisted by the Project Management Committee in the preparation and presentation of the monthly report. The mean participation score of both villages was 1.5, which reflected community participation as assistencialism, a type of pseudo-participation. There was not much difference on the level of community participation in both villages, with mean score ranging from 1.4 to 1.6.

In the case of providing information for monitoring and evaluation, results showed that the nature of community participation in both villages was of the cooperation type (2.0 mean score). The respondents (65.8%) reported that they actively coordinated with the Project Management Committee in this activity. Namha village had higher level of community participation (2.2 mean score) than the Nam Gnaene village, which was in the cooperation stage (1.8 mean score).

Overall level of community participation in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the NCAD project was at the level of

cooperation (1.9 mean score), a genuine type of participation (Table 5).

On the whole, community participation in the various phases of the NCAD project was generally of the cooperation type (1.7 mean score), a form of genuine participation, but the results showed different levels of community participation in both villages (Table 6). In general, however, Nam Gnaene village had a higher level of community participation than the Namha village. Across the three phases, participation was highest in planning, followed by implementation, and then by monitoring and evaluation.

Factors Affecting Community Participation

Correlation between independent variables and extent of community participation. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Pearson's r) was used to determine the degree of association of the independent variables, namely: household characteristics, community characteristics, organizational support, with extent of community participation in terms of planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the project. The level of association was reflected by correlation coefficient (r). The level of association is very weak if r value ranges from 0.01 to 0.20; weak if r is from 0.21 to 0.40; moderate if r is from 0.41 to 0.60; strong if r ranges from 0.61 to 0.80; very strong if r ranges from 0.81 to 0.99; and perfect association if r=1.00.

Household characteristics. Results showed that almost all the household characteristics were significantly associated with community participation in the planning phase of the project. Household size (r=0.67), household labor capacity (r=0.61), and household land size (r=0.61) were the three factors that had substantial positive significant association with participation in Nam Gnaene and Namha villages. Household size in the remote area

is normally dependent on the income of the labor capacity of the household. Households with higher income were more perceptible and had stronger motive to participate in the project. A strong positive significant association was noted for age of household head, while gender role perception had a fair level of positive association in both villages. Education had strong positive significant association in Nam Gnaene. This meant that the respondents who had higher educational attainment participated more in the project activities.

Household labor capacity and household size were also strongly and positively significant in the implementation phase (r=0.81 and r=0.80, respectively), and in the monitoring and evaluation phase (r=0.71 and 0.71, respectively). On the whole, both variables were also identified to have the strongest and positively significant association in all management phases of the project. All the household characteristics were all significantly associated with community participation.

Community characteristics. Results showed that the communication system was strongly, positively, and significantly associated with community participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases of the project. In general, community leadership, resources, power structure, and cohesiveness were found to be fairly strong, positively, and significantly associated with community participation in all aspects of planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Organizational support. Results showed that all the factors that are considered important such as state and local government policies in organizational support had a strong, positive, and significant association with community participation in all phases of the project. Only training and project incentives had a fair or moderate relationship with the independent variables.

In summary, correlation analysis indicated that the independent variables had a positive and significant relationship with community participation, except for decision-making, which had negative but significant relationship with community participation. The households whose decision making was composite, meaning majority of all household members were involved in decision making, tended to participate less in the project activities. This result pointed to the general nature of decision making in the household, which was either by the father or mother depending on the project activities to be involved with.

Factors that had strong levels of relationship with community participation were household size, household labor capacity, land size, state and local government policies, and communication system of the community. Variables that had fair/ moderate relationship with community participation were project perception, community cohesiveness, and incentives. The level of association of the independent variables (household characteristics, community characteristics, and organizational support) with the dependent variable (community participation) varied among different phases of the project (Table 7).

Correlation of the extent of community participation in the project with the project goals. Results show that the extent of community participation in the project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as in overall phases of the project management had positively significant associations with the level of satisfaction of the long-term and short-term goals of the project. Community participation had a strong level of relationship with achievement of the economic objective (r=0.75; 0.71 and 0.65), and it was strongly related to the food security objectives (r=0.64; 0.62 and 0.57). A weak but significant relationship was observed in the attainment of the living standard objective of the project (r=0.41; 0.38 and 0.37 during the planning, implementation, and

monitoring and evaluation, respectively) (Table 8). Raising the living standard of the people in the community is a longer-term objective and was not measurable at the time of the study.

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Independent Variables and Extent of Community Participation in the Project

Major factors influencing community participation in the planning phase of the project. Results of multiple regression analysis show that household characteristics such as age, gender role, educational attainment, household size, household income, labor capacity, land size, decision-making, and project perception; community variables such as leadership, communication, resources, power structure, community cohesiveness; and organizational support consisting of policies, usefulness of training, and usefulness of incentives had significant contribution to the regression effect on community participation in the planning phase in Nam Gnaene (Table 9). The combined effect/contribution of these independent variables was 98.2 percent to the total regression effect on the dependent variable community participation. Community cohesiveness did not contribute significantly to the multiple regression model. The indicators used were sense of belonging, solidarity, rootedness, and alienation. The measurement of these indicators may be refined in future studies.

In Namha, the same variables, except gender role, were contributory factors to community participation in the planning phase. Combination of these independent variables contributed 78 percent to the total regression effect on the dependent variable. For the whole village, all the variables, contributed to the total regression effect on community participation in the planning phase, with R^2 = 76.7 percent.

Major factors affecting community participation in implementation phase of the project. Results of the multiple regression analysis show that community power structure was the only variable that has not contributed to the total effect of the independent variables to community participation in Nam Gnaene and Namha (Table 10). A total of 94.5 percent (R^2 = 0.945) of the combined effect of the independent variables influenced community participation in the implementation phase of the project in Nam Gnaene village.

On other hand, gender role had no significant effect on community participation in the implementation phase of the project in Namha village. The total regression effect due to independent variables was 88.8 percent (R^2 = 0.888). As a whole, all the independent variables significantly influenced community participation in the implementation phase of the project. The results show that 92.8 percent (R^2 = 0.928) of the variables directly contributed to the total effect on community participation. Moreover, the households in the villages were assigned to implement their own plans during the implementation phase of the project.

Major factors affecting community participation in monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. Several factors had significant effect on community participation in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project in Nam Gnaene and Namha. These included age, gender role perception, educational attainment, household size, household labor capacity, household income, land size, decision-making, project perception, community leadership, community communication, community resources, community power structure, community cohesiveness, state and local government policies, usefulness of training, and usefulness of incentives. These variables contributed 89.8 percent to the total regression effect on community participation in Nam Gnaene, and

67.3 percent in Namha (Table 11). Gender role perception was the only factor that had no direct effect on community participation in Namha.

As a whole, the independent variables except gender role had significant effect on community participation in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. The combined effect of these independent variables contributed 79.3 percent to the total regression effect on the dependent variable. All activities in the monitoring and evaluation phase were more concerned with knowledge of the households about social perception, procedures of financial report, informational collection, and reporting.

In all three phases, gender role did not come out as a significant contributory factor to community factors. As operationalized in this study, gender role refers to the respondents' perception about the role of men and women in the different household activities especially in agriculture. Equality in gender was attained when the women were perceived to be equal with the men on matters of household activities such as irrigation, farming, forestry, livestock, and household chores. Data revealed, however, that men were more engaged in forestry, while women were more involved in livestock raising and household chores.

Assessment of Poverty Alleviation Goals

More than half of the respondents (54%) perceived that the long-term objective, that of improving the living standard of the group minorities, has been attained satisfactorily. But more of them perceived that the short-term objectives had been achieved satisfactorily such as increasing the latter's household income (72%) and food security (67%).

On the social side, majority of the respondents felt that their understanding, knowledge, and experiences in agriculture and forestry technology as well as in rural development and gender role improved because of their participation in the project. On the whole, the respondents felt satisfied on the contribution of the project as reflected on the attainment of its long-term and short-term goals.

On the whole, the respondents felt satisfied on the short-term economic objective of the project to increase village-level incomes (3.3) and household food security (3.3). They were also generally satisfied with the long-term goal of improving the living standards of minority groups and other poor groups (3.5) and with other short-term objectives such as improving the environmental condition and social development of the community (Table 12).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the respondents' perception, the NCAD project towards poverty alleviation contributed significantly to the improvement of the living standards of the minority groups in the Nam Gnaene and Namha villages. The households in the villages participated in all phases of the project such as planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, but participation was highest in the planning phase.

The nature and extent of community participation at the village level in all phases of the project was at the level of genuine participation. Participation was in the form of cooperation in all phases of the project. However, community participation varied between the ethnic groups; the Taidam was more participative than the Khmu group. This showed that under the present socio-economic condition of Luang Namtha province, it was possible to elicit genuine participation of the households in agriculture and

rural development projects. Participatory approaches in agriculture and rural development proved their worth in mobilizing the local people for their own development.

Socio-economic, physical, organizational, and political factors both within and outside the community are needed to be able to mobilize the community people in rural development program such as the NCAD project. These factors are the household characteristics (age, gender role, education attainment, household size, income, labor capacity, land size, decision-making, and project perception); community characteristics (leadership, communication, resources, power structure, and community cohesiveness); and organizational support in terms of state and local government policies, training, and incentives. These were found to have significant relationships with the nature and extent of community participation in the context of planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the project to improve the living standards of the beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The perceived significance of the NCAD project of the government for the improvement of the living standards of the minorities groups and other poor groups in the villages suggests that socio-economic development programs for remote/poor areas should be promoted in selected villages in poor districts of the province.

Community participation as a participatory approach/ strategy in the NCAD project in Laos has demonstrated the important role of households as stakeholders. The government should encourage and support research/teaching on community participation approaches. This can be done through educational programs in selected universities and in the promotion of these

approaches both in theory and practice in undertaking agriculture and rural development projects in the country.

Implementers and planners should exert more effort on the monitoring and evaluation aspect by strengthening/providing short training courses on monitoring and evaluation to the project participants, especially the minority groups. In this way, the participants will develop the confidence to get involved in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project.

Implementers/planners should consider the variables identified in this study to have significant effect on community participation in crafting their strategies/approaches to develop agriculture and rural development projects. Strengthening the education and training of the people, improvement of community facilities, and provision of incentives (especially in agricultural land allocation) are important components for improving people's participation in agriculture and rural development projects in Laos.

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TABLES

Table 1. Description of the study sites

DESCRIPTORS	NAM GNAENE	NAMHA
Area (ha)	128,500	61,000
Agricultural land	23,951	12,875
Forest land	89,283	38,498
Others	15,266	9,627
Population	1,690	521
Number of households	389	103
Number of participating households	100	45

Table 2. Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

CHARACTERISTICS	NAM GNAENE		NAMHA	
	No.	%	No.	%
Age (years)				
Below 30	3	3.8	2	5
31-40	40	50	10	25
41-50	21	26.3	20	50
51-60	10	12.5	4	10
Above 61	6	7.5	4	10
Total	80	100	40	100
Mean	**42.2**		**45**	
S.D.	**10.0**		**9.6**	
Range	**26-65**		**28-66**	

Table 2. Socioeconomic characteristics... (*continued*)

CHARACTERISTICS	NAM GNAENE		NAMHA	
	No.	%	No.	%
Educational attainment				
No formal schooling (0 years)	10	12.5	13	32.5
Elementary (1-5 years)	39	48.8	17	42.5
Secondary (6-9 years)	20	25.0	8	20
High school (10-12 years)	11	13.8	2	5
College (13-16 years)	0	0	0	0
Total	80	100	40	100
Mean	**5.5**		**3.6**	
S. D.	**3.6**		**3.4**	
Ethnicity/sex				
Taidan				
Male	45	66.2	4	66.7
Female	23	33.8	2	33.3
Total	68	85.0	6	15.0
Khmu				
Male	9	75.0	22	64.7
Female	3	25.0	12	35.3
Total	12	15.0	34	85.0
Household size				
3	18	22.5	4	10.0
4	24	30.0	8	20.0
5	22	27.5	8	20.0
6	12	15.0	14	35.0
7	4	5.0	6	15.0
Total	80	100	40	100
Mean	**4**		**4**	
S. D.	**1.2**		**1.2**	
Range	**3-7**		**3-7**	

Table 2. Socioeconomic characteristics... (*continued*)

CHARACTERISTICS	NAM GNAENE		NAMHA	
	No.	%	No.	%
Household income (Million LAK)				
Less than 3.7 (very poor)	3	3.8	4	10
3.7-6.3 (poor)	9	11.3	16	40
6.4-9.4 (moderate)	56	70	17	42.5
9.5-14 (rich)	10	12.5	3	7.5
More than 14 (very rich)	2	2.5	0	0
Total	80	100	40	100
Mean	**8.2**		**6.5**	
S. D.	**2.5**		**2.4**	
Range	**3.1-16.2**		**2.8-13.5**	

Table 3. Nature of participation in the planning phase of the NCAD project

ACTIVITY	NAM GNAENE	NAMHA	OVERALL
	Mean Participation Score		
Problem analysis	2.7	2.6	2.7
Goals / objectives setting	2.8	2.5	2.7
Decision-making	2.7	2.5	2.6
Rules and regulations	2.3	2.2	2.3
Yearly planning	2.7	2.5	2.6
Overall	**2.6**	**2.5**	**2.6**

Legend: 0.1 – 0.5 Domestication 0.6– 1.5 Assistencialism
1.6 – 2.5 Cooperation 2.6 – 3.0 Empowerment

Table 4. Nature of participation in the implementation phase of the NCAD project

ACTIVITY	NAM GNAENE	NAMHA	OVERALL
	Mean Participation Score		
Conduct of monthly meetings	2.5	2.3	2.4
Setting up of the project's organizational structure	2.6	2.2	2.4
Promotion of the project	2.7	2.3	2.5
Implementation of the project activities	2.8	2.5	2.7
Overall	**2.7**	**2.3**	**2.5**

Legend: 0.1 – 0.5 Domestication 0.6 – 1.5 Assistencialism
1.6 – 2.5 Cooperation 2.6 – 3.0 Empowerment

Table 5. Nature of participation in the M&E phase of the NCAD project

ACTIVITY	NAM GNAENE	NAMHA	OVERALL
	Mean Participation Score		
Selection of monitoring and evaluation staff	1.9	1.8	1.9
Monitoring and evaluation activities	2.0	2.1	2.1
Monthly financial report	1.6	1.4	1.5
Information for monitoring and evaluation	1.8	2.2	2.0
Overall	**1.8**	**1.9**	**1.9**

Legend: 0.1 – 0.5 Domestication 0.6 – 1.5 Assistencialism
1.6 – 2.5 Cooperation 2.6 – 3.0 Empowerment

Table 6. Overall nature and extent of community participation in the NCAD project

PROJECT PHASE	NAM GNAENE	NAMHA	OVERALL
	Mean Participation Score		
Planning phase	2.6	2.5	2.6
Implementation phase	2.7	2.3	2.5
Monitoring and evaluation phase	1.8	1.9	1.9
Overall Phases	**1.8**	**1.7**	**1.7**

Legend: 0.1 – 0.5 Domestication 0.6 – 1.5 Assistencialism
1.6 – 2.5 Cooperation 2.6 – 3.0 Empowerment