

Brief report

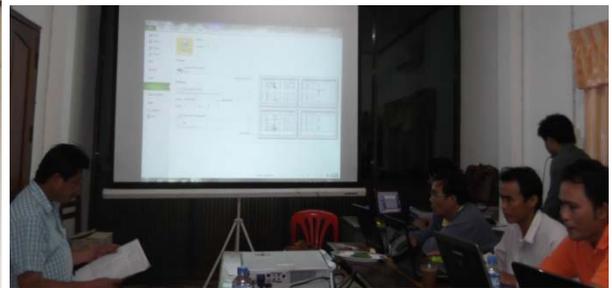
On-site and Distant Coaching

Using MS Project 2010 for Sub-Project Managers of

Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Productivity Enhancement Project

9 to 26 July 2013 (on-site)

27 July to 10 August (Distant coaching)



Submitted to: 0144-LAO and 0145-LAO-Sustainable Natural Resource

Management and Productivity Enhancement Project

Prepared by: Enterprise and Development Consultants



A) Introduction

The “the on-site and distant coaching” mission to individual provinces of SNRMPEP was part of the MS Project Capacity Building Program for Managers of SNRMPEP. The Coaching followed the two training courses on MS Project 2010 that being implemented in Vientiane capital on 11 to 15 March and 5 to 7 June 2013 respectively. Specifically, the Coaching aims to:

- Review the MS projects’ knowledge and skills of participants who have been trained in the earlier training courses, and especially the use of the tool for specific sub-projects.
- In addition, it aims to provide specific support needed by individual provinces’ participants, enhance the interest and commitment of the participants and their respective superiors in the applications of MS Project tool for the benefits of managing their sub-projects.
- Meanwhile, the on-site coaching aims to enable the coaches to gain better insights of the working conditions and contexts of individual sub-projects.

B) Coaching program

B.1 On-site coaching

Coaching duration: The on-site coaching was scheduled for the five provinces of SNRMPEP as follows:

- 1) Sekong province: 9 to 11 July 2013
- 2) Saravan province: 15 to 17 July 2013
- 3) Attapeau province: 18 to 20 July 2013
- 4) Savannakhet province: 22 to 24 July 2013
- 5) Champasak province: 24 to 26 July 2013

The Participants: There were in total 23 participants participated in the Coaching session, 14 of whom have been through the earlier training courses and 9 are new participants. Of the 23 participants, 4 participants are from Sekong (all participated in the earlier courses), 3 participants from Saravan (all participated in the earlier courses), 6 participants from Attapeau (5 of them are new), 4 participants from Savannakhet(all participated in the earlier courses), and 6from Champasak (3 of them are new).See Annex 1 for list of participants. In addition, there consultant/specialist and/or Project Director of the 5 provinces took part by mean of observing, discussing and attending the presentation session of the participants on their MS Project application into the selected span of the sub-project they practiced over the coaching session.

In the provinces where there are new participants the coaches spent sometimes to explain and demonstrate the basic functions of the program before concentrating on the former participants to enable them complete the sub-projects, especially the span (certain output of the sub-project) they are directly in charge. It was observed that the new participants, in Attapeau, for example, are keen to learn

and in fact would be the core team of the province in applications of MS Project. They continued to learn as a group and communicate with EDC coaches for distant coaching support.

Agenda: The 3-day on-site coaching session was scheduled to cover the following agendas:

- 1) Review and complete a sub-project' plan (selected spans of the sub-projects according to the participants' knowledge of the sub-activities of the span)
- 2) Develop a monitoring plan for the selected spans
- 3) Monitor the selected spans and report on results (set scenario)

At the end of the coaching session, the participants presented (as if they present to the colleagues and/or superior) the progress of their work of the 3-day on-site coaching.

The coaches/trainers from local service provider—EDC: There 2-3 coaches from EDC are in charge for each coaching session of individual province. They coaching team consisted of 5 persons and 1 assistant:

1. Dr. Vivath Sauvaly (all five provinces)
2. Mr. Vila Chanthavong (Champasak)
3. Mr. Visay Sayyavongsa (all five provinces)
4. Ms. Somsack Souvannalath (Savannakhet)
5. Ms. Thiphaphone Phetmany (Saravan and Attapeau)
6. Mr. Somphone, IT staff (Savannakhet and Champasak)

B.2 Distance coaching:

It followed the on-site coaching, over the period from between 28 July 2013 until 12 August. The coaching arrangement based on availability of the participants in each province. Communication using Skype was used for all provinces (except Champasak) for team coaching and individual learning in addition to frequent telephone calls. This enabled the participants to gain more confidence when applying the tools on their own.

C) Outputs and Observations

Outputs: Individual provinces produced the outputs, specifically they are: implementation/operational plan, monitoring plan and monitoring results (See Table below). They have printed and also shared all relevant files in Drop box (*Note: invitation to get access to the team Drop box was sent to superiors of the participants at provincial and central level*).The superiors who attended the presentation also found this way of communication would enable the follow-up on the progress of different sub-projects become more efficient.

Province	Sub-project's name	Name of span under the selected sub-project (using MS Project)	Remarks
1. Sekong	-Enhancement of the production and quality of coffee through the Association of Coffee Producer Groups (AGPC) in Thateng District Sekong Province Category: Commercialization	-Construction of irrigation	-Implementation plan, monitoring plan (monthly), results of monitoring and adjust implementation plan, reports

Province	Sub-project's name	Name of span under the selected sub-project (using MS Project)	Remarks
	Subproject Code: SEK/COM/02 -Poverty Reduction through Promotion of Sustainable Cattle Raising in Kumb Ban Wang Pango, Kaleum District of Sekong Province Category: Poverty Reduction Subproject Code: SEK/PR/03	-Revolving fund	-Implementation plan, monitoring plan (monthly), results of monitoring and adjust implementation plan, reports
2. Saravan	-Integrated Commercial Cultivation of Sweet Potato, Peanut and Banana in Lao Ngam district Category: Commercialization Subproject Code: SAL/COM/04	-Land Use planning & Land Allocation	-Ibid
3. Attapeu	-Subproject: Poverty Reduction through promotion of Sustainable Agriculture in 3 Kum Ban in Xansai District, Attapeu Province. Category: Poverty Reduction Code: ATP-PR-03	-Revolving fund for coffee	-Ibid
4. Savannakhet	-Promotion of Organic Vegetable Production Systems in PhakKha, Non Savanh, Thasano, & Doneseng Villages of KaisonePhoumvihan District, Savannakhet Province Category: Commercialization Code: SVK/COM/02 -Poverty reduction through improved agriculture and livestock raising in Kumb ban PhouPha Nang and Xekeu of Thaphanthong district of Savannakhet Province Category: Poverty Reduction Code: SVK/PR/04	-Revolving fund for vegetable plantation groups -Land Use planning & Land Allocation	-Ibid -Ibid
5. Champasak	-Integrated Rice based farming system for food security in Mounlapamok district, Champasak Province Category: Poverty Reduction Code: CPA/PR/04	-Survey and Design of Irrigation Scheme	-Ibid ?

Observations: The outputs of the products using MS Project tool that each provinces' participants managed to complete were limited to only '1span' of '1-2 sub-project/s'. They are the spans in the field that are knowledgeable and able to detail sub-activities of that specific span. Therefore, the participants would need cooperation of relevant people/staff beyond the participants who attended MS Project

training program to specifically provide necessary information and inputs to complete the other spans of the sub-project (ranging from 14-24 spans/ sub-project).

D) Participants' self evaluation

At the end of the on-site coaching in each province the participants were requested to reflect on what they felt in relation to the applications of the MS Project tool and their envision of the future use. The comments they gave were:

Saravan and Attapeau

- The tool is particularly useful which require the planner to thoroughly think of sub-activities and associated indicators that are necessary to achieve the set project's spans and outputs and outcomes of sub-projects. It also asked to specify responsible persons' name which is important to gain commitment and as well as recognition of individual staff engaged in several sub-projects.
- For the province with new participants for the coaching, the participants agreed to conduct a weekly group training (Attapeau). The participants would like to transfer the skills they gain to those working at district level by means of conducting the training (Saravan). This also included the concept related to project management and individual elements of project's plan, monitoring....

Sekong, Savannakhet and Champasak

- In Sekong, the participants appreciated the MS Project tool and agreed to continue to apply them. The participants' respective superior also stressed the need to build capacity of the staff to be able to catch up with those of other provinces as long as the competency in project management is concerned.
- The participants in Savannakhet also appreciated the tool, however, they shared the fact that working in the villages always faces uncertainty, and frequent changes of working schedule. Their respective superiors shared that there has been little attempt of the staff in charge to develop a proper plan and set target to achieve. She strongly encouraged the participants continue to use the MS Project program for this purpose.
- The participants in Champasak suggested the training program to be extended to more people at the districts. This will widen the use of the tool and also gain cooperation in terms of information and inputs from those who have better knowledge about the sub-projects. The participants' superior (Mr. Bounlon In Thinning, Deputy Head of the project, who attended the final day's presentation) strongly supported the suggestion and would like to seek way to realize this in the future.

Evaluation of end MS Project Capacity Building Program

At the end of the distant coaching, all of the participants who attended the MS Project Capacity Building Program, (partial or full) were asked to evaluate the entire program using the evaluation form developed by the EDC team. Out of 17 participants who engaged in the evaluation, seven participants attended all three series of the program (i.e., training part 1, training part 2, and coaching), six participants attended two sessions, and four participants attended one session).

The evaluation captured a number of aspects relating to the program, and the results are summarized as follows:

In terms of “**usefulness**” of the MS Project capacity building program, 13 participants rated as “useful” tool (in managing a project, including planning, monitoring and reporting); two of them said it is “very useful”, and one rated as “medium” and one rated “little”.

In terms of level of “**confidence**” in using the tool, on average 64% was noted with the lowest 40% (said by three participants) and highest 90% (said by one participant). 70%-80% level of confidence was noted as the most frequently said by the participants (eight participants).

When the participants were asked to assess their **competency** in using individual tools associated with MS Project program, it was noted that majority of participants rated “medium” level of competency for most of the tools. There considerable numbers of participants assessed themselves having “little competency” in using “Define critical path, define slack time, and set constraints and deadline”. This was also observed during the training and coaching that the participants had difficulty in applying the tools. They would need more practices to overcome this. There also appeared three participants who evaluated themselves having “no competent at all” in using the tools; and five participants evaluated the same for “using visual reporting tool”. They are mostly who attended the program once or twice.

Level of competency in using MS Project:

MS Project tools	Level of competency			
	High	Medium	Little	Not at all
1) Define project information and project calendar	2	11	4	-
2) Set auto scheduling	3	9	5	-
3) Add tasks to a project plan	2	10	5	-
4) Outline tasks	4	8	4	1
5) Insert and delete tasks	4	8	4	1
6) Link dependent tasks	1	9	6	1
7) Define critical path	2	5	9	1
8) Define slack	3	5	8	1
9) Set constraints	-	8	6	3
10) Set deadline	-	7	7	3
11) Monitor and update a project plan	1	10	3	3
12) Report project data visually	1	9	2	5

When they participants were asked about **use of MS Project in the future**, 12 participants said they will apply in the other sub-projects, while five participants said “it is not certain or unlikely” that they will use. The main reasons for this are including, the sub-projects they are in charge will be completed soon; they are not directly in charge of the other sub-projects; and it is difficult to obtain inputs (details about activities) from the villagers, thus in this case the tool may not be much needed.

When asking the **difficulties they may face** in pursuing their attempt to use the tools, the common ones observed are:

- MS Project contains different tools/functions and that they, especially those who have little basics of Micro-soft program (Excel) and English (to understand the command) would need longer time to master the skills.
- The budget approval process, which is crucial determining factor for the implementation of the project plan, usually takes longer time and unpredictable. This affects frequent changes/adjustments of the sub-project’s work plan. When this combines with the fact that many of them are not in the position to fully in charge of the sub-project’s planning and monitoring, it limited their chance to use the Program on their daily basis and thus increase competency.

The end program evaluation specifically asked how the participants felt about the **delivery of the whole program** by the EDC team, 16 participants said they are “very satisfied”. They appreciated the trainers/coaches in their supportive effort, the friendliness and hands-on manner, etc.

Regarding any **suggestions** the participants would like to make, a few of them requested for the coaching/following up to be carried in the future to give them more confidence. Especially when they actually applied the tools in different sub-projects and they may need support over the course of project implementation and monitoring.

F) Conclusions and recommendations

The on-site coaching and distant coaching sessions were successfully implemented for SNRMPEP personnel of the five provinces. The participants paid high interest and attention in seeking support from the coaches during the entire engagement. In addition, the end program evaluation has suggested that the trained personals of SNRMPEP in the five provinces acquired competency and gained confidence at the level that allow them to continue to apply in other respective sub-projects. (See Annex 2: Photos taken during the on-site coaching engagement in five provinces).

- **In order to enhance the MS Project skills of the participants, and the future use of the tools for the benefits of managing sub-projects, it is recommended that:** The participants shall continue to use the knowledge and skills they gained - MS Project 2010 in planning, monitoring and updating, and reporting as much as they can. At Individual level, the participants’ respective superiors shall provide continual encouragement, given the fact that extra time and effort will be required from the participants until when they are competent and confident enough. Also, there should be recognition for their good/extra works for the benefits of the sub-projects’

management. At organizational level, the National Program Coordinator shall give clear instructions if the use of MS Project program is mandatory for individual sub-projects. And if this is putting in the system, technical support will still be of need, for the time being, such as in form of intermittent coaching, and lessons learned workshops. Not all participants attended the whole MS Project capacity building program and thus their level of competency varies. It is therefore, suggested that the former and new participants shall continue to share and learn from each other. Their respectively superiors/Project Managers shall support them including provide time for team learning; the initiatives of transfer the knowledge to wider technical team members is also recommended, if feasible for the province.

- In order to be able to complete the plan of the sub-projects, the participants are suggested to actively consult/discuss with relevant parties for necessary information. This is considered challenge of the participants that will need extra time to gain cooperation and participations of wider group of people. It is therefore recommended that the Project Managers/superiors of the participants shall provide more support to the participants in order to be able to gain such cooperation and inputs.
- The participants of five provinces shall continue to share the information, using Drop box that they already created for this purpose. The cross-province learning shall help to maintain and accelerate learning momentum. The MS Project 'champion' could be identified and recognized as motivator.
- There should be clear and specific mandate for those who play a key role in project planning and monitoring in individual provinces/districts. This will allow them to fully concentrate and make use of the MS Project in full capacity.

Annex 1: List of participants (participated in coaching session)						
#	Name	Position	Attended the training provided by PSI Solutions	Attended the 1 st training	Attended the 2 nd training	E-mail address
Sekong						
1	Mr. Anouluck Saythongdeth	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	Sanoulak@gmail.com
2	Mr. Sayyalath Sysouk	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	
3	Mr. Phonthiluck Sayasane	Technical staff	-	-	Yes	Theeluck@live.com
4	Mr. Thippachanh Bunsukhabuasone	Technical staff	-	Yes	-	thippachane@hotmail.com
Saravan						
1	Mr. Kaysone Inthilath	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	Ksinthilath@gmail.com
2	Mr. Chanthavong Vorasane	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	Chanthavong1983@hotmail.com
3	Mr. Thongchay Kommany	Technical staff	-	-	Yes	Thongjai@hotmail.com
Attapeau						
1	Mr. Khamkhan Thavongsamay	Head of Unit	-	Yes	Yes	tkhamkhan@yahoo.com
2	Mr. Liddaphone	Technical staff	-	-	-	
3	Mr. Xeay	Technical staff	-	-	-	xkeomanivong@yahoo.com
4	Mr. Vilayphone	Technical staff	-	-	-	vilaphanhspd@yahoo.com
5	Mr. Montry	PPMS	-	-	-	
6	Mr. Inpong Xummark	Project advisor	-	-	-	inpong19@yahoo.com
Savannakhet						
1	Mr. Vongsuwanh Bualuanglath	Technical staff	-	-	Yes	VongvanhBLR@yahoo.com

2	Mr. Phetsamone Vorasan	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	Gissvk2@gmail.com
3	Mr. Viengkeo Sayasone	Technical staff	-	Yes	Yes	Kviengv@yahoo.com
4	Mr. Khanthamath	Deputy Project coordinator	Yes	-	-	khanthamath@yahoo.com
Champasak						
1	Mr. Sysay Thongpadsa	Deputy project coordinator, Paksong District	-	-	Yes	Sisaythongpadsa@yahoo.com
2	Mr. Chansavang Budtavong	Deputy project, Mun District	-	-	Yes	Chanhsavangboudthavong@yahoo.com
3	Mr. Sauphakone Phantiyavong	Technical staff	-	Yes	-	saophagone@yahoo.com
4	Mr. Sounthone Sayaxick	Project coordinator, Pathumphone	-	-	-	
5	Mr. Bounlon	Deputy project coordinator	-	-	-	
6	Mr. Sithnithsack	Technical survey staff	-	-	-	sithisack@gmail.com

Annex 1: List of participants (participated in coaching session)					
#	Name	Position	Attend the training provided by PSI Solutions	Attend the 1 st training	Attend the 2 nd training
Sekong					
1	ທ່ານ ສະນຸລ ກສາຍທອງເດດ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
2	ທ່ານ ໄຊຍະລາດ ສິສຸກ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
3	ທ່ານ ພອນທະນາ ໄຊຍະສານ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
4	ທ່ານ ທິບພະຈັນ ບຸນສຸຂາບົວສອນ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	-
Saravan					
1	ທ່ານ ກິສອນ ສິນທິລາດ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
2	ທ່ານ ຈັນທະວົງ ວິລະສານ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
3	ທ່ານ ທອງໃຈ ກຸມມະນ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
Attapeau					
1	ທ່ານ ຄຳຂັນ ທະວົງສະໄໝ	ຫົວໜ້າ ທຳນຽມ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
2	ທ່ານ ວິດາພອນ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	-
3	ທ່ານ ເຊີຍ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	-
4	ທ່ານ ວິໄລພອນ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	-
5	ທ່ານ ມະນຸດ	PPMS	-	-	-
6	ທ່ານ ສິນທິ ຈຸມມາກ	ທ່ານ ກຳລັງການ	-	-	-
Savannakhet					
1	ທ່ານ ວົງສຸວັນ ບົວຫວັງລາດ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
2	ທ່ານ ເພັດສະໝອນ ວິລະສານ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
3	ທ່ານ ວິບັງແກວ ໄຊຍະສອນ	ອຳນວຍການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
4	ທ່ານ ຂັນທະມາດ	ຮອງປະທານງານໂຄງການ	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	-	-
Champasak					
1	ທ່ານ ສິໄສ ທອງບຸນສາ	ຮອງປະທານງານ ເມັດ ອົງປາກຊອງ	-	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ
2	ທ່ານ ຈັນສະຫວົງ ບຸນດະວົງ	ຮອງປະທານງານເມັດ ອົງມຸນ	-	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ

3	ທ່ານ ເສາພະກອນ ພັນຕິຍະວົງ	ວິຊາການ	-	ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ	-
4	ທ່ານ ສຸນທອນ ໄຊຍະສິກ	ປະສານງານ ເມືອງປະທຸມພອນ	-	-	-
5	ທ່ານ ບຸນລິ້ນ	ຮອງປະສານງານ	-	-	-
6	ທ່ານ ສິດນິດສັກ	ວິຊາການ ສຳຫຼວດ	-	-	-

Annex 2: Photos

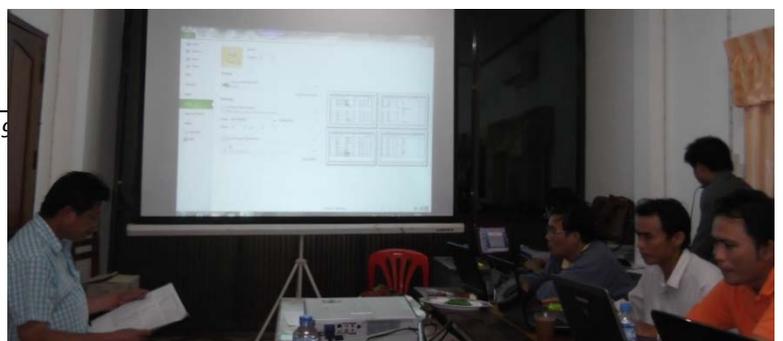
Sekong Province



Saravan Province



Attapeau Province



Savannakhet Province



Champasak province

