



Policy Frameworks for Enhancing Agricultural Marketing Strategies: Case Study of Chomphet District, Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR

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Abstract

This study examines the potential markets and policy frameworks to enhance agricultural marketing strategies in Chomphet District, Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. Employing a mixed-methods design, including surveys of 42 grocery shops in Luang Prabang City and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with representatives from 12 villages, the research identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with production capacity and market access. Findings indicate strong demand for agricultural and artisanal products, driven by the district's strategic proximity to the UNESCO World Heritage city of Luang Prabang. The study employs a TOWS Matrix to formulate SO, ST, WO, and WT strategies, providing actionable guidance for sustainable marketing development and inclusive economic growth.

Keywords: *Agricultural marketing strategies, Market access, and Inclusive economic growth*

1. Introduction

Chomphet District has been the focus of several development initiatives, including the Community-Based Inclusive Development (CBID) and Micro-Agricultural Development programs for Collective Farmers (CFs). In the modern agricultural development in Lao PDR promotes the creation and strengthening of farmer organizations, such as the Lao Farmers Association and Lao Farmer Network, to enhance collective production, improve market access, and increase smallholder incomes. These initiatives are grounded in development theory, which highlights the benefits of collaboration for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and policy engagement, enabling smallholder groups to negotiate markets effectively and adopt sustainable agricultural practices (Lao Farmers

Association, 2025), and this development project aims at generating income opportunities for marginalized populations through agriculture and related activities. Skills-building initiatives, such as vegetable cultivation and frog raising workshops, reflect broader efforts to improve rural livelihoods.

Market-oriented assessment is critical for identifying immediate and long-term opportunities for promoting agricultural products. This study situates Chomphet's agricultural potential within broader research on community-based development, inclusive market systems, and smallholder livelihood improvement. Community-Based Inclusive Development (CBID) frameworks emphasize empowerment, accessibility, and participation of marginalized populations in local economic systems

(CBM Global, 2020; Deepak et al., 2013), aligning with global development paradigms that advocate local capacity building and equitable value chain participation (Banks & Polack, 2014).

Agricultural Market Systems and Smallholder Participation

Smallholder farmers in Southeast Asia often rely on informal and semi-formal market channels, including local shops, wet markets, middlemen, and tourism-related buyers. Proximity to urban centers, infrastructure quality, and bargaining power are critical determinants of market access (Cramb et al., 2020; Khampou, 2019). The urban growth and tourism economy of Luang Prabang have increased demand for fresh produce, livestock, handicrafts, and cultural tourism experiences (Lash et al., 2020), creating opportunities for nearby districts such as Chomphet.

Structural challenges such as price volatility, weak quality control, and production seasonality hinder smallholder competitiveness (FAO, 2021). These constraints are consistent with the findings of this study: limited technical expertise, insufficient funding, and high input costs.

Chomphet's cultural and experiential tourism potential presents additional opportunities for pottery, handicrafts, and performance-based cultural services (UNWTO, 2023). Proximity to UNESCO heritage sites enhances visibility for local products (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015). Historical and artisanal traditions, such as Ban Chan pottery (Solheim, 1967), demonstrate how cultural heritage can create niche rural markets (Ashley & Mitchell, 2009). Success in tourism-related markets requires product quality, branding, and robust market linkages (López-Guzmán et al., 2019; Dao, 2018).

SWOT and TOWS Frameworks in Rural Development

SWOT analysis identifies internal and external strategic factors, while the TOWS Matrix translates these insights into actionable strategies (Wehrich, 1982). This approach has been widely applied in Southeast Asia to guide marketing strategies for

community enterprises, organic agriculture, and value-added products (Phongphan Pattana et al., 2024; Mulyanto & Rahmawati, 2021). In this study, TOWS serves as a strategic tool for guiding marketing development for CFs in Chomphet.

Inclusive Market Development and Value Addition

Value addition through processing, packaging, and certification significantly enhances rural household incomes (Donovan et al., 2022). Inclusive market systems prioritize accessible information, collective action, and equitable bargaining, allowing marginalized producers to capture higher value in supply chains (Springfield Centre, 2015). Certification standards, such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), reinforce buyer confidence, particularly in tourism-driven markets (Kawasaki, 2020).

Research Objectives were to: 1) assess the potential market for agricultural products produced by CFs in Chomphet District, 2) identify market demand and purchasing behavior in Chomphet District and Luang Prabang City, and 3) Recommend practical policies to promote sustainable market development and product promotion.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to generate a comprehensive understanding of production constraints, market opportunities, and the broader commercial environment influencing collective farmer (CF) producers. The qualitative component consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with twelve CF members from twelve villages. Participants were selected to represent diverse ethnic groups, reflecting the heterogeneous sociocultural context of the study area. This diversity was essential for capturing a wide range of perceptions, livelihood strategies, and marketing practices.

The FGDs followed a semi-structured format, allowing participants to freely articulate their experiences while enabling researchers to probe key

themes such as production potential, resource availability, seasonality, labor constraints, and market access barriers. This approach, aligned with guidance from Dilshad and Latif (2013), facilitated in-depth exploration of the lived realities of CF members and identified nuanced challenges within their production systems. Additionally, the discussions highlighted existing marketing experiences, including informal trading arrangements, reliance on local traders, and emerging opportunities in niche markets.

To complement qualitative insights, a quantitative survey was administered to 42 grocery shops in Luang Prabang City. This survey systematically assessed market demand for major agricultural products commonly produced by rural households, including livestock, vegetables, staple crops, and organic or chemical-free products. By providing measurable indicators of consumption trends, purchasing volumes, and preferred product attributes, the survey allowed the research team to compare urban market demand with production capacities described in the FGDs, highlighting potential mismatches or opportunities for scaling up supply.

Finally, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with representatives from district government offices and tourism-oriented businesses. Selected for their strategic roles in market regulation, infrastructure development, and service provision, these stakeholders offered insights into policy initiatives, institutional support mechanisms, and tourism-driven changes in demand. Insights from tourism enterprises further clarified quality standards and supply expectations shaping local markets.

Through this triangulated methodology, the study integrated local experiences, quantitative market data, and institutional perspectives to provide a robust, holistic understanding of the production–market interface affecting CF members.

2.2 Sample Group

The qualitative sample consisted of twelve collective farmer members from twelve selected

villages, representing diverse ethnic groups to reflect the sociocultural heterogeneity of the study area. For the quantitative component, 42 grocery shops in Luang Prabang City were surveyed to capture patterns of market demand for locally produced agricultural products. Key informants included district government officials and representatives from agricultural, and other related businesses with direct involvement in market regulation, service provision, and producer-consumer interactions. The combined sampling strategy ensured coverage of community, market, and institutional perspectives.

2.3 Research Instruments

The study used three main research instruments: focus group discussions to explore production challenges and market access, a survey to gather information on urban retailers' purchasing behavior and product preferences, and key informant interviews to collect insights on policies, market infrastructure, and supply expectations. Therefore, these tools provided data from community, market, and institutional perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive analysis.

2.4 Data Collection

Data were collected using a three-pronged approach. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with collective farmer (CF) members in village settings to facilitate open discussion and authentic sharing of experiences. Quantitative surveys were administered in shops within Luang Prabang City to gather data on demand for local agricultural products. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with government officials and tourism representatives to provide contextual insights into market dynamics and institutional support. All qualitative sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent and supplemented with detailed field notes, while quantitative data were coded and analyzed statistically. This approach aligns with best practices in mixed-methods research, allowing for triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of the study context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from focus group discussion (FGDs) and key informants' interviews (KIIs) were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and key themes related to production constraints, marketing practices, and institutional influences. Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations, to assess market demand, product preferences, and sourcing behaviors. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enabled a comprehensive understanding of the production–market interface, revealing potential gaps, opportunities, and strategies for supporting collective farmer (CF) producers.

3. Results

3.1 Potential Market Assessment

Strengths (S):

The communities exhibit a robust foundation of traditional skills that span a wide range of livelihood activities, including agriculture, livestock husbandry, handicraft production, pottery making, and the delivery of cultural services. These longstanding competencies form an important basis for household income generation and are deeply embedded in local knowledge systems. In particular, the ability to draw on multiple skill sets enhances livelihood resilience and provides households with diverse economic options.

Environmental conditions further strengthen these livelihood assets. The presence of fertile agricultural land enables year-round cultivation, supporting both subsistence needs and market-oriented production. Beyond agricultural activities, local production systems are distinguished by the creation of unique artisanal goods. A notable example is the Ban Chan pottery, formally recognized as a One District One Product (ODOP) item, which showcases the community's specialized craftsmanship and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Market conditions within the region are generally favorable, with sustained local demand for both

agricultural products and artisanal items. This demand signals considerable potential for livelihood improvement, especially if producers can strengthen supply consistency and product quality. Additionally, collective farmer (CF) members demonstrate positive work attitudes and strong diligence, traits that enhance their ability to participate effectively in production activities and engage with emerging market opportunities. These human capital attributes serve as a significant asset for future development initiatives.

Weaknesses (W):

The communities face increasing challenges related to the rising costs of raw materials and limited access to essential production inputs. These constraints place pressure on household-level enterprises, particularly those dependent on consistent supplies of agricultural, livestock, or artisanal materials. As input prices continue to increase, producers often struggle to maintain profitability, which in turn restricts their ability to expand or diversify their activities.

Compounding these material constraints is the generally low level of technical knowledge and the limited adoption of modern production technologies. Many producers continue to rely on traditional methods, which, while culturally significant, may not provide the efficiency or productivity gains necessary to compete in increasingly dynamic markets. The lack of exposure to improved techniques, equipment, and processing methods hinders efforts to enhance product quality, reduce production costs, and meet emerging market standards.

Furthermore, insufficient funding and institutional support present major obstacles to scaling production. Limited access to credit, grants, or development programs restricts the ability of households and community groups to invest in upgraded infrastructure, expand their operations, or engage in value-added processing. The absence of supportive financial mechanisms thus reinforces existing production limitations and constrains the potential for

broader economic development within these communities.

Opportunities (O):

The study area benefits from a growing market demand driven largely by the expansion of the tourism and hospitality sectors. As visitor numbers continue to rise, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and tour operators increasingly seek locally sourced agricultural products, handicrafts, and cultural goods. This expanding buyer base provides producers with new and diversified market channels, enabling them to position their products within higher-value segments. The linkage between local production and tourism therefore represents an important opportunity for rural households to enhance income generation and strengthen market integration.

Seasonal price incentives further contribute to favorable market conditions. Demand for certain agricultural commodities and artisanal products increases during peak tourism periods, often resulting in higher sale prices. These seasonal dynamics create opportunities for producers who can time their production cycles to align with market peaks. For small-scale producers, such seasonal premiums can improve overall profitability, encourage market participation, and provide motivation to expand production capacities. However, effective utilization of these incentives requires adequate planning and the ability to maintain product quality and consistency throughout the year.

Government support also plays a significant role in shaping the enabling environment for local producers. Policies aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector, improving rural infrastructure, and promoting cultural industries contribute to more accessible and efficient production systems. Government initiatives often focus on enhancing value chains, supporting producer groups, and fostering innovation, thereby helping communities respond more effectively to evolving market demands.

In addition to state-led efforts, donor agencies provide complementary support through targeted programs that promote sustainable agriculture,

livelihood diversification, and artisanal craftsmanship. These interventions frequently include training, capacity building, and small grants designed to improve production techniques and boost market readiness. Donor engagement has therefore helped fill critical gaps in resources and technical knowledge, reinforcing local efforts to increase production and strengthen participation in both domestic and tourism-oriented markets.

Threats (T):

Climate change and the increasing frequency of natural disasters present significant risks to local production systems. Irregular rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and occasional flooding disrupt agricultural cycles and reduce overall productivity. These environmental stresses not only threaten crop yields and livestock health but also undermine the long-term stability of rural livelihoods. As climate-related shocks become more severe, communities face growing uncertainty that complicates planning and resource allocation.

In addition to environmental challenges, producers must navigate substantial market-related constraints, particularly price instability and insufficient quality control mechanisms. Fluctuating market prices reduce income predictability and make it difficult for households to invest in production improvements. At the same time, limited systems for monitoring and ensuring product quality hinder competitiveness, especially in markets that require consistent standards. Weak quality assurance practices restrict producers' ability to access higher-value markets and reduce consumer trust in local products.

Market access limitations, driven largely by poor infrastructure, further exacerbate these challenges. Inadequate road networks, limited transportation options, and weak market linkages increase transaction costs and reduce the efficiency of supply chains. These infrastructural constraints make it difficult for producers to deliver goods in a timely and cost-effective manner, thereby diminishing their market reach and overall

profitability. Improving infrastructure and connectivity is therefore essential for enhancing market participation and supporting the resilience of local production systems.

3.2 Market Demand

The market assessment conducted among retail outlets reveals critical insights into the dynamics of agricultural product consumption in Luang Prabang City. The survey found that 100 percent of participating grocery shops procure agricultural products on a daily basis, highlighting the indispensability of fresh agricultural commodities in the urban food supply system. This consistent purchasing behaviour underscores a strong and continuous demand for livestock products, vegetables, and staple crops, which collectively form the backbone of local food markets. Daily procurement also reflects the operational model of small and medium-sized retailers, who typically lack the storage infrastructure necessary for bulk purchasing and thus rely on frequent restocking to ensure product freshness and maintain customer satisfaction. Such patterns further suggest a stable market environment for producers, particularly those capable of ensuring continuous supply and adherence to quality standards. In this context, the steady demand observed across all surveyed shops offers substantial opportunities for rural producers seeking to strengthen or diversify their market presence, provided that they can meet the logistical and quality expectations of urban buyers.

Despite the strong and consistent demand for agricultural products, retailers' interest in organic goods remains relatively modest. Only 45.24 percent of surveyed shop owners expressed interest in sourcing organic products, indicating that the market for chemical-free or sustainably produced goods is still emerging. A major factor explaining this limited interest is the presence of existing suppliers, cited by 65.38 percent of respondents. Many shops operate within established supply networks that provide stable, predictable delivery of agricultural products; such networks tend to discourage experimentation with new

suppliers unless clear economic or quality advantages are demonstrated. Furthermore, 23.08 percent indicated that the distance to farms producing organic goods poses an additional constraint. The physical separation between producers and retailers elevates transportation costs, complicates timely delivery, and increases the risk of product spoilage, all of which weaken the commercial viability of organic supply chains. These findings illustrate that although consumer awareness of organic products may be rising, structural and logistical barriers continue to limit their integration into mainstream retail markets. Expanding the organic sector will therefore require targeted interventions, including improved certification systems, enhanced distribution networks, and strengthened producer–retailer partnerships to build confidence in product quality and continuity of supply.

The survey also identified a set of products that experience consistently high demand across retail outlets. These include key livestock items pork, goats, buffalo, and beef as well as widely consumed vegetables such as Chinese greens, lettuce, onions, chili, and coriander. The prominence of these products reflects both cultural consumption patterns and the requirements of the tourism and hospitality sectors, which depend heavily on fresh and diverse food supplies to meet visitor expectations. Livestock products, in particular, play a central role in household diets and restaurant menus, contributing to stable and often growing demand. Complementing the findings from retail assessments, national export data from January to October 2024 further highlights the economic importance of livestock and crop production. During this period, the country exported 1,319 cows, 756 buffaloes, and 2,324 pigs, illustrating the substantial scale of cross-border livestock trade. In addition to animal exports, agricultural commodities such as cassava and rubber also played a significant role, with more than 1,200 tons of cassava and 2,500 tons of rubber exported. These figures demonstrate the dual-oriented nature of agricultural production in the region, which serves both domestic markets and international trade networks.

Collectively, these findings illustrate the complex interplay between domestic retail demand, emerging organic market opportunities, and broader export-oriented agricultural production. The strong daily demand for agricultural products within urban markets underscores substantial and sustained opportunities for local producers, yet also highlights the necessity for improved supply chain coordination, quality assurance, and year-round production capacity. The limited yet growing interest in organic products signals a potential niche market whose development will require strategic investments in certification, distribution, and producer training to overcome existing barriers. Meanwhile, the high-demand livestock and vegetable products identified in the survey not only reinforce current consumption trends but also align with national export patterns, suggesting potential complementarities between domestic and international market strategies. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing interventions that enhance market integration, improve producer competitiveness, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of agricultural and livestock systems in the region

3.3 TOWS-Based Policy Recommendations

The **SO strategies** emphasize leveraging existing strengths to capitalize on emerging opportunities, particularly those created by the rapidly expanding tourism sector. Expanding production capacities to meet tourism-driven demand presents a viable pathway for increasing household income and strengthening market integration. This approach includes not only scaling up existing agricultural and artisanal outputs but also developing new product varieties tailored to the preferences of tourists and hospitality service providers. Product diversification can enhance competitiveness, reduce market risk, and help producers respond to changing consumer trends. In this context, innovation in product development—such as specialty vegetables, value-added livestock products, or culturally distinctive crafts—can position local producers more favourably within high-value market segments.

The **ST strategies** address the need to mitigate threats through the strategic use of existing strengths. Given the increasing variability associated with climate change, investment in climate-adaptive technologies is essential for safeguarding production systems. Improved irrigation infrastructure, drought-resistant crop varieties, and climate-smart cultivation techniques can help stabilize yields despite environmental fluctuations. Such technological enhancements also contribute to long-term resilience, enabling farmers to maintain consistent supply and meet the reliability requirements of tourism-dependent markets. The integration of adaptive technologies ensures that environmental vulnerabilities do not undermine the community's capacity to benefit from expanding economic opportunities.

The **WO strategies** focus on overcoming internal weaknesses by capitalizing on external opportunities. Enhancing quality control mechanisms is crucial for accessing higher-value markets, particularly those requiring standardized agricultural and artisanal products. Technical training programs can strengthen producer skills in cultivation, processing, storage, and packaging, thereby improving product consistency and safety. Additionally, developing collective branding for farmer groups can increase market visibility and consumer trust. Group branding also facilitates coordinated marketing efforts, enabling small-scale producers to compete more effectively with larger suppliers. By addressing internal capacity gaps, these strategies help rural producers take full advantage of the expanding demand environment.

The **WT strategies** aim to reduce vulnerabilities by addressing both internal weaknesses and external threats. Aligning production cycles with seasonal patterns of demand can help mitigate price fluctuations and optimize income-generation opportunities. Integrating pottery and other traditional crafts into tourism activities—such as demonstrations, workshops, and community-based cultural tours—can diversify income sources and enhance the cultural value proposition of the community. Improving market access

through cooperative structures can also reduce transaction costs, strengthen bargaining power, and facilitate more efficient supply chain management. By organizing producers into cooperatives, communities can negotiate better prices, coordinate transport, and ensure regular supply to both local and tourism-oriented markets, thereby reducing exposure to market and environmental uncertainties.

The strategies presented emphasize strengthening local production systems by aligning internal capacities with external opportunities and challenges. SO strategies propose expanding and diversifying agricultural and artisanal production to meet growing tourism-driven demand, enabling producers to increase income and position themselves in high-value markets. ST strategies focus on mitigating climate-related threats through investments in climate-adaptive technologies and improved irrigation, thereby enhancing long-term production resilience. WO strategies aim to overcome internal weaknesses by improving quality control, providing technical training, and promoting collective branding to increase competitiveness and market visibility. Finally, WT strategies address both internal and external vulnerabilities by aligning production with seasonal demand, integrating traditional crafts into tourism activities, and improving market access through cooperatives, strengthening producers' bargaining power and reducing market risk.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that Chomphet District has strong market potential driven by urban and tourism demand, but collective farmers face constraints related to technology, product quality, and institutional support. Addressing these challenges requires agro-tourism integration, strengthened farmer organizations, improved quality standards, and long-term planning to promote sustainable rural development.

The findings from Chomphet District align with broader evidence that tourism and urban markets can create significant opportunities for rural agricultural producers. Research on agritourism and rural

development indicates that linking agricultural production with tourism demand can diversify rural incomes, preserve cultural heritage, and stimulate local economic activity through increased direct sales of local products and services (Yasin & Bacsi, 2025). In Chomphet, high demand from Luang Prabang's urban population and visitors underscores similar patterns observed globally, where agritourism acts as a driver for rural market expansion and diversified revenue streams. Such integration between agriculture and tourism is increasingly recognized as a valuable rural development strategy that enhances both product visibility and local livelihoods (Yasin & Bacsi, 2025).

However, consistent with broader studies in Southeast Asia, the competitiveness of collective farmers in Chomphet is constrained by technological limitations, inconsistent quality standards, and weak institutional support. Studies on smallholder technology adoption in Lao PDR emphasize that rural farmers often face persistent barriers to adopting improved technologies and management practices due to limited extension services and capacity building, which in turn restricts productivity and market access (ACIAR, 2021). Likewise, national agricultural assessments highlight those farmers in Lao PDR lack access to post-harvest handling, quality control skills, and market-oriented extension support, reinforcing the need for institutional strengthening to improve market competitiveness (UN-CSAM, 2020).

The policy measures recommended in the Chomphet study mirror approaches in regional research that emphasize the role of collective action and institutional linkages. For example, smallholder market linkage studies in Asia argue that strengthening farmer organizations, cooperatives, and public-private partnerships is essential to improve bargaining power, reduce market risks, and facilitate access to high-value markets (Devaux et al., 2018; and Tray et al., 2021). These parallels suggest that while the Chomphet context is locally specific, the patterns of market potential and structural constraints are broadly consistent with

regional experiences, highlighting the importance of integrated tourism-agriculture strategies, quality improvement, and institutional support in fostering sustainable rural development.

5. Conclusion

The market for agricultural products in Chomphet District is strong, driven by demand from Luang Prabang City and the growing tourism sector. Local producers benefit from fertile land, natural resources, and traditional skills, which support steady production of culturally significant products, such as Ban Chan pottery. Despite these advantages, the competitiveness of collective farmer members (CFs) is limited by technological challenges, inconsistent quality standards, and insufficient institutional support. These factors prevent producers from fully exploiting market opportunities, highlighting the need for strategies that improve both economic viability and long-term sustainability.

The evidence from surveys and qualitative assessments shows that local and urban consumers have high interest in Chomphet's products. The buyers tend to prefer high-quality, culturally authentic goods, and tourism-related demand provides additional opportunities to diversify income sources. Urban retailers and visitors are willing to pay higher prices for products that meet quality standards, indicating significant market potential for CF-produced agricultural goods.

To support sustainable market development, several policy measures are recommended. First, integrating farm tourism with agriculture and traditional farming activities through workshops, eco-friendly demonstrations, and tours can increase income and preserve traditional knowledge. Second, forming and strengthening farmer groups and cooperatives can improve market access, collective bargaining, and knowledge sharing, allowing producers to respond effectively to market changes. Third, improving product quality through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), quality control measures, and training can facilitate access to high-value markets and reduce post-harvest

losses. Finally, a development plan from 2024 to 2030 should emphasize value addition, institutional partnerships, sustainable agro-tourism, and initiatives like a Seed Museum in collaboration with Souphanouvong University, linking agricultural and cultural heritage with economic development.

These strategies aim to enhance Chomphet's competitiveness in regional and sustainable and community-based tourism-driven markets while supporting resilient, inclusive, and sustainable production systems. By combining market-focused interventions, technical support, institutional strengthening, and cultural-agricultural integration, local producers can increase income, maintain product quality, and preserve traditional knowledge, contributing to long-term rural development.

6. Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial organization regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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