



LaoFAB Frequently Asked Questions (FAQv6) The short version

- a) LaoFAB is a forum for sharing information about agriculture, rural livelihoods and natural resource management in Laos. The forum consists of a Google discussion group, an online library, a Facebook page and a LinkedIn group.
- b) Members include Government officials, staff of donor agencies and NGOs, project experts, academics, business people, journalists and students. There were 4,000 members by May 2015.
- c) Membership is free. Apply here: <http://groups.google.com/group/laofab> You do *not* need a gmail address to join.
- d) To post a message to the group, members can use any email software to send to this address laofab@googlegroups.com or reply to an existing message.
- e) Between 5 and 10 messages are posted every day. This includes news, questions and comments. Unless expressly stated, opinions expressed in this forum are those of individual members, not the organisations for which they are working.
- f) All messages to the forum should be directly related to rural development in Laos or other Mekong countries. Information about global issues (eg. climate change, donor policies, technologies) should only be shared if the relevance to Laos is made explicit.
- g) Members have the following options for receiving messages: email (get every message), summary or combined versions (get once per day), no email (but can still read online). Members can login here to change their settings at the group page: <http://groups.google.com/group/laofab>
- h) The *LaoFAB Repository* is an online library at this address: www.laofab.org. Members can download and upload files. The repository contains more than 2,000 policy documents, project reports, case studies, academic papers and training manuals.
- i) Members should *not* attach files to messages sent to the Google discussion group. Instead, documents can be uploaded to the repository or members can post links to other websites where files can be found.
- j) Messages and documents at LaoFAB should be in English language. A sister group called *LaoLink* operates in Lao language. You can join the other group by submitting your address here: www.laolink.org/laolink.htm. They also have their own online library here: www.Lao44.org.
- k) The majority of LaoFAB members are unmoderated; their messages are automatically sent to all other members. A member can be placed on the moderated list, however, if they do not follow the guidelines in this FAQ; in this case, messages are reviewed by a moderator who decides if they should be approved or rejected.
- l) The *LaoFAB ProDev group* at LinkedIn can be found here: <http://linkd.in/15YqnWy>. Members can share announcements about job opportunities, training courses, scholarships etc. This type of announcement should *not* be made at the Google discussion group.
- m) The *LaoFAB Facebook page* is here: <https://www.facebook.com/LaoFAB>. The Facebook page covers similar topics to the discussion group, with an emphasis on visual content (video and photos) rather than text-based reporting. The page had more than 6,000 likes by May 2015.
- n) LaoFAB is an activity of the Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS), a project approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This activity is managed by CLICK, a Lao social enterprise. The views and opinions expressed by members of LaoFAB do not necessarily reflect the position of SDC, MAF, LURAS or CLICK.
- o) The moderators cannot accept responsibility for copyright violations or other infringements by members who use this service, but do reserve the right to delete inappropriate messages, put members on a moderated list, and – if deemed necessary – ban members from the group.
- p) To contact a moderator, write to: LaoFAB@gmail.com

The long version

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2. Becoming a member
3. Discussion group options
4. Sending messages
5. Things to avoid
6. Other services
7. Using the repository
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1. The basics

1.1 What is LaoFAB?

LaoFAB is a forum for sharing information about agriculture, rural livelihoods and natural resource management in Laos.

1.2 But what does FAB stand for?

FAB = Farmers and AgriBusiness

1.3 And what is the purpose?

LaoFAB aims to support rural development in Lao PDR by providing decision-makers with better access to information and analysis.

1.4 How does it work?

LaoFAB makes use of the internet to provide members with a mailing list, an online library and other information services.

1.5 When did it get started?

The first message was posted on 13th November 2006.

1.6 What is the difference between LaoFAB and other info channels?

LaoFAB is not a substitute for official meetings and publications. It attempts to 'add value' to the discourse about rural development in Lao PDR by making information-sharing more open and pluralistic. The discussion at LaoFAB is diverse, informal and open 24-7. It pulls together news from a wide range of sources and provides space for an exchange of views without delays or censorship.

1.7 What do you mean by 'open' information-sharing?

LaoFAB operates under the principles of open source, open access and open minds. For further explanation, take a look at 'The Dongdok Statement on Access to Information

for Development' (Dongdok SAID), which can be downloaded from the LaoFAB repository.

1.8 Who manages LaoFAB?

LaoFAB is managed as a public service by a social enterprise called 'CLICK'. More information about this organization is available at <http://www.clicklaos.org>. Other information services managed by CLICK include the LaoLink discussion group and the online library at www.Lao44.org.

1.9 But who actually does the work?

Most LaoFAB messages are posted by the members. However, there are moderators who post a steady stream of news, and who are also responsible for approving new members and any files uploaded to the LaoFAB repository. You can contact a moderator at LaoFAB@gmail.com.

1.10 And who makes the rules?

The members were surveyed in 2007 and in 2011. This FAQ is based on the result of those surveys and on-going feedback from members.

1.11 Does the discussion on LaoFAB have any 'official' status?

No. Opinions expressed in this forum are those of individual members, not the organisations for which they are working.

1.12 What is the legal status of LaoFAB?

LaoFAB currently operates as an activity under the Lao Upland Rural Advisory Service (LURAS), a project approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). All members of LaoFAB are expected to abide by the laws of the Lao PDR when using this service, and neither the moderators nor the donor can take responsibility for any wrong-doing committed by the members.

2. Becoming a member

2.1 How much does it cost to join?

Nothing.

2.2 Great! How do I sign up?

Go to the LaoFAB group page, here: <http://groups.google.com/group/laofab> and click 'apply for membership'. Google will send you a confirmation message. Click on the link in the message to complete the application process.

2.3 Why am I asked for personal details when joining the group?

Before membership is approved, you will be asked to provide information about your profession or organisation. The purpose is to make sure you have a genuine interest in rural development and are not a spammer. Just a few words are required; you are *not* expected to provide your name and contact details. Once this information has been submitted, a moderator will approve membership.

2.4 What is a Google Group?

Google Groups is a free service from Google which allows people to have discussions about common interests. In the case of the LaoFAB group, when a member sends a message to laofab@googlegroups.com it is automatically sent to all other members.

2.5 Who are the other members of LaoFAB?

Members include Government officials, staff of donor agencies and NGOs, project experts, academics, business people, journalists and students.

2.6 How many are there?

LaoFAB had 4,000 members by the end of May 2015.

2.7 If I join, how many messages can I expect to receive?

Between 5 and 10 messages are posted per day. Some days there are more, while occasionally there are none.

2.8 What is the scope of discussion on LaoFAB?

Here are some of the things that have been discussed over the past few years: Government plans and policies; the impact of hydropower and mining on rural livelihoods; the role of contract farming and farmer associations; the rapid expansion of cash crops such as maize and rubber production; the future potential for organic crops and biofuels; prices, investment and trade; land grabs and corruption; the work of ADB, MRC, HAGL and CP; plantations, forest cover and biodiversity.

2.9 It sounds like we can say anything, right?

Wrong! Despite this long list of topics, members are discouraged from posting every news article they find on the web or sharing every opinion that pops into their head. All messages should relate to rural development in Laos and be of professional interest to other members.

3. Discussion group options

3.1 How do I read LaoFAB messages?

You can read LaoFAB online at the group page, or you can get messages delivered to your mailbox.

3.2 How do I find the LaoFAB discussion group online?

Our page at Google Groups is here:

<http://groups.google.com/group/laofab>. It's a good idea to save this address as a favourite or bookmark. At the LaoFAB group page you can read the latest discussion, post new messages, and change your membership settings. You can also search the archive of old messages (more than 20,000!), which may be useful if you are doing any research about rural development in Laos.

3.3 I tried to visit the LaoFAB page and it said I was not a member. What's the problem?

You must sign in to Google before visiting the website. To sign in, please visit:

<https://www.google.com/groups/signin>. Note that you need a Google password to sign in. If you have not got a password, click on 'create an account now' at the signin page. It is free and takes only a minute. Google will send you a confirmation message; once you have responded you can visit the website.

3.4 So, I need a Gmail account to visit the LaoFAB page at Google Groups?

No. Google will allow you to create a password for any email address. Make sure – however – to use the same email address for which you are subscribed to this group (ie. the address at which you receive LaoFAB messages).

3.5 What are the message delivery options?

At the LaoFAB Google website, click on the icon for 'my settings' (this is at the top right-hand side of the screen), and select from the following:

- a) *no email*: nothing will arrive in your inbox, but you can continue to read or post messages at the website.
- b) *daily summary*: this will give you one message per day containing a summary of what has been posted in previous 24 hours. You can click the links to read the complete messages if desired.
- c) *combined update*: this also gives you one email per day, but the message contains the full content of what has been posted in the past 24 hrs.

d) *every new message*: this is the default option, which means that you receive each individual message as it is posted.

3.6 Is there a way to filter the LaoFAB messages delivered to my mailbox?

Yes. You can use the prefix [LaoFAB] for this purpose. The prefix is included in the subject line for all messages, so it can be used to automatically redirect these messages to a separate folder. This will prevent your inbox from filling up with posts from LaoFAB.

3.7 This really isn't my cup of tea. How do I unsubscribe?

Are you sure you want to unsubscribe? If you are having trouble handling so many messages, then consider changing your membership settings so that you get a summary every day. You could even select 'no email' but still have access to the LaoFAB websites.

3.8 Seriously, get me out of here, OK?

If you really, *really* want to leave the group, you can unsubscribe by clicking the link in the footer of every LaoFAB message. If that doesn't work, just send a message to a moderator. Please do NOT post an unsubscribe message to the forum.

4. Sending messages

4.1 How do I reply to a LaoFAB message?

It's easy. Just click 'reply', write your response, and press 'send'. But remember, your reply will go to ALL of the members, not just the person who posted the message.

4.2 What if I want to respond to the sender, not the group?

If you read messages online at the LaoFAB Google page, there is option to "Reply privately to author". If using email software on your computer, click 'forward' and add the address of the person to whom you want to send the message.

4.3 And how do I start a discussion on a new topic?

There are two ways of starting a new topic, a recommended method and the lazy method. The recommended method is to open a blank message using your email software, enter the LaoFAB address (laofab@googlegroups.com), type in the subject, write the message, and press 'send'. Simple!

4.4 And the lazy method for starting a new topic?

The lazy method is to open an old message from LaoFAB and change the subject line before sending it. Please do NOT do this because messages get jumbled up in the online version of LaoFAB, with unrelated items filed under the original topic. The 'reply' button should only be used when adding information or opinions to an existing thread.

4.5 I tried sending a message to the LaoFAB address and it bounced back: what's the problem?

Maybe you are not a member! Or, if you are a member, perhaps you are sending from a different address to the one you used to join LaoFAB. Google only accepts messages from senders that are included in the membership list.

4.6 Can I send messages in Lao?

Yes and No. While the discussion at LaoFAB is in English, we have another group called *LaoLink* that covers similar topics using Lao language. If you want to join LaoLink you can submit your address here:

www.laolink.org/laolink.htm

4.7 Should I send messages to both LaoFAB and LaoLink?

Cross-posting, ie. sending the same message to more than one discussion forum, is discouraged. Although some people are members of both groups, messages should be targeted as follows:

English = laofab@googlegroups.com

Lao = laolink@googlegroups.com

4.8 Can I advertise on LaoFAB?

No. This is a forum for sharing professional information. It is *not* the place to advertise goods and services.

4.9 Can I post job announcements?

Job announcements can be posted at the LaoFAB ProDev group at LinkedIn (see 'other services'). These announcements should *not* be shared via the discussion forum.

5. Things to avoid

5.1 Is the discussion moderated?

Generally, discussion on LaoFAB is not moderated. Members can start new topics at any time and the majority of messages are immediately forwarded to other members without being seen or approved by the moderator.

5.2 But some members are moderated, right?

Yes. A minority of members, less than 5%, has been placed on the moderated list because they posted unhelpful messages at some time in the past. These members can continue to submit messages, which are reviewed by the moderator. If the message is unhelpful, it will be deleted. If it is OK, it is posted to the forum. The moderators reserve the right to ban members who repeatedly try to post unhelpful messages

5.3 What do you mean by 'unhelpful' messages?

Here are the types of messages that will get you put on the moderated list:

10 types of message to be avoided

1. news articles, reports etc that are outside the technical scope of the forum (ie. not related to rural dev., agriculture or NRM)
2. articles that are outside the geographical scope of the forum (ie. not related to Laos or it's neighbours)
3. job announcements, calls for proposals, training advertisements etc. (these should be post at LinkedIn)
4. messages with attached files (these should be uploaded to the repository)
5. messages in Lao language (these should be posted at LaoLink)
6. messages that have no subject, or which consist of a link without any explanation of its content or relevance
7. messages that contravene Article 10 of Lao Decree 327 on Management of the Internet
8. offensive remarks, sarcastic one-liners, repeats of previous posts, idle chit-chat, and unintelligible content
9. messages that appear to be addressed to a single person and which may have been sent to the forum by mistake.
10. 'Out of Office' messages

5.4 Why can't I send attachments?

Most documents are only of interest to a minority of members. If you want to share a report or a journal article, you have two main options: a) If the document is already online somewhere, you can post a message containing the link, or b) you can upload the document to the LaoFAB repository, and then share a link to the file.

5.5 What type of message is considered 'offensive'?

Members are expected to show respect for each other. You don't have to agree, in fact we enjoy a good argument, but members should stick to the facts rather than making rude remarks about each other. You can raise questions about the policies and activities of organizations involved in agribusiness and rural development – and that includes Government Departments, donor agencies and private companies – but please do this without calling into question the intelligence or integrity of other members of the forum.

5.6 But what's so bad about harmless 'chit-chat'?

There are other platforms for chatting, such as WhatsApp, Line or Twitter. Most members of LaoFAB do not appreciate casual responses that increase the number of messages without adding any substance to the discussion, e.g. 'thanks for your suggestion', 'I completely agree', or 'you must be joking!'. You can send this kind of message directly to the person concerned; the rest of us are really not interested.

5.7 Surely 'Out of Office' messages are no big deal?

If your computer sends an 'out of office' message to the LaoFAB address it will automatically go to ALL members (that's a lot of people!). We don't appreciate this, and it can be avoided. The software that creates Out of Office messages usually has the ability for creating exceptions. Eg. in Outlook, try 'Tools -> Out of Office Assistant -> Add Rule.

5.8 And what's this about Decree 327?

This Decree was issued by the Lao Govt. in September 2014. A translation is here: <http://www.laofab.org/document/view/2455> Decree 327 encourages people to share information via the Internet for the purpose of education and research. This is what we are doing at LaoFAB. The decree also makes it illegal to spread false information with the aim of undermining the government. That means we should stick to the facts and any criticism should be for constructive purposes.

6. Other services

6.1 What? There's more to LaoFAB than the discussion group?

Yes, indeed! We have a repository, a Facebook page, and a LinkedIn account.

6.2 What is the Repository?

This is an online library that was launched in September 2008. You can find the site at: www.laofab.org. All LaoFAB members are given a password that can be used in conjunction with their email address. Once you have logged in, you can search, browse, upload and download documents. More details are given in section 7 below.

6.3 So I need two passwords, right?

Well, you need a password for the LaoFAB Document Repository (which we will send you) and another password for the LaoFAB Google Group (which you select). But you can change the so they they match for the two sites.

6.4 Help! I forgot my password.

For the LaoFAB Google Website, go to the signin page (see 3.3) and click on 'I cannot access my account', and then select the appropriate option. For the LaoFAB Repository, enter a dummy password at the login page (eg. LaoFab123) and you will be taken to a page that says 'Wrong email and/or password'; then click on the word 'emailed' (in blue) to get a password reminder sent to your registered address. If this doesn't work, write to the moderator (see 1.9).

6.5 What's this about LinkedIn?

LaoFAB ProDev (Professional Development) is a group at LinkedIn, that can be found here: <http://linkd.in/15YqnWy>. You need to be a member of LinkedIn to use this service. It's free to join. Once you have signed up, you will be able to share announcements about jobs, training courses and scholarships. There are other Lao-based groups on LinkedIn that are posting job announcements, not only LaoFAB, so it is worth using this platform if you are looking for staff ... or looking for work.

6.6 I love Facebook! Where's the page?

The LaoFAB Facebook page is here: <https://www.facebook.com/LaoFAB>. Here you can like, comment and share whatever is posted. The content is similar to the discussion group, with an emphasis on visual content (video and photos) rather than text-based reporting. The page had more than 6,000 likes by May 2015.

7. Using the repository

7.1 What is available at the Repository?

The repository at www.LaoFAB.org contains training manuals, market studies, conference reports, presentations and academic papers. Most documents are in English, and most are

pdf files. There were more than 2,300 documents by May 2015.

7.2 How do I find documents?

At the repository homepage you will see links to the latest uploads and the current 'top ten' downloads. You can find other documents using the search and browse functions. Also, within every folder you will find a link on the left that says 'View the documents in this folder on a map'; this displays a selection of files that have been geo-tagged (see 7.11)

7.3 Should I use browse or search to find what I want?

The browse button will open list of folders, Clicking the links will display a set of sub-folders and/or a list of files. Note that these are 'virtual' folders, and most documents appear in more than one location. The search function is a better option if you know what you are looking for, because it allows you to find documents on specific topics, or by particular authors.

7.4 I can see a list of files... what next?

Clicking a link will display the metadata for a particular file (title, author, date etc) and a thumbnail image. Clicking the thumbnail will display a larger image of the front page.

7.5 Help! I used the search function and got a list of 659 files. What should I do?

LaoFAB uses a 'full-text' search engine. This is very powerful, but you may need to do a *smart search* to get exactly what you want. The box below has some tips.

Smart search tips

1. Enter a search term, and then add filters from the column on the left to refine the search. Eg. *rubber* will return a list of more than 700 files, but also select *weiyi shi* from the authors and the list is reduced to 6 files.
2. Use quotation marks to search for phrases rather than all occurrences of each word, eg. a search for *organic vegetables* will return 860 files, but "*organic vegetables*" returns only 31.
3. Use AND when you want to find documents that include all the selected words and phrases, eg. "*rubber plantation*" will return 191 files, but "*rubber plantation*" AND *Attapeu* AND *Oji* returns only 13.

7.6 I found something interesting, now how do I get the file?

Near the bottom of the metadata you will see the label '*Download file*'. Click on the file title. Your computer may ask where you want to keep the file. Select a location and click 'save'.

7.7 And how do I upload documents?

Click on 'browse' in the menu bar, then open the relevant folder and sub-folder, eg. *commodities/organics*. Click the link on the left that says 'upload a document to this folder'. You will be asked to fill in some details (title, author, date...). Then use the box near the bottom of the page to choose a file on your computer, and finally click 'submit document'.

7.8 I want to upload something but I don't know which folder to use?

Don't worry. The LaoFAB Repository is organized around 'virtual folders', which means that you can put a single file in more than one folder. If, however, you have a collection of files for a topic that is not yet included in the repository, just send a request to the moderator who can create a new folder for you. Please don't send the files to him; you can upload them yourself!

7.9 I uploaded a file, but it didn't appear online. What's going on?

It may take one or two days before your documents become visible. This is because they need to be reviewed and approved by a moderator. This provides an opportunity to ensure files have been placed in the correct folders and tagged with enough information to make them searchable.

7.10 What is a 'secondary reference'?

Under the title you can add details of the source of the document. For example, if the document is an academic paper, you should add the journal name and volume number. For a presentation, the secondary reference might be the name and location of a conference. For a working paper, please add the series title.

7.11 And what's with the map?

We have been experimenting with geo-tagging at LaoFAB. This is optional, but it allows users to select the name a province from the drop-down menu, or draw a polygon around a location that is associated with a file.

7.12 Can I upload photos?

Please do! All members are encouraged to share image files. The process is similar to

that described at 7.5. When you browse the repository you will find a folder at the top of the list called "Photo Albums". This contains sub-folders where you can upload photos. The information required is less than other documents: a caption is essential, but the date, location and name of photographer is optional. Photos are not reviewed by the moderator, and are therefore immediately visible to other members.

7.13 Who owns the copyrights?

Copyright to the documents and photos is held by their respective authors and/or photographers. The files are made available through the LaoFAB repository on the basis of 'fair use'. It is understood that members can make use of these files for non-commercial purposes, but should acknowledge the copyright holder if this is known.

8. The ghost in the machine

8.1 Who or what is the Abbot?

The Abbot is a ghostly resident of the LaoFAB Repository who continuously offers suggestions for the names of projects, organizations, events and resources. You can find his pronouncements at the bottom of every page, just above the credits.

8.2 You are joking, right?

OK, I'll be honest with you: 'Abbot' is actually an acronym for 'Agribusiness Buzzword Robot', or Agribuz-bot. This is a small bit of software that uses a lexicon and random numbers to generate ingenious names and acronyms for development activities. Why pay thousands of dollars for a consultant when you can make use of the Abbot for free?

8.3 This is really clever stuff. Who created the repository?

The website and software was developed by Joakim Lagerqvist. You can contact him at joakim.lagerqvist@gmail.com. The moderator uploaded most of the documents, and it took a LOT of time. It's amazing that we aren't charging for this!

LaoFAB FAQv6
Andrew Bartlett
14 May 2015

Send queries and suggestions to:
LaoFAB@gmail.com