

Policy Think Tank Stakeholder Consultation Meeting: Strengthening Cross-Sectoral Cooperation on Policy Implementation in Lao PDR

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Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWD	Alternate Wetting and Drying
DLF	Department of Livestock and Fisheries
DOI	Department of Irrigation
GDP	National Gross Domestic Product
ISEPR	Institute for Socio-Economic Policy Research of LASES
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LASES	Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences
MAE	Ministry of Agriculture and Environment
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
NPS	CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies
NUOL	National University of Lao PDR
PRPA	Policy Research Priority Agenda from 2025 to 2030 of PTT
PTT	Policy Think Tank
SSWGs	Sub-sector Working Groups
SWG-ARD	Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development

Summary

The report summarizes key insights from the Policy Think Tank (PTT) Stakeholder Consultation Meeting and presents recommendations to strengthen the launch and implementation of the PTT Policy Research Priority Agenda (PRPA) for 2025–2030. The workshop was jointly organized by the Policy Think Tank of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) under the CGIAR Policy Innovations initiative. It was held on 7 November 2025 in Vientiane Province, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), with the overall aim of soliciting feedback and exploring opportunities for further cooperation among key stakeholders from the public sector, development partners, academia, and farmer organizations in implementing the PRPA.

Strong interest in cooperation with PTT to advocate for demand-driven policy research was evident. This provides momentum for PTT, under NAFRI’s supervision, to assume a lead role in policy research cooperation and to position itself as a network hub for stakeholder consultation and policy dialogue. In doing so, PTT can strengthen its coordination and convening functions in agricultural policy research within the framework of the Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development (SWG-ARD).

The PRPA is widely seen as a key instrument for facilitating research cooperation and collaboration across sectors and with development partners. Participants also offered reflections on how its scope could be further expanded to better reflect broader agricultural and national development issues beyond the agricultural sector alone; these perspectives are captured in the report’s discussion.

Several immediate actions are recommended to support effective implementation of the PRPA:

- Increase dissemination of printed copies of the PRPA to public agencies and development partners, alongside online publication on the MAE website.
- Develop periodic research proposals that articulate the PRPA’s thematic priorities, aligned with development trends and emerging issues, to mobilize funding opportunities.
- Strengthen collaboration with development partners who advocate for agricultural policy development, including through joint research to demonstrate impact and support broader uptake.
- Organize annual or semi-annual stakeholder consultation workshops to showcase policy research, present periodic proposals, and reinforce PTT’s coordination role under SWG-ARD by enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation on policy research, dialogue, and implementation.

1. Introduction

This report summarizes and reflects on key outcomes of the Policy Think Tank (PTT) Stakeholder Meeting on 07th November 2025 in Vientiane Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) or Laos. The meeting was organized in cooperation between the PTT of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) under the CGIAR Policy Innovations. The event was co-chaired by Mr. Viraphon Nouanesengsy, NAFRI Deputy Director General, and Mr. Mark Dubois, IWMI Representative for Lao PDR, as shown in photo 1 below.



Figure 1. Mr. Viraphon Nouanesengsy, NAFRI Deputy Director General, delivered opening remarks, together with Mr. Mark Dubois, IWMI Representative Lao PDR. (photo: IWMI)

The event brought together 40 participants, with 10 women from the government sector, development partners, civil society organizations, and farmer associations. The participating government officials are from many public agencies and development initiatives, such as the sectoral working group on agriculture and rural development and its other sub-sector working groups (SSWGs) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE), the Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences (LASES), and the National University of Laos (NUOL), in addition to PTT and NAFRI.

An overall aim of the event is to consult on the potential for cross-sectoral cooperation on policy implementation to support the launch of the PTT Policy Research Priority Agenda (PRPA) from 2025 to 2030. Specific objectives are as follows:

- To present the latest draft of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Strategy to 2035 and Vision to 2050 as a key framework to guide policy research.

- To present PRPA, focusing on its formulation process and thematic research areas, as background for further implementation and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- To present PTT's annual key achievements and identify areas of interest and potential for further cross-sectoral cooperation.

2. Key Meeting Sessions

This section highlights the presentation, panel discussion, and follow-up question sessions of the meeting, which are the key technical sessions. A full agenda is available in the annex of the report. Key messages from each session are summarized as follows:

2.1 Presentation on NAFRI's Research Policy Program Updates

The presentation provides an update on the formulation of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Strategy to 2035 and Vision to 2050, delivered by Mr. Chaloun Bounithphone, Deputy Director of the Planning and Administration Division, NAFRI. The main objective of this presentation is to demonstrate how the coming NAFRI strategic policy frameworks can be articulated by PRPA. Key points of the presentation are as follows:

- The presented strategic draft has made progress on its third version from its formulation start in around mid-2024.
- The formulation was guided by the development direction to enhance potential for comprehensive agricultural and forestry development and gradually shift to industrial-based production, focusing on clean agriculture, value-adding through agricultural processing, and sustainable biodiversity management, for example.
- It was developed to serve as guidance for research and technological innovation development for agricultural modernization to support the development direction.
- The draft has four thematic and two enabling strategic programs. The main strategic programs include i) science research on agriculture, ii) science research on livestock and fisheries, iii) science research on forestry, and iv) science research on economy and policy for agricultural and rural development. The fourth strategic programs were the focus of the presentation because of its immediate links to PRPA 2025-2030.
- The strategic plan has three research priorities, including i) agricultural economy and value chains for agricultural product commercialization and income generation for rural communities, ii) evidence generation to provide options, measures, and recommendations for agricultural and rural development policy, and iii) rural livelihoods to guide new development patterns, resettlements, and permanent occupations based on the socio-economic context.

2.2. Presentation on PRPA 2025-2030

The presentation introduces concepts and thematic research areas of PRPA 2025-2030, which is the first policy research framework of PTT since its establishment in June 2012. The presentation was delivered by Mr. Thavone Phommavong, Deputy

Director of the Policy Research Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, NAFRI. Key points of the presentation are as follows:

- PRPA was conceptualized by the agricultural and rural development policy frameworks of NAFRI and MAE in reflection with bilateral and multilateral stakeholder consultations. Key formulation processes included reviews of the policy frameworks to guide overall policy research themes, consultations with public agencies and development partners, who have advocated for PTT strengthening, to identify research priorities from their mandates and strategic goals, and a consultation workshop to finalize research themes, priority topics, and key research questions for each theme. These formulation processes were arranged in 2024 with the support of the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies (NPS), led by IWMI.
- PRPA comprises four thematic research areas, including sustainable and resilient food production and agriculture, economic strengthening, social inclusion, and enablers. Each thematic area has three to four main research topics. For example, policy research on farmer adoptions of climate-responsive technologies is one of the topics under the first research theme; poverty reduction and livelihood improvements for smallholder farmers is part of the economic strengthening research theme; and policy coherence and engagement is part of the enablers.
- A full version of PRPA is available at MAE's [website](https://www.maf.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Policy-Think-Tank-Research-Priority-2025-2030_Final.pdf) - https://www.maf.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Policy-Think-Tank-Research-Priority-2025-2030_Final.pdf.

2.3 Presentation on PTT's Recent Achievements and Priority Plans in 2026

The presentation is mainly to acknowledge partnerships and cooperation between PTT and its partners and stakeholders. It was delivered by Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk, PTT Coordinator and Deputy Director of the Policy Research Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, NAFRI. A summary of the key points is as follows:

- PRPA is one of the key recent achievements, in addition to releases of different policy research, technical reports of regional cooperation projects, and a joint policy research training in June 2025. IWMI, which takes the lead of CGIAR Policy Innovations and NPS in the Lao PDR, is one of the key contributors for these achievements.
- PTT is implementing two projects, named "Pathways for future farmers in Southeast Asia" and "Strengthening Policy and Research Integration for Agricultural and Rural Development in Lao PDR", with funding support from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).
- PTT will explore opportunities to work in cooperation with other government agencies, development partners, and research institutions to implement PRPA, in addition to conducting some collaborative research with IWMI.

2.4 Panel Discussion

The discussion is to identify implanting policy frameworks on strategic development of other public agencies and explore the potential and interests in collaborations with PTT

to implement PRPA and other areas of cooperation. The session was moderated by Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk, with three panellists as follows:

- Associate professor Dr. Viriyasack Sisouphanthong, Head of Applied Economics Unit, NUOL.
- Dr. Kommaly Onxayvieng, Deputy Director of the Division of Fisheries, Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF).
- Dr. Vongsakda Vongxay, Director of the Division of Planning and Cooperation, Department of Irrigation (DOI), and a representative from the SSWG on irrigation.

Summaries of the discussion along with the objectives are as follows:

Policy frameworks:

- DOI supports MAE's current agricultural development strategy to 2025 and the vision to 2030, especially two of the four strategic programs on food security and agricultural product commercialization. DOI is implementing its irrigation development plans from 2021 to 2025 to provide irrigation support for agricultural production for food security, commercialization, and rural development.
- DLF is also a key sector to support MAE's current strategy and vision. However, DLF still refers to the 2015–2020 Fisheries Strategy and Vision 2025 because its new strategic development framework has not been finalized and enforced.
- For NUOL, it is guided by the educational development policy of the Ministry of Education and Sports. The university also has a role to collaborate with other educational and research institutions to participate in research, the policy formulation process, policy engagements, and other development efforts/initiatives, i.e., joining a committee for the development of a national strategy for the elderly.

Potential areas for cooperation with PTT:

Key areas of interest and potential for further cooperation shared among the participants are as follows:

- Market research on the export and import of fish, fingerlings, and fish feed to understand and strengthen value chain development for domestic fishery production. As a part of the joint research between PTT and DLF, research on production capacity can be done through a nationwide survey of domestic fingerling production to understand the capacity of the fishery sector and policy research to explore necessary policy support needed for the production by the entrepreneurs and farmers.
- Economic policy analysis is suggested as further research cooperation between PTT and NUOL to support agricultural development, especially sufficient food production. The research area is suggested to fill a recently high gap of the agricultural contribution to the national gross domestic product (GDP) with less than 20%, while more than 50% of the population is engaged in agricultural production.
- Joint research cooperation on water management and irrigation development for lowland and upland systems, in responding to an emerging high cost of electricity for water pumps and promoting efficient use of water through Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) techniques, for instance. The suggested research area is also for the institutional cooperation between DOI and NAFRI.

Further policy research focuses and approaches:

- There is a need to balance between supply-driven research and demand-driven research to serve evidence-based policy development and decision-making processes.
- Policy research and recommendations shall be offered for specific target audiences, especially when actions are expected to be taken by any sector. This may start from co-development and agreement on research questions to be addressed by the demanded research.
- Promoting the community of practice to facilitate collaboration between researchers and policymakers to achieve demanded research and effective dissemination and communication of the research findings through the stakeholder platforms in addition to other media channels.
- Communicating research findings should be diverse in different forms of knowledge products and dissemination channels, such as policy briefs, short video clips, and audio segments. Researchers may consider finding ways to create and disseminate research findings for more impact.

2.5 Plenary Discussion Session

This section serves to complement and expand upon the insights shared in the previous three presentations and the panel discussion. It was facilitated by the chairperson, Mr. Viraphon Nouanesengsy, NAFRI Deputy Director General. Key discussions are as follows:

Enhancing demand-driven research and policy assessments to enhance impacts:

Another key discussion topic was around enhancing research impacts, affected by limited access to research findings, a lack of policy assessment, and a mismatched focus on the policy demand. Detailed discussions are as follows:

- A participant from the Communication and Information Center of NAFRI shared his thoughts on how research has been implemented, which seemed to be based on available research funding or donors' research interests, while some research findings are not being used. He suggested that researchers may need to shift toward a demand-based approach, focusing on the needs of target users of research findings and the research needs of the society to ensure research impacts. He added that PTT should establish a research taskforce comprising NUOL and other sectors to enhance collective capacity to proactively explore research demand through a research needs assessment survey, for instance, and pitch for further funding.
- A participant from NUOL expressed his support for target demand-based research and shared that this approach will be more effective to implement in parallel with strengthening a platform for dissemination of research findings with policymakers and practitioners to influence the use of research findings. He added that this would help understand whether the sectors would be willing to use the research findings. On the other hand, he clarified that although university research was often conducted based on external funding sources, the use of research findings was secured by the funding organizations.
- The participant from the Office of the Scientific Council of Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences (LASES) expressed his support for demand-driven research and shared his advice on the formulation process: that research questions should be identified from what the communities and decision-makers

wanted to be answered. He added that the demand-driven approach should serve as the foundation for research planning and development, which needed to be facilitated with community participation to reflect real needs and drive for practical outcomes. He also supported the need to have platforms for regular coordination and direct engagements between researchers and policymakers through presentations and discussions for research proposals for aligning with policy priorities and research findings for further use and impacts.

- A senior consultant from NAFRI also shared similar thoughts that the willingness to follow research recommendations among policymakers also mattered, although researchers may make good recommendations for their consideration for further uptake, by the nature of policy research. He found that a critical gap was associated with a lack of a robust assessment and evaluation system to understand how and why policy recommendations were or were not turned into practice. He added that although different dialogues were arranged to discuss and influence improvement needs, implementation was still seen as a challenge.
- A participant from the Institute for Socio-Economic Policy Research (ISEPR) clarified a process for using research findings, which needed to involve a process for further reviews or assessments of the findings, whether they may be associated with other policy frameworks, operation processes, and respective sectors, prior to being adopted into practices. He urged researchers to cooperate and share research findings with his center for further reviews and recommendations for further use, recalling a generic research purpose of exploring causes of an issue or phenomenon.

Overall reflections on PRPA:

PRPA was considered a good policy document among the participants, with some suggestions for further reflections to facilitate the successful implementation and position PTT to take the leading role in policy research coordination across all relevant sectors and enhance regional integration on current development trends, like smart and green agriculture. Details of the comments and feedback are as follows:

- The senior consultant from NAFRI expressed his support for the four thematic research areas and 20 sub-research priorities outlined in PRPA and urged immediate action on finding funding support for the implementation. He suggested that PTT may need to start coordinating with relevant agencies and target partners; for example, IWMI may support research on water-based priorities.
- The participant from LASES sought a clarification from the PTT on how PRPA was formulated, and which directions will be focused on to provide more coverage for the entire agricultural policy, which can be translated into a broader term beyond its four thematic areas.
 - The Coordinator from PTT clarified that PRPA was formulated in comprehensive consultation processes, including document review, bilateral consultations with different public agencies and development partners, and a co-creation workshop with broader stakeholders to present consolidated findings on research priorities and prioritize key research themes, research priorities, and research questions under the

framework of sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and productive agriculture. She also acknowledged suggestions for having more comprehensive research areas, which their further revision can be discussed later when both NAFRI and MAE have their new development strategies enforced, because PRPA was developed prior to the merger of the former Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) as MAE.

- A participant from the Department of Planning and Cooperation, MAE, provided an update that a draft of the agricultural and environmental development plan from 2026 to 2030 of MAE was developed with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization, and it will be further reviewed by appointed development committee members from different sectors. He also listed initial development programs of the draft, which were adjusted from the former MAF's development programs, such as agricultural production for food security and nutrition, agricultural product commercialization and primary processing for domestic and export markets, and rural development and poverty eradication.
- The participant from ISEPR shared his advice for further reflections on PRPA through three aspects, including its coherence with other national policies, especially the five-year socio-economic development plan of the government; its potential, strengths, and contributions to other policies; and its alignment with the agricultural development challenges to frame research concepts. These may help justify why this additional policy should be required. While Lao PDR had many policies across different ministries and sectors, which seemed to be sufficient, he added.

Further potential areas for policy research:

The following suggested topics were raised to guide explorations of more research areas in response to demand-based research for further reflections of PRPA. Detailed suggestions are as follows:

- The participant from LASES suggested that PRPA and policy research may need to have better reflection on the current integrated economic era, in which regional transport and products are integrated, requiring price and cost competitiveness in food production, not only the need to thrive for production capacity. He suggested that policy research should play a role to support this agricultural development focus. He shared his thoughts that there seemed to be the need to shift research focus on industrial farming, which might be an alternative solution if small-scale farming is not profitable in commercialization. He added that research on promoting foreign investment will be required.
- The participant from NUOL expressed his support for enhancing the competitiveness of Lao farmers in the export market and suggested that further promotions shall focus on clean and green agriculture based on the potential of

Lao PDR, where soil fertility is still good. He elaborated that we shall focus on smart agriculture to use technologies and innovations to support green agriculture, which can be unique and niche produce, towards the National Green Growth Strategy until 2030. Besides, he shared another research topic on understanding enabling policies, government incentives, and promotions for those business operators who are doing businesses with environmental responsibility, following the guidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹ on responsible investment in food, agriculture, and forestry, which he believed that MAE also has key roles to fulfil in the commitment of a member country.

- The participant from the Institute for Enterprise Development Research of LASES also seconded the suggestion from the participant from NUOL on regional integration. He found that more research areas, which could be part of PRPA, include digitalization, climate-resilient technology adoptions among farmers, green value chains, safety and quality food systems and standardizations, and low-carbon agricultural practices.

¹ International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). 2019. ASEAN Guidelines for Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/uqd/4458b1_72f0553231b14209a4195dff8466b845.pdf

3. Reflections and Recommendations

This section summarizes key insights from the PTT Stakeholder Consultation Workshop, alongside reflections from the authors, on the potential for cross-sectoral cooperation in implementing the PTT Policy Research Priority Agenda (PRPA) for 2025–2030. The key reflection points are as follows.


Many participants expressed strong interest in cooperating with PTT and across sectors to advocate for demand-driven policy research. This represents a positive signal for PTT—under NAFRI’s supervision—to assume a lead role in policy research cooperation and to position itself as a network hub for stakeholder consultation and policy dialogue. In doing so, PTT can strengthen its coordination and convening functions in agricultural policy research within the framework of the Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development (SWG-ARD). However, enthusiasm for advocating the implementation of the PRPA—the first policy research guiding document of PTT—appeared largely implicit. Discussion during the event focused more on clarifying the PRPA development process or suggesting broader reflections to incorporate wider agricultural and national development policy frameworks, rather than on concrete pathways for implementation.

One possible explanation for the limited interest in future implementation relates to a mismatch in expectations regarding the scope of the PRPA. Its development was guided by the four agricultural development programs outlined in the Agricultural Development Strategy to 2025 and Vision to 2030, and by NAFRI’s existing programs, given that PTT is part of its Policy Research Center for Agricultural and Rural Development. In contrast, participants’ suggestions reflected a desire for a broader framing of agricultural development at national and regional levels. The PRPA’s scope also reflects PTT’s current technical, financial, and operational capacity. During the discussion, participants noted the need for PTT to strengthen its research capacity, including through closer collaboration with NUOL and other sectors.

A further factor appears to be limited understanding of the PRPA’s status and intended function as a guiding document for NAFRI’s policy research center. Although PTT is recognized as a cross-subsector platform for agriculture and rural development policy under SWG-ARD, the PRPA has not yet been positioned to fully serve that role. In addition, the absence of a clear operational budget and implementation plan—setting out priority research, partners, and funding sources—may have dampened interest in concrete collaboration. Where pathways for action are unclear, explicit commitment is often limited.

To support effective implementation of the PRPA, the following actions are recommended for consideration by PTT, NAFRI, and the wider policy community:

- **Expand dissemination of the PRPA** to all NAFRI research centers, relevant MAE agencies, and all development partners under SWG-ARD and its SSGWs. This can include mailed or event-based distribution of printed full and summary versions, alongside online publication on the MAE website.

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- **Develop periodic research proposals** under the four PRPA themes, aligned with current trends and emerging issues in agricultural development, to mobilize funding from development partners, agricultural enterprises, and government sources.
 - **Strengthen collaboration with key development partners** who advocate for agricultural policy research—particularly those supporting the PRPA—to pilot joint research, demonstrate impact, and build momentum for wider adoption.
 - **Institutionalize regular stakeholder consultations** (semi-annual or annual) to share findings, present research proposals, and reinforce PTT’s coordination role under SWG-ARD in promoting cross-sectoral cooperation on policy research and implementation.

Annex A. Workshop Agenda.

Time	Description	Facilitators
8.00-8.30	Registration	NAFRI
8.30-8.45	Opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Viraphon Nouansengsy, NAFRI Deputy Director General • Mr. Mark Dubois, IWMI Country and Regional Representative
8.45-8.50	Group photo session	All
8.50-9.10 (20 minutes)	A presentation on the current draft of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Strategy to 2035 and Vision to 2050	Mr. Chaloun Bounithiphone, Deputy Director of Planning and Administration Division, NAFRI
9.20-9.40 (20 minutes)	A presentation on PTT Policy Research Priority Agenda (PRPA)	Mr. Thavone Phommavong, Deputy Director of Policy Research Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, NAFRI
9.40-10.00 (20 minutes)	A presentation on the PTT's annual key implementation achievements	Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk, Deputy Director of Policy Research Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, NAFRI
10.00-10.20	Coffee break	
10.20-11.00 (40 Minutes)	A panel discussion on cross-sectoral cooperation on policy implementation. Participated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A representative from NUOL • A representative from DLF • A representative from SSWG-IR 	Moderated by Dr. Latsamy Phounvisouk
11.00-11.45 (45 minutes)	Q & A for all the presentations and panel discussion.	Facilitated by the chairperson and co-chairperson
11.45-12.00	Ways forward and closing remarks	The chairperson
12.00-13.30	Lunch and end of the event	All



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