

Emergency Food
Security Assessment
(EFSA):
Follow-Up Rapid
Assessment

Northern
LAOS



May 2010

Data collected in February 2010



World Food Programme

Executive Summary

The World Food Programme in Laos fielded an Emergency Food Security Assessment in eight provinces of northern Laos in October-November 2009. As the findings of that assessment will be prepared, additional requests for assistance were received from five provinces in February 2010.

Based on these requests, WFP deployed a follow-up rapid assessment to Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, Houaphan, and Xieng Khouang provinces in February 2010, with the following main objectives:

- To assess reports of food insecurity caused by multiple shocks (including rodent infestations, droughts, and floods) since October 2009.
- To better quantify the extent to which the combination of shocks present in northern Laos (rodent infestation, floods, erratic rains/drought and others) continues to cause higher than expected levels of vulnerability among poor rural households.

Given time and logistical constraints, a qualitative methodology was applied. This report summarizes the findings of the rapid assessment, and should be viewed as supplemental information to buttress the larger and more comprehensive November EFSA. General and specific recommendations are given for both immediate actions at the province level and overall programmatic approaches to be considered.

The rapid assessment identified urgent needs for Food for Relief (FFR) assistance in Bokeo, and in a limited number of villages in the east of Houaphan. Food insecurity in these locations is a function of the combination of shocks faced in the rural context. It can be understood as the compound result of short term shocks such as pest infestation overlaid by longer term shocks such as drought, which are slow-onset, but have a multiplier effect on vulnerability the longer they persist.. It is recommended that household level targeting for FFR be considered, as important food security disparities exist, even in severely affected villages. In other locations visited, FFW was recommended as the preferred response option, with added emphasis on water and sanitation schemes.

1. Introduction

In the course of preparing the northern EFSA report, the WFP Laos country office received additional requests for assistance from five provinces in January 2010. Requests for assistance ranged from relatively small numbers in only a few villages in the case of Houaphan, Luang Namtha, and Xieng Khouang provinces, to more general appeals for larger populations in the case of Luang Prabang and Bokeo.

Based on these requests, a rapid assessment was fielded by the WFP Laos VAM unit between 7-20 February, with the following objectives:

Objectives:

- To assess reports of food insecurity caused by multiple shocks (including rodent infestations, droughts, and floods) since October 2009.
- To better quantify the extent to which the combination of shocks present in northern Laos (rodent infestation, floods, erratic rains/drought and others) continues to cause higher than expected levels of vulnerability among poor rural households.

Time and resource constraints meant that the more complex, quantitative data analysis undertaken in November 2009 (coupled with a much smaller area of focus) would not be viable in this case, and as a result a largely qualitative methodology was applied.

Moving rapidly and deploying two teams in three provinces and one team in two provinces, the VAM unit supported by sub-office staff visited a total of 10 districts in five provinces, synthesizing and analysing data on a rolling basis. The present report was prepared in the week following the field work.

Within the context of the much larger EFSA exercise conducted in October-November 2009, the February 2010 rapid assessment should be understood as a supplemental chapter of that process: it does not represent a stand-alone document, but is rather part of the larger body of research and assessment WFP has conducted in northern Laos since early 2009.

It will also be noted that certain sections of the November EFSA have been omitted from this report. Given this assessment's supplemental role, to reiterate the context and background chapters would be redundant. Equally, a more liberal approach to the main findings section has been used, both for reasons of expediency and as a function of the qualitative methodology applied.

Great care has been taken to ensure that the recommendations and conclusions of both assessments are aligned. The February rapid assessment had the advantage

of a much narrower geographic and thematic terms of reference, and as a result was able to provide recommendations which are highly specific to the objectives above. The integration of these recommendations into the overall portfolio of programming for WFP in Laos will require further review by the WFP Country Office programme unit.

2. Background

The November 2009 EFSA provides a complete review of the pertinent general context and food security issues in the affected provinces, and the reader is referred to that section of that report.

3. Methodology

General:

As with the November 2009 EFSA, the rapid assessment consisted of a review of secondary data, key informant interviews and primary data collection in visited areas. Key sources of data included the March 2009 EFSA (WFP's first assessment of rodent infestation in the north), and the November 2009 EFSA itself. Existing academic, media and grey literature on rodent infestation was also reviewed (see reference section). In terms of collaboration, WFP advised the UN country team of its intention to field the assessment and welcomed collaboration from any interested UN agency.

Discussions with key informants at the provincial level, including staff from the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, as well as Provincial Food Aid Coordinators were held in a number of formal and informal contexts. In the course of these meetings, the objectives of the assessment were presented, and any additional pertinent information or guidance sought.

Selection of districts and villages to be visited during the fieldwork was largely purpose driven, as requests for assistance came from specific districts, not whole provinces (with the exception of Luang Prabang). To that end, it was logical to travel to those villages which were reported to have been most severely affected. Once in the villages, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were held, followed by household interviews. Household sampling was conducted on a purposive basis, selected by the village development committee based on guidance from the assessment team.

Team composition and training:

Given the recent experience of the March and November 2009 EFSAAs, this rapid assessment was able to proceed with a relatively light training requirement. Key WFP personnel at the sub-office level had participated in those exercises and thus were well aware of the rationale, objectives and general methodological approach to be applied. Field staff were instrumental in selecting key districts and villages to visit based on their own first-hand monitoring of the situation in the course of their routine duties.

For Houaphan, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces, the mission was led by the two staff of the VAM unit in Vientiane, supported by sub-office staff across the three provinces. For Bokeo and Luang Namtha, the National VAM Officer led the field assessment, supported by the head of sub-office and sub-office staff.

For all locations, the assessment tools to be applied were disseminated and discussed with all participants. For the most part, this amounted to a refresher course, as the methodological approach was essentially a concise version of previous EFSA methodologies, and was already available in Lao language.

Assessment tools

Four key assessment tools were used in the course of the rapid assessment at the village level: key informant interviews, focus group discussions, household visits, and village transect walks. Sample questionnaires are included in appendix. These questionnaires were revised versions of the March 2009 tools, adjusted to focus attention changes to the food security context over the last three months.

Interviews with key informants (usually village heads called *Nai Ban*) served to outline the basic demographic, economic and social context of each village. This was the only tool applied with a predominantly quantitative approach. Focus group discussions with both men and women's groups explored the key sources of food, livelihoods, coping mechanisms and priorities for the future. Household level questionnaires served to provide randomly selected examples of the overall context of the village. Informed consent was obtained prior to commencing all interviews.

In total, some 16 key informant interviews, 19 focus groups, and 62 household interviews were conducted in 16 villages in 10 districts across five provinces were visited.

Province	Districts	Number of villages visited
Bokeo	Pak Tha	1
	Pha Oudom	1
Houaphan	Vieng Xai	2
	Xam Tai	1
Luang Namtha	Sing	2
	Vieng Phou Kha	1
Luang Prabang	Nambak	2
	Nan	2
	Chompet	2
Xieng Khouang	Nong Hed	2

Each team was equipped with GPS units, and all locations visited were plotted and mapped (see attached map).

Team debriefings were held at the end of each working day, with an interim debrief for the three southernmost provinces held in Vieng Xai district, Houaphan province on 13 February. An additional debrief was held in Bokeo (for Bokeo and Luang Namtha) on 19 February.

Data Management

As with the November EFSA, it was not possible to have a team dedicated to data entry and cleaning. The bulk of data entry was conducted at the end of each day into team members' laptop, a process overseen by the National VAM officer.

Although data collection methods and assessment tools were very largely derived from the November EFSA, the two data sets have been kept separately in order to expedite reporting of the findings. The findings of the November 2009 EFSA should be given precedence given the substantially larger scope and scale of that exercise.

Limitations:

Requests for assistance were received by the Country Office sequentially, the earliest being Houaphan and Xieng Khouang, followed by Luang Prabang and Bokeo. The request for Luang Namtha was received late on 7 February, when teams were already in advanced preparations for field travel. This meant that travel plans and scheduling were under constant review and adjustment, which in turn necessitated a methodology that was flexible enough to provide useful information within a very limited amount of time per village.

- Despite the fact that this was rapid assessment involving a relatively small number of villages, the mission involved a total of six field staff, three vehicles and two country office staff, across five non-contiguous provinces of Laos. This taxed the human resources and vehicle pools of the sub-offices involved to the limit. In other words, all other sub-office work was of necessity put on hold while the assessments were underway. This has a knock-on effect for the ongoing Food for Work targeting process, which is time sensitive given the onset of the rainy season. While this was largely unavoidable, it does go to underscore the challenges to the sub-offices to meet the needs of both assessment work and routine programming with scarce resources. This is especially true for Luang Prabang sub-office, which sees a high number of official visitors and missions.
- As agricultural and forest hunting and gathering livelihoods require villagers to be away from the village during daylight hours, in order to ensure that adults were present to take part in discussions, advance word was sent by public bus courier of the dates, times and objectives of WFP's visit. There were occasions in Bokeo, Houaphan, and Luang Namtha provinces where the message was not received in good time. As a result the village was deserted when the assessment team arrived. Again, this required a degree of flexibility and adjustments to the itinerary, resulting in a smaller sample than was initially intended.
- Although not unique to Laos, travel conditions are gruelling, especially in the mountainous north of the country. Days with six to eight hours of hard travel were not unusual, and care had to be taken that the quality of the work was not compromised by staff fatigue.
- At the village level, important linguistic variations made discussion difficult. Where possible, discussions were held in locally appropriate languages (Akha, Hmong), but it should be noted that from place to place there are differences in dialect, vocabulary and tonal systems within the Lao language itself. In some locations, unfamiliar vocabulary or phrasing made it difficult to fully understand the answers provided to WFP's questions.
- Important differences in gender roles exist in different ethnic groups, rendering women's focus groups a particular challenge. For some ethnicities, women will not talk to strangers, or if there are any men present. Where possible, separate focus groups with only WFP female staff were present were held, but this was also not always culturally appropriate. However, this did not always hold true. One joint male/female focus group discussion with a Khmou ethnic village in Chompet district of Luang Prabang was animated and open, despite Khmou traditions that women stay silent.

4. Main Findings

This section will address the findings of the assessment as they pertain to the two main objective and the secondary objectives. It will also provide additional information which is also of importance in understanding the food security context in the locations visited. In view of the immense diversity of the Lao context, it is recognized from the outset that these analyses may not pertain outside of the study areas.

Once again, it is stressed that the approach taken in this assessment was qualitatively based, and did not deploy some of the more elaborate assessment tools such as Food Consumption Score, or Coping Strategies Index included in the November EFSA. The findings of this assessment should only be viewed in the context of that larger exercise, and not as a stand alone document.

Main Objectives:

The first objective of the assessment was stated as:

- To assess reports of food insecurity caused by multiple shocks (including rodent infestations, droughts, and floods) since October 2009.

Key Findings:

Rodent Infestation:

In reviewing the short term shocks which may have resulted in greater levels of vulnerability since the November 2009 assessment, the assessment noted that rodent infestation persists at varying levels in all locations visited. However, based on discussions with villagers, the scale and impact of this infestation vary from low (Xieng Khouang) to severe and ongoing (Houaphan). The most prevalent species appears to be the small rodent known as *Nuu kii*, although 10-15 cm specimens were not uncommon.

However, taken on their own, with the exception of Bokeo and Houaphan, rodent infestation does not ipso facto appear to be the root cause of heightened food insecurity in the short term. The November EFSA noted that

Given that the assessment was conducted immediately after the main harvest season, the implications are that many households will fall from borderline (and possibly adequate) consumption group to the “poor” consumption category...It follows that a likely deterioration of the situation during the hunger season will affect more households in these provinces.

The rapid assessment concurs with these findings. As will be elaborated in the text for the second objective, rodent infestation is one of a number of concurrent threats which rural households in northern Laos is undergoing, which, taken as a whole, are indeed pushing borderline households into vulnerability.

Drought:

Rodent infestation has compounded the existing drought conditions, which were reported in villages visited in all locations visited. Drought in the provinces visited does not have a particularly prominent profile, is perhaps best understood as a key background factor. By reducing yields and the robustness of the crop, drought impacts overall agricultural production to the extent that additional shocks (such as rodent infestation) cause more damage than would be seen in under non-drought conditions. Drought also has important linkages to flooding and erosion in rainy seasons, as dry conditions exacerbate rapid water flows. Although droughts are slow onset, the longer they persist the more they reduce household ability to cope with shorter term, immediate onset shocks.

The assessment did not identify any new aspects to the phenomenon of drought in the five provinces, but it is mentioned here to illustrate the overlays of shock factors presents in the Lao context, with slow onset shocks such as drought compounded by more rapid onset pest infestations.

Seed Stocks:

Across all districts visited, rodent infestation combined with drought has resulted in reduced harvests and seed stocks. Focus group discussions indicated that rodents were most prevalent at two key stages in the agricultural cycle: at the moment of initial planting of seedlings, and just prior to harvest when the grain nears maturity. Following the harvest, seed (and rice stocks) stored in village granaries have also then been infested.



Rice stalks stripped of grain by rats, Xamtai district, Houaphan.

While it is beyond the scope of the rapid assessment to quantify the gross losses resulting from this infestation, what is clear is that this will have important implications for the main 2010 planting. In some locations visited, respondents stated they would be planting less than half than in previous years. This is due in part to limited seed stocks, and also an attempt to minimize further losses caused by additional infestation in the future. In some cases, such as Nong Het district in Xieng Khouang, villagers had made arrangements to purchase or trade seed from other villages, but this is not always possible for a variety of agricultural, economic and logistical reasons.

The upshot of the depleted seed stocks is that the 2010 rice planting will be considerably lower than in previous years, and consequently the September 2010 harvest will fall short of requirements, especially in villages which were already net deficit producers. Based on patterns noted in previous years, even very poor harvests do provide enough for households to meet their basic rice needs for one to three months. However, it is highly likely that there will important shortfalls in overall availability and access in the 2011 lean season.

Finally, as a caveat to this finding, it should be noted that rodent infestation patterns are idiosyncratic and difficult to track. In Xantai district of Houaphan, villagers with upland fields on the north side of the village of Ban Korlou were highly affected by rats, whereas fields on the south side were untouched. This has led to significant imbalances within villages. This point will be discussed in more detail in the Conclusions and Recommendations section.

The second objective was:

- To better quantify the extent to which the combination of shocks present in northern Laos (rodent infestation, floods, erratic rains, drought and others) continues to cause higher than expected levels of vulnerability among poor rural households.

Key Findings:

Shocks and Vulnerability:

In all locations visited, it was clear that poor rural households face a wide range of shocks on a more or less constant basis. While livelihoods and coping strategies have been developed which allow for a reasonably level of stability at the household and community level, should any one of those shocks, or indeed two or more occur with greater intensity than expected (as is occurring with both drought and rodents at the time of assessment), then households quickly exhaust their available resources. As the November EFSA has noted, a precarious and delicate balance exists between food insecure and borderline households.

As the intensity and frequency of shocks increases, households' ability to cope will be stressed on a rolling basis, making it more difficult to cope during lean seasons or in response to short term shocks. This has implications not only at the village level for covariant shocks which affect all households (as in the case of pests, flooding or drought), but also at the individual level, as households experiencing loss of food source, income, illness or death of a productive member are immediately rendered food insecure. The rapid assessment noted that in Chompet district of Luang Prabang, the difference between food secure and food insecure was having a family member employed as a casual labourer: when that labourer fell ill and was unable to work, the main livelihood of that household evaporated overnight.

Although beyond the scope of this assessment to make any firm recommendations on this next point, it was noted that indigenous forms of community based charity and welfare exist within and between different ethnic groups, notably Hmong. The assessment team talked to households reliant on soft loans, labour or direct handouts of cash or food from sympathetic richer households. As vulnerability increases, more households may resort to this option to meet their immediate needs, which may in turn overtax such systems. More research is required to better understand the importance of this support mechanism as a key coping strategy for vulnerable households.

Resettlement, Land Access and Tenure:

In addition to shocks such as floods, droughts and pest infestation, food insecurity in the locations visited was affected by issues of land access and land tenure, as well as resettlement.

Resettlement in rural Laos is an incomplete and ongoing process. As it pertains to food security, what is most pertinent about resettlement is that the transfer of human settlements precedes allocation of new agricultural lands. In other words, villages are moved to new locations but their paddies and uplands remain where they were. Moreover, as the resettlement process tends to consolidate small villages into larger ones located along key roads, this increases pressures on the arable land, water and forest resources close to the consolidated locations. Villagers often have no option but to commute back and forth from their fields into order to cultivate their crops. The topography of northern Laos is such that walking a single kilometre may take as much as 45 minutes, and even longer during the rainy season. Households unable to make such a commute face clear challenges in meeting their food needs.

The assessment did not record any discontent with resettlement as a priority, and it appears to be well understood as national policy; on the whole, there appears to be no objection to the policy *per se*. However, concerns were repeatedly raised about the difficulties resulting from trying to maintain an agriculture-based livelihood over great distances.

Livelihoods:

The assessment noted that casual or day labour is a common livelihood, but is unevenly distributed, highly seasonal and is contingent on availability of employment.

In districts visited Bokeo, Luang Namtha and Luang Prabang, casual labour represents a viable livelihood, as employment is widely available. In contrast, in Nong Hed district of Xieng Khouang it is virtually unknown. While paid labour increases the overall cash income of the household, it reduces the time available for own cultivation and increases household reliance on market purchases.

It was further noted that in Bokeo and Luang Namtha, casual labour availability is linked to increased commercial and concession farming, as commercial farms require labourers for planting, land clearance and so on. As commercial farming expands, uplands (and in some cases, paddy lands) are being sold on to commercial developers for conversion to sugar cane and rubber plantations. In addition, all households visited in Luang Namtha had planted rubber to one degree or another. This is far from a comprehensive analysis on this topic, but the key observation here is that contrary to the assumption that smallholder agriculture is the prevailing livelihood in rural areas, paid employment is emerging as an increasingly important livelihood strategy.

Consumption Patterns and Coping Strategies:



Preparing cassava, Xamtai District, Houaphan. Cassava is consumed in the lean season, as is generally less preferred than rice.

The rapid assessment did not have the time or resources to conduct a coping strategies index as was conducted in November. However, qualitative information gathered in the course the assessment confirmed the findings of the November EFSA, insofar as the incidence of 'very high' coping strategies¹ is very limited. There were no reported instances of extreme negative coping strategies, such as distress sale of assets or large animals, or migration.

In all locations, the preferred staple diet was rice, vegetables and chilli. Sources of foods besides rice represented a more substantial challenge.

¹ For a fuller explanation of this index and of the concept of coping strategies as a whole, please refer to the November EFSA document.

Protein intake from fish was very limited, and meat even more so. No household interviewed reported eating meat or fish every day.

Changes in consumption patterns were more frequently recorded than during the November EFSA, but this is consistent with that report, which anticipated that as the lean season progressed, changes would be seen in consumption patterns. The most common change noted was consuming less preferred foods, notably cassava, and to a lesser extent maize. While this can be viewed as a routine coping mechanism during dry season, interviewees noted that they had started eating cassava and maize earlier than in previous years as their rice stocks had run short. Women in Bokeo province also reported skipping meals and reducing the frequency of meals to ensure that their children would get enough to eat.

On the whole, villages visited did not report any problems in terms of overall market availability of rice, but concerns centred on access. In Luang Namtha and Bokeo, it was reported that households were purchasing rice earlier in the year than in 2009, and that they were doing so because they had exhausted their available stocks.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In order to be of direct utility to WFP programming unit, and in recognition of the important variations noted within and between locations visited, this recommendation section will include both general and province specific recommendations. The location specific recommendations will tend to cover the short to medium term concerns emanating from the present context, while the general recommendations focus more at the programmatic level.

General:

1. As a result of rodent infestation and drought, food insecurity and vulnerability are a matter of immediate concern for Bokeo and for a limited number of villages in Houaphan. Across all provinces visited, it is recognized that rodent infestation is one of a wide range of shocks present in the northern Lao rural context, and serves to compound existing vulnerabilities, putting added pressure on already vulnerable food insecure and borderline households.

Existing food insecurity is also impacted by a number of medium and longer term issues, such as burgeoning commercial agriculture, land access and land tenure, and off-farm employment opportunities.

Households' ability to cope with the present combination of shocks is contingent on the livelihood options available. It is likely that a number of middle and upper income households in the locations visited will be able to recover from the present set of shocks without outside assistance. In other words, while food assistance will be required for some populations in each locations visited, a widescale approach targeting the village level is not recommended at this time. This is explored in more detail in province level recommendations below.

In considering response options, due attention should be paid to the location-specific combination of factors which contribute to food insecurity. It is recommended that in this context, particular attention be paid to the micro and meso-level impact of resettlement, and resultant land access and tenure implications.

2. Except for Bokeo province and three villages in Houaphan, the February rapid assessment did not find a pressing need for Food for Relief (FFR) distributions at this time. However, it is noted that this requirement may increase as the lean season progresses. Decision making on FFW and FFR should be centred at the sub-office level, and made on a case by case basis to the extent possible.

Province Level Recommendations:

The following recommendations are specific to each location visited, and are subject to review and refinement at the sub-office level. Suggested caseloads per province are included simply as indication of the overall scope of the situation, and are included for planning purposes only, not as absolute indicators of food insecurity. Based on the Food Consumption score analysis contained in the Northern EFSA, a range of plus or minus 30 percent of the figures cited here may be possible, given the number of very poor and borderline households identified.

Extensive field notes are available for each district visited, and can be provided if need be upon request.

For all numbers cited below, the initial reported number is based on the first request received from local government at the provincial and district level. Based on a joint review and fieldwork by WFP and the government, the revised figure is then presented here for planning purposes. It should also be noted that in the case of Bokeo and Luang Namtha that the revised figure indicates the priority needs in key districts, and does not negate the initial estimate. Indeed, the levels of vulnerability noted in the course of the assessment indicate that it is in these provinces that needs are likely to be highest.

Whichever mode of assistance is deemed most appropriate, a review of WFP's targeting procedure is required.

Targeting: With some occasional exceptions, WFP's current approach under PRRO 10566 uses a village level targeting mechanism for Food for Relief, whereby village requests for assistance as assessed on a village-by-village basis: if a village is found eligible, then all residents of the village will receive assistance from WFP. Food for Work activities have applied household targeting.

While village level of targeting has been relatively straightforward to apply, errs on the side of inclusion, and reduces the risk of redistribution, the assessment noted that there are important disparities within any given village, whereby not all residents are vulnerable. Even in the village of Ban Goh-lou (Houaphan) which has been severely affected rodents and has high levels of prevailing vulnerability, some residents were still able to not only meet their own needs, but sell surplus.

The challenges around village level targeting have been compounded by resettlement. As human settlements are increasingly located along transport arteries, the physical (as opposed to the administrative) boundaries between one village and the next become blurred. It is increasingly difficult to single out particular villages from a string of settlements along a road. Equally challenging is that redistricting has not kept pace with population movements. The

assessment mission encountered a single settlement in Houaphan which was an amalgam of three separately gazetted villages.

Again in the medium term, it is recommended that WFP consider targeting above the village level, selecting potential locations for assistance at the sub-district level, then grouping by 'zone' such as along a given road, river, valley or mountain range. Thereafter, within that zone, household level targeting could be applied. If all vulnerable households within a given zone were targeted, this would in theory reduce redistribution, while being more equitable to all vulnerable households within a given area.

This would be a substantial paradigm shift, but one for which there is support at the sub-office level. The country office VAM unit should work to support sub-offices to develop an implementation plan for this recommendation.

Provinces:

Bokeo & Luang Namtha:

Initial reported number of affected people (Bokeo): 29,580
Revised Number: 4,720

Initial reported number of affected people (Luang Namtha): 6,746
Revised Number: 6,733

Recommendation: In terms of overall food insecurity and vulnerability, Bokeo is of most immediate concern of all locations visited. In Bokeo, women reported skipping meals to feed their children. Food stocks have been severely depleted, as households buy rice day-to-day to meet their needs. This situation is expected to deteriorate further as the lean season continues. Extensive planting of rubber and other cash crops has reduced the land available for own production, leaving households reliant on cash incomes to purchase food to meet their needs.

It is recommended that, bearing in mind the recommendation above on household level targeting, FFR is appropriate for a number of villages, supplemented by expanded FFW activities on a case by case basis. Priority for FFW should be on water and sanitation projects, which area pressing need in all locations visited in the two provinces. It should be stressed that as with other provinces, the total number of villages visited was very limited, and the assessment was informed that there were other villages facing equivalent levels of food insecurity which the assessment team was unable to verify or visit.

Furthermore, these two northern provinces contain some of the most varied ethnic, economic and ecological zones in Laos, and it is especially difficult to extrapolate conclusions for the whole province based on the five villages visited in the course of this assessment. The sub-office should be supported to

- a) initiate FFR in priority villages and districts,

- b) work up a portfolio of viable FFW schemes, and
- c) continue village level assessments on a rolling basis to get a fuller picture of the food security situation as the lean season continues.

The sub-office is currently understaffed and under resourced to carry out such activities, and will need a minimum of two additional field staff and supporting physical assets (notably vehicles) if these recommendations are to be realized.

Houaphan:

Initial reported number of affected people: 6,750

Revised Number: 6,750

Recommendation: The overall affected population in Houaphan is limited to two districts in the extreme east of the province. Villages visited in Houaphan had the most immediately evident and ongoing rodent infestations of all locations visited, and are physically isolated from even district level infrastructure- the provincial capital is more than four hours drive away. Based on the revised number of households, and in light of the prevailing levels of food insecurity noted by the assessment, FFR is recommended in the immediate term. For households able to initiate recovery activities with some external support, the possibility of FFW later in the lean season.

Xieng Khouang:

Initial reported number of affected people: 8,700

Revised Number: 8,700

Recommendation: In Xieng Khouang, affected populations appear to be confined to a single district and are relatively few in number. Households interviewed reported that 2010 has been considerably more difficult than 2009, with persistent rodent infestation, drought and lack of access to water. In this context, FFW would be recommended for affected populations in this district.

Luang Prabang:

Initial reported number of affected people: 91, 361

Revised Number: 80,331

Recommendation: Initial and revised figures received from the provincial government for Luang Prabang are higher than all other requests combined, and include districts located across the entire province. With the time and resource constraints this assessment faced, a total of six villages were visited, from which drawing conclusions for 80,331 people is a challenge.

Within the limited sample visited, there were no indications that the situation in Luang Prabang is as urgent as those numbers would suggest. With this in mind,

it is recommended that in collaboration with the provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare and the Provincial Food Aid Coordinator, a verification exercise of the revised figure is conducted, and on that basis a revised list of priority districts and villages be developed.

Appendix I:



Appendix II: Assessment Tools

Checklist -- Key informant interview

Part I: Agriculture and other gov. officials (district, provincial, central)

1. What is the history of the shock(s) in this area? When was the last major shock? What was it?
2. What is the nature of the damage? When was the damage most – growing, seeding, harvest time?
3. What geographical areas are affected (possibility to draw a map of affected areas and verify the areas that are low, moderate and severe damages)? (districts, villages...)
4. How many households/people are affected? (distinguish between low, medium, highly affected if possible)
5. What proportion (approx. percentage) of the cultivation area is affected?
6. How do the current production losses compare to losses in a usual year?
7. How is the situation likely to evolve in the next three months, and in the coming years?
8. Has any assistance already been provided to affected people?
 - a. What type,
 - b. to whom,
 - c. where,
 - d. from whom?
9. Are there any plans to support farmers to:
 - a. Recover from the damage to their crop (e.g. assist in replanting)? What type, to whom, where, from whom?
 - b. Preventing future damage? What type, to whom, where, from whom?
10. Collect the records/secondary data where it is applicable and available (examples: records of areas affected, maps (photos of maps), requests or descriptions regarding the situation)
11. Have you heard of rodent control committees? Are they active in your area? What do they do? Where are they can we ask them some questions? Set up a meeting? (in case of rats infestation)

Part II: Health centers – (go to centers located close to areas that seem to be very affected - can be province, district, village health facility, if there is a health volunteer in a very affected village also ask him/her the questions)

1. What are the main diseases in the area? Any changes in the last 3 months?
2. Do you have concerns regarding the impacts of shock(s) to human health condition (mention nutrition and disease)? Explain
3. What are the common diseases found in this area due to the shock(s)?
4. Have you observed a change no. of cases/patients due to the shock(s)? Can you quantify the change?
5. Have you observed a change the nutrition status of patients due to the shock(s)? Can you quantify the change?
6. If there is a disease outbreak, is the health center be able to cope with the situation? Explain
7. Collect the records/secondary data where it is applicable and available (examples: recent records of diseases in the area...)

Part III: Village key informants (village head, LWU...)

1. No. of HHs
2. No. of people in the village
3. Main ethnic groups in the village
4. What are the main livelihood activities in the village?
5. What are the main crops grown by the villagers/ in the village

6. Describe village population:
 - a. How many “poor”/“vulnerable” households
 - b. How many “normal” households
7. What is the general situation of food security in the village – do people have enough to eat (rice and other food) to live an active and healthy life? Discuss.
8. Was the village affected by the shock(s)?
9. Is this year worse than previous years regarding shock(s)?
10. What is the history of the shock(s) in this area?
11. What type of damage did the shock(s) cause this year in your village?
12. How would you consider the damage level in your village (low, moderate, high)? Why?
13. Do you know of other villages in the area that are more affected than your village?
14. What geographical areas are affected in your village (possibility to draw a map of affected areas and verify the areas that are low, moderate and severe damages)? (districts, villages...)
15. How many HH are low, medium, very affected by the shock(s) in your village? Describe the households (any types of households more affected than others?)
16. What problems have people in your village had to cope with because of the shock(s)?
17. What do people in your village do to cope with the food shortage situation?
18. What do people do to deal with the rat problem?
 - a. in their fields, Explain
 - b. in their stocks? Explain
 - c. In their homes? Explain
19. Estimate (ha compare to total,%) cultivation areas that were damaged by shock(s)
 - a. Rice (paddy + upland)
 - b. Other crops
20. Has any assistance already been provided – what type, to whom, where, and by whom?
21. What immediate assistance do people need most in the short term?
22. What immediate assistance do people need most in the medium-long term?
23. Collect the records/secondary data where it is applicable and available (examples: areas affected by shock(s)...)
 - a. in their fields, Explain
 - b. in their stocks? Explain
 - c. In their homes? Explain

Part IV: Traders (village)

1. Is there enough foods available in the local/nearby market to meet demand?
2. Is it more difficult to find sellers (farmers) now compared to previous years at the same time?
3. Has the price of food gone up or down compared to the same time last year, by how much?
4. Check for market prices on some key basic commodities (Sticky rice first and second quality, Ordinary Lao rice, Beef Buffalo chicken second quality, rice alcohol)
5. What are the main causes for the price changes (e.g. the price of the food increase due to food shortage)?
6. Is there more or less buyers now compared to same time last year and to the last 3 months?
7. Is there any changes in amount and quantity villagers buy from you compared to same time last year and to the last 3 months?

Part V: Rodent control committee

1. What is the role of your committee?
2. What is the history of the rats in this area? When was the last major infestation?
3. What is the nature of the damage? When was the damage most – growing, seeding, harvest time?
4. What geographical areas are affected (possibility to draw a map of affected areas and verify the areas that are low, moderate and severe damages)? (districts, villages...)
5. How is the situation likely to evolve in the next three months, and in the coming years (how long are the rats likely to stay)?
6. Has any assistance already been provided to affected people?
 - a. What type,

- b. to whom,
 - c. where,
 - d. from whom?
7. Are there any plans to support farmers to:
 - a. Recover from the damage to their crop (e.g. assist in replanting)? What type, to whom, where, from whom?
 - b. Preventing future damage? What type, to whom, where, from whom?
 8. Collect the records/secondary data where it is applicable and available (examples: records of areas affected, maps (photos of maps), requests or descriptions regarding the situation)

Checklist -- Focus group discussion for community/village level

Instructions: Select the most relevant questions based on the group you are working with: e.g. rice upland farmers, cash crop farmers (corn), women. You don't need to ask all questions in the checklist because the purpose of it is to help you remember not to forget asking these points. You should instead pay attention to the main topics.

I. Food availability and security in the village

1. What are the main livelihoods in the village?
2. What is the general situation of food security in the village – do people have enough to eat (rice and other food) to live an active and healthy life? Discuss.
3. Where is the market, is it easy for the villagers to reach?
4. What are the main problems faced by the households in the village? (rats, drought, flood, land slide, other crop pest/ disease, illness/accident in the HH, livestock disease, lack of income, lack of food, etc.)

II. Extent and severity of the shock(s)

12. Is this shock(s) a big problem for this village?
13. What is the history of the shock in this area?
14. Is this year worse than previous years regarding shock(s)?
15. What type of damage did the shocks(s) cause this year?
16. What geographical areas are affected?
17. What proportion of HHs are potentially affected?
18. How would you consider the damage level in your village (low, moderate, high)? Why?
19. Try to draw a map of affected areas and verify the areas that are low, moderate and severe damages)?

III. Impacts of shock(s)

1. Which people are having the most problems due to the shock(s)? Describe the people and the problems.
2. What are the shock(s)'s main impacts on food sources for the villagers: Try to quantify (compared to last year or to normal year)
 - What are the main food sources of people?
 - Have they changed since the shock(s)? How?
3. What are the shock(s)'s main impacts on production:
 - What type of crops were damaged?
 - How do the current production losses compare to losses in a usual year? (quantify harvest after the shock(s)/ harvest in average years)
 - Are there any possibilities for other crops to be grown now in order to compensate to the losses?
4. Have the shock(s) damaged food stocks?
 - What types of food?
 - Who's food?
 - quantify?
5. Have the shock(s) damaged seeds that were kept for planting?
 - What type of seeds?
 - quantify?
6. What are the shock(s)'s main impacts on Livelihoods?
 - What livelihoods are most affected by the shock(s)? How are they affected?
 - Has the shock(s) changed the income of some people in the village? Explain?

- Are there alternative livelihoods that villagers currently use or are considering as another option?
7. Have the shock(s) been affecting the following:
 - Livestock, how?
 - Water sources both for HH uses and drink, how?
 - Health/diseases, how?
 - Education, how?
 8. What are the shock(s)'s main impacts on food in the market?
 - Is there a local/nearby market?
 - Does it have adequate food available?
 - Has the price of food gone up or down compared to the same time last year, by how much?
 9. How is the situation likely to evolve in the next three months, and in the coming years (how long are the rats likely to stay if the shock is due to rats)?

IV. Coping strategies

1. How do the villagers deal with the shock(s)?
 - a. How do they deal with/solve the problems due to the shock(s)?
 - b. What do villagers do to overcome the problems caused by the shock(s)?
2. What are people doing to be able to get enough food for their HHs after being affected by the shock(s)?
3. Are there any changes in their food consumption since the rats came (do people eat more, less, different types of food)?
4. Have you observed any HHs that reduce no. of meals or skip their entire meals, or go without eating for the whole day? What % of people in the village does that?

V. Assistance received and/or needed

1. Has any assistance already been provided – what type, to whom, where, and by whom?
2. What immediate assistance do you need most in the short term?
3. What immediate assistance do you need most in the medium-long term?

Household questionnaire

Instructions:

⇒ Recommended to interview at least 2 poor and 2 normal households

A-ASSESSMENT INFORMATION <i>(to be filled in by the team leader and before you start the HH interview)</i>	
1. Dates of Assessment: _____/02/2010	
2. Assessment team number: 1 2 <i>(circle your team number)</i>	
3. Place of the assessment:	
Province	District
Village	
GPS coordinates:	
4. Household number: : 1 2 3 4 <i>(circle number of HH you interview)</i>	
5. What is the status of the HH in the village? <i>(ask key informant)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor/vulnerable <input type="checkbox"/> Normal
6. What % of HH in the village are similar to this HH? <i>(ask key informant)</i>	_ _ % of village HH

B-HOUSEHOLD BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
1. What ethnic group do you belong to?	_____ ethnic group Belongs to <i>(fill in afterwards)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Lao-Tai <input type="checkbox"/> Mon-Khmer (austrro-asiatic) <input type="checkbox"/> Sino-tibetan <input type="checkbox"/> Hmong-Mien
2. What are your household's main livelihood activities (Tick all that apply)?	
Farmer - Crops	Unskilled worker
Farmer - Crops, gathering and hunting	Skilled worker
Farmer - Crops and livestock	Salaried
Trader, shopkeeper	
Others _____ <i>(specify)</i>	
3. What are the main problems your household has been facing in the last 3 months (Tick all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Drought	<input type="checkbox"/> Illness/accident in the HH
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular flood	<input type="checkbox"/> Death of HH member
<input type="checkbox"/> Flash Flood/ land slide	<input type="checkbox"/> Livestock disease
<input type="checkbox"/> Rat infestation	<input type="checkbox"/> Wild animal
<input type="checkbox"/> Other crop pest/ disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Un-yeild rice
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of rice	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of food	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of income	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <i>(specify)</i>	

C-DAMAGE CAUSED BY SHOCKS (rats, droughts, floods, un-yeild rice, wild animals, pests, insects, etc)				
1. Is your household affected by the shock(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK <i>(if No ⇒ Section E)</i>				
2. What types of problems did your household face during the shock(s)? <i>Tick all that apply</i>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Loss/damaged crops in the field → <i>continue to Q3</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Disease/injury to poultry			
<input type="checkbox"/> Loss/damaged food stock → <i>continue to Q4</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Disease/injury of other livestock			
<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged/spoiled seeds → <i>continue to Q4 or 5</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged fish pond/fish source			
<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged vegetable garden	<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged house			
<input type="checkbox"/> Food shortage	<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged/loss of business establishment			
<input type="checkbox"/> Had to consume non-staple/ unconventional food	<input type="checkbox"/> Reduced/loss income source			
<input type="checkbox"/> Unavailability of foods in market	<input type="checkbox"/> Reduced//loss wage rate			
<input type="checkbox"/> High price of daily commodities	<input type="checkbox"/> Interrupted education			
<input type="checkbox"/> Death of household member	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of pure drinking water			
<input type="checkbox"/> Injury/illness of the household members	<input type="checkbox"/> Others (specify) _____			
3. <i>If HH crops have been affected, please fill in the below table</i>				
Crop affected by shock(s)	amount planted in normal year <i>(Specify unit)</i>	amount harvested in normal year	amount planted last season	amount harvested last season
Rice	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _
Corn	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _
Cassava	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _	_ _ _

Sesame	_ _	_ _	_ _	_ _
Jobs tear	_ _	_ _	_ _	_ _
Vegetable gardens	_ _	_ _	_ _	_ _
Other: _____	_ _	_ _	_ _	_ _

4. If HH food stocks have been affected, please fill in the below table		
Type of food affected	Amount available before shock(s)(Specify unit)	Amount damaged by rat
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5. If HH seed stocks (planted) have been eaten, please fill in the below table		
Type of seed eaten	Amount available before shock(s)(Specify unit)	Amount damaged by rat
Rice	_ _	_ _
Corn	_ _	_ _
Cassava	_ _	_ _
Sesame	_ _	_ _
Jobs tear	_ _	_ _
Vegetables	_ _	_ _
Other: _____	_ _	_ _
6. If HH seed stocks seeds (in stock) have been eaten please fill in the below table		
Type of seed eaten	Amount available before shock(s)(Specify unit)	Amount damaged by rat
Rice	_ _	_ _
Corn	_ _	_ _
Cassava	_ _	_ _
Sesame	_ _	_ _
Jobs tear	_ _	_ _
Vegetables	_ _	_ _
Other: _____	_ _	_ _
7. Has your HH recovered from the shock (is everything gone back to normal now)?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK

D-IMPACT OF RATS ON FOOD SECURITY	
1. How did your household overcome the problems caused by the shock(s)? <i>Tick all that apply</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Spent savings <input type="checkbox"/> Sold household assets (cooking utensils, jewellery etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Sold productive assets (land, agricultural tools, seeds or other inputs, machinery) <input type="checkbox"/> Distress sale or consumption of animals <input type="checkbox"/> Rented out land <input type="checkbox"/> Purchased food on credit <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowed food <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowed money	<input type="checkbox"/> Received food by relatives or others (no need to reimburse) <input type="checkbox"/> Some HH members migrated <input type="checkbox"/> Sent children to live with relatives <input type="checkbox"/> Sold crop before harvest <input type="checkbox"/> Casual labor <input type="checkbox"/> Increased Collecting of Forest products, Hunting, Fishing <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced expenditures on health and education <input type="checkbox"/> Relied on emergency support (specify who?) <input type="checkbox"/> Other, specify: _____

E- FOOD SECURITY SITUATION

1. Does your household have food to eat now?	RICE <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	Other food <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK
How long will the current rice stock last your HH?	_ _ _ months	
2. For the months in which you do not have food will you be able to purchase/collect/borrow the food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
3. <u>In the last 7 days</u> Did you or any household member eat a smaller meal (less amount of food) than usual because of food shortage?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
4. <u>In the last 7 days</u> Did you or any other household member eat fewer number of meals (skip meal) than usual, because of food shortage?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
5. <u>In the last 7 days</u> Were you or any household member not able to eat the kinds of foods you choose to eat as staple/main food (e.g. rice) because of shortage of food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
6. <u>In the last 7 days</u> Did you or any household member was compelled to eat foods that you normally choose not to eat due to shortage of food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
7. <u>In the last 7 days</u> Did you or any household member go a whole day (24 hours) without eating anything because there was shortage of food?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	

RESPONSE		
1. Did you receive any aid/relief given due to the shock(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> DNK	
2. If yes, what type of aid/relief did you receive? <i>Tick all that apply</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Food <input type="checkbox"/> Cash <input type="checkbox"/> Seeds	<input type="checkbox"/> Rat traps/pesticides <input type="checkbox"/> Others (specify).....
3. From your HH point of view, what are the priority needs in terms of assistance?		

Village summary sheet

Instructions:

⇒ To be filled in by the team leader with the team members after the village was visited – if possible on the same day

OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTED				
7. Date of Assessment: ____/02/2010				
8. Assessment team number: 1 2 <i>(circle your team number)</i>				
9. Place of the assessment:				
Province		District		Village
GPS coordinates:				
10. Describe how the information was collected in this village				
<input type="checkbox"/> Direct observation	Describe what was observed by team members (circle)	1= Affected upland field 2= Rice stocks in the field 3= Food stocks in the houses 4= Village areas 5= Some poor HHs 6= Other: _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> Key informants interview	Number of Key informants interviewed	_ people	Function of Key informants interviewed (circle)	1= Village chief, 2= head of the elders 3= LWU representative 4=LFNC representative 5=head of the young 6=teacher 8=Health volunteer 7=other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group Discussion	Number of FGDs	_ FGD	For each FGD describe FGD and people present	FGD 1:
				FGD 2:
				FGD 3:
				FGD 4:
<input type="checkbox"/> Normal Households	Number of normal households interviewed	_ HH	According to the KI what % of the village are in the same situation as these households?	_ _ % of HH in the village are in a similar situation
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Households	Number of special households interviewed	_ HH	According to the KI what % of the village are in the same situation as these households?	_ _ % of HH in the village are in a similar situation
			Describe main characteristics of the special households	_____ (eg: female headed household, HH with disabled family member, HH with no labor force, elderly)
11. Note any difficulties in collecting information in this village				

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Main findings in the village

Food availability and security situation

Extend and severity of the shock(s)

Impacts of shock(s)

Coping strategies

Assistance received and/or needed

- Overall judgment on situation and the severity of needs identified

- Short-term outlook (whether the crisis is worsening or becoming less serious)

- Factors that could worsen the situation or impede relief operations (bad weather, insecurity etc.)

2. Quantitative summary

a-How many HH are potentially affected?

_____ % HH lowly affected in the village
 _____ % HH medium affected in the village
 _____ % HH very affected in the village

b-How many very food insecure HH?

_____ % HH reducing amount of food eaten at each meal, or reducing numbers of meals per day

c-How have the crops been affected in the village

_____ % rice production lost compared to a normal year
 _____ % maize production lost compared to a normal year
 _____ % other crop production lost compared to a normal year

3. Other problems and priorities identified by the affected population

4. KEY FOR RANKING SEVERITY OF NEED

Red	Severe situation: urgent intervention required	
Orange	Situation of concern, or lack of data/unreliable data: further assessment and/or surveillance required	
Green	Relatively normal situation or local population able to cope with crisis; no further action required	
Ranking of severity of need (Circle one for each)	Problems identified	Recommendations
Food security	Red	
	Orange	
	Green	

Nutrition	Red		
	Orange		
	Green		
Health risks and health status	Red		
	Orange		
	Green		
Other (specify)	Red		
	Orange		
	Green		
5. Attach all outputs (questionnaire, ...) of the village visit to this sheet			

Appendix III: Mission Members:

Jannie Armstrong
Maria Frank
Somphavanh Nakhavong
Khamsing Namsavanh
KhanNgeun Phommalangsy
Bouakhai Saipaseuth
Saysana Sithirajvongsa
Tiziana Zoccheddu

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