

# Juth Pakai



ISSN 1813-3622

*New Thought*

Issue 8



## **Perspectives on Lao development**

**Ecotourism vs. rubber, Lao minors  
working in Thailand, and equity in  
development**

**Front cover photo: eco-tourism trekking in Luang Namtha (Paul Eshoo)**

**The United Nations in the Lao PDR is supporting the production of *Juth Pakai, Perspectives on Lao Development* with the aim of stimulating dialogue on all issues related to development in the country. The Editorial Board has reviewed the articles presented in this issue. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations in the Lao PDR.**

# Juth Pakai

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April 2007

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## Sharing Information to Stimulate Development

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The Editorial Board of *Juth Pakai* firmly believes that the objectives of alleviating poverty and stimulating development in the Lao PDR will be better pursued if information and innovative thinking are shared. The articles presented here challenge our current way of thinking and/or contain information that has not yet been published. We sincerely hope that *Juth Pakai* will stimulate an active development debate and will contribute to a better understanding of the development challenges in the Lao PDR.

# Editorial

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This is the first issue of *Juth Pakai* to be published in 2007, and first time I have written the editorial for the journal. In the three-and-a-half years since the project to publish *Juth Pakai* began, many new readers, researchers and fields of development work have been reached and I trust that this advance will be maintained in the future. Presenting and discussing analysis of the actions and innovations to enhance livelihoods and eradicate poverty can only strengthen and accelerate the development progress being made in the Lao PDR.

Issue 8 features the of Steven Schipani of the Lao National Tourism Authority, Roy Huijsmans, a researcher from the Netherlands, and a Lao-Japanese research team consisting of Sisavanh Phanouvong and Masaaki Yamada. Mr Schipani, who has been contributing to ecotourism advances in northern Laos for several years now, is understandably perturbed by the boom in rubber planting in Luang Namtha. However, his article shows he understands that rubber and other cash crops can bring vital revenues to farmers, and his work provides an important opening in what could be a valuable debate on how to balance differing ways of raising incomes in rural areas.

The work of Mr Huijsmans explores the complex issue of migratory labour, which is all the more sensitive when young people under 18 years old are involved. His approach of questioning black and white rules is a lesson in how to consider that statistics do not always tell the whole story, particularly where complicated human relationships are involved. Ms Phanouvong and Ms Yamada present an appraisal of a rural development project carried out near Vientiane, and show quite clearly that such projects do not always meet everyone's expectations. Careful planning could help distribute the benefits of projects more equally.

Together these valuable articles show us that 'development specialists' must keep an open mind in planning, executing and following up on their actions. There is always more than one perspective to each problem or situation, and discussing and debating these issues helps give a voice to everyone concerned.



Sonam Yangchen Rana  
UN Resident Co-ordinator

# Letter

## New NHDR underway

Colleagues,

Research is the process of pursuing new knowledge, satisfying, and even increasing curiosity. However, if a forum for sharing and receiving intellectual feedback is not available, the overall aim of the research process will remain unaccomplished. Thanks to publications such as *Juth Pakai* and the National Human Development Reports (NHDR), the research community in the Lao PDR now has a forum for discussing and sharing the outputs of intellectual investigations and new thoughts. Discussion surrounding the overused term ‘development’ still often leaves important questions unanswered: is the overall output of development beneficial for the majority of the population? How can the beneficial kinds of development be determined? Publications such as the NHDR try to answer these questions by putting people - especially the poorest in society - at the centre of the development discourse. The 2006 NHDR *International Trade and Human Development* was written to highlight the best paths to take in order to simultaneously boost trade and human development. It is an urgent call for action and provides information on how policy reforms can increase the positive benefits of international trade for Lao people while reducing future negative impacts. The most important issues in these efforts will concern cross-border trade, migration and remittances, employment, rural electrification and improved information.

People’s opinions and experiences, and the challenges they face, were captured through the commitment and work of several young Lao researchers - many of them women - during the process of compiling this third Lao NHDR. The report features in-depth analysis of these findings through supporting documents such as Pafoualee Leechuefoung’s paper “Exports of Electricity: Positive and Negative Contributions to the Lao PDR”. A focus on the gender implications of this study was published in Issue 7 of *Juth Pakai* under the title “Damming Lao Rivers, the Voices of Women”. The process of writing the fourth NHDR will start soon. The theme of the next report will be ‘Labour Force’ and the opportunities, challenges and contribution of Lao labour to human development, especially in rural areas. The NHDR team is looking forward to working again with young motivated researchers. The team values *Juth Pakai* as a unique forum for the research process in Laos. This process goes on even after a research paper has been written, by building capacity, increasing knowledge, stimulating interaction and discussion, and ultimately enriching society with new thoughts and ideas.

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# Ecotourism as an Alternative to Upland Rubber Cultivation in the Nam Ha National Protected Area, Luang Namtha

by Steven Schipani

*Tourism arrivals in Laos continue to rise, reaching over one million people in 2005. It seems that visitors are primarily interested in the country's natural and cultural attractions. There is concern now that forested lands used for community-based ecotourism may be earmarked for conversion to rubber plantations. Since 2002, both ecotourism and rubber cultivation have become important economic activities in Luang Namtha province. This paper reports on the financial benefits that ecotourism is generating around the Nam Ha NPA, arguing that it generates financial benefits for local people while protecting the environment and culture of Laos. Rubber may provide less profit and negatively affects national biodiversity. It is concluded that ecotourism activities and rubber plantations can both be conducted viably, but not in the same immediate areas.*

In 2005, the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA) estimated that the tourism industry generated over US\$146 million, making it the country's top earner of foreign exchange. During the same year, after a decade of spectacular growth, the Lao PDR welcomed over one million visitors for the first time since the government opened the country to international tourists in the early 1990s (LNTA, 2005a). Bouttavong et al. (2002) estimate that culture and nature-based tourism make up over half of the total value of the entire Lao tourism industry. Realising that tourism is a major employer and foreign exchange earner stimulating economic activity across a wide range of sectors, the government has embraced tourism centred on the country's natural and cultural attractions as part of its strategy to reduce poverty and contribute to socio-economic development (Allcock, 2004). Within a wider regional context, tourism is one of 11 flagship programmes in the ten-year strategic framework of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Programme (ADB, 2005). This aims to use tourism to reduce poverty and contribute to the conservation of cultural and natural resources.

Laos, located at the heart of the GMS with an abundance of nature and culture-based tourist attractions, is well-placed to take advantage of the socio-economic benefits that tourism is capable of producing (Jamison, 2003; Goodwin et al, 1998). Despite rapid growth over the past decade, there is still a pressing need to improve rural and urban infrastructure, upgrade human resources, and strengthen inter-agency coordination to better plan for and sustainably manage the assets forming the basis of the Lao tourism industry. At the same time, ongoing socio-economic development plans reflect long-standing government policy to end shifting cultivation and promote agro-forestry, especially in the mountainous north where opportunities to pursue wet-rice cultivation are limited (GoL, 2003). One such scheme gaining momentum in Luang Namtha, a sparsely -populated province bordering Myanmar and China in the northwest, is to encourage communities to plant rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) trees. The idea is that villagers will produce rubber latex for export, either as sole proprietors or under various land-stewardship and revenue sharing agreements with Lao or international investors, many of whom are Chinese. In Luang Namtha rubber was pioneered in a small number of plots in 1994. The first latex tapping began in 2002, about the same time that the LNTA and UNESCO were implementing a pilot community-based ecotourism project in the Nam Ha National Protected Area (UNESCO, 1998).

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*Ecotourism and rubber cultivation are now  
competing with each other for forested land*

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Since 2002, both ecotourism and rubber cultivation have gone on to become important economic activities in the province, and the community-based ecotourism programme developed by the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was adopted as a national model after receiving several international awards (Lyttleton & Allcock, 2002). It could be though that these two activities are now competing with each other for the forested land available in the north of Laos. This paper reports on the financial benefits that ecotourism has generated for local stakeholders in and around the Nam Ha National Protected Area (Nam Ha NPA) from 2000 to 2006, in an effort to provide land-use planners with a broader perspective on an alternative livelihood activity (community-based ecotourism) already taking place on forested land in and around the Nam Ha NPA that may be earmarked for conversion to rubber plantations.

Other subjects that deserve further attention but are not explored in this paper are the accelerating loss of biodiversity due to conversion of natural forest to monocrop rubber, reduced harvests of non-timber forest products on cleared land, the reduction in size and diversity of the Namtha and Sing Valley watershed forests, soil erosion brought about by massive land clearance on steep slopes, and the social changes that this new agricultural production system is bringing about. For an in-depth analysis of these and other important issues related to rubber cultivation in Luang Namtha, see the *Para Rubber Study* commissioned by the GTZ Rural Development in Mountainous Areas Programme (Alton et al, 2005).

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*Conversion of natural forest to  
monocrop rubber is accelerating loss  
of biodiversity*

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### **The Nam Ha National Protected Area**

The 222,400 square-hectare Nam Ha NPA falls entirely within Luang Namtha's borders, and is contiguous with the Shiang Yong Protected Area in Yunnan, China. Based on an analysis of LANDSAT imagery in 2000, 32% of the NPA contains unbroken dense, mixed deciduous forest and 47% is a mosaic of forest types of varying maturity (Hedemark & Vongsak, 2003). Thirty-seven large mammal species including Asian Tiger, Malayan Sun Bear, Clouded Leopard, Asian Elephants and Black-Cheeked Crested Gibbons have been confirmed in the NPA, in addition to over 288 species of birds (Tizard, 1997). At present there are 19 villages within the protected area's boundaries and an additional 85 villages just outside its borders. These rely heavily on the NPA's forests for food, fuel, medicine and cultural purposes (Nam Ha NPA & WCS, 2004). The majority of people living in and around the Nam Ha NPA are Ahka, Kmhmu, Lanten, and Hmong. Because of its significance in terms of habitat and diversity of species, the Nam Ha NPA has been designated an ASEAN Natural Heritage Site. The cultural and natural resources of the Nam Ha NPA are also the province's main tourist attractions, with over 70% of tourists stating that they are interested in guided tours into the protected area (Schipani & Marris, 2002).

## Ecotourism in Luang Namtha

From 1998–2004 the number of annual tourist arrivals to Luang Namtha increased from 18,600 to 41,658 and during that period the province consistently attracted about 5-7% of the entire Lao tourism market. In 2005, Luang Namtha welcomed over 49,000 visitors (LNTA, 2005). Also rising is the average daily expenditure of tourists, which increased from \$9 per day in 2000 (Schipani & Pakasy, 2000) to \$16 per day in 2005 (LNTA, 2005b). There are a total of 50 accommodation establishments with 536 rooms and 18 restaurants spread over the province’s five districts, with most concentrated in Namtha and Muang Sing. Since the late 1990s, culture and nature-based tourism has established itself as one of the province’s top earners of foreign exchange and is a major employer. Based on 2005 arrival and expenditure data, it is estimated that tourism in Luang Namtha generated over \$3.15 million in foreign exchange that year.

Interviews with international tourists in Luang Namtha show that the most popular activities (table 1) are multi-day forest trekking, locally-guided visits to ethnic minority villages, and guided river and cave tours. This type of nature and culture-based tourism is referred to in this paper as ‘ecotourism’ because it meets a number of criteria outlined in the Lao National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan (LNTA, 2005c). Specifically, ecotourism in Luang Namtha (i) employs and generates financial benefits for local people; (ii) provides appropriate small-group settings for cultural exchange; (iii) minimises adverse cultural and environmental impacts; (iv) has a strong educational component; and (v) generates public funds for environmental and cultural protection.

**Table 1: Main interests of international tourists in Luang Namtha 2004–2005**

Activity	2004 (n = 210)	2005 (n = 170)
	% indicating an interest	
Forest Trekking	77	78
Visiting Ethnic Villages	74	75
Visiting Waterfalls	44	54
Rafting/Kayaking	35	43
Mountain Biking	29	42
Safaris	40	41
Visiting Caves	40	40
Seeing Cultural Shows	-	29
Camping	20	24
Bird Watching	21	19

To participate in most of the activities shown in table 1, tourists must book a tour through a local guide service or tour company. In 2005 there were four provincial operators and two national companies in Luang Namtha selling tours to areas in and around the Nam Ha NPA. Table 2 shows that these ecotourism-related businesses employ 138 local people as guides and office staff, a high percentage of whom are ethnic minorities. Typical pay for town-based guides is \$10 per day, and most guides report that they work anywhere from 1–20 days per month. Office staff are usually paid a base salary and sales commission, with earnings ranging from \$50–\$200 per month.

**Table 2: Characteristics of tour operators in Luang Namtha, 2005**

<b>Operator Name</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>No. of Active Employees/Guides</b>	<b>Tour Types/no. of tours</b>
1. Luang Namtha Guide Service	Namtha (est. 2000)*	59 male 15 female (34) ethnic minority	Trekking (5) River tour (1)
2. Luang Namtha Bike Tours	Namtha (est. 2003)	3 male 1 female (4) ethnic minority	Mountain bike tours in the province (3)
3. Muang Sing Guide Service	Sing (est. 2001)	24 male 3 female (23) ethnic minority	Trekking (5) Eco/cultural tours (1)
4. Vieng Poukha Guide Service	Vieng Poukha (est. 2003)	18 male 3 female (16) ethnic minority	Trekking (3) Cave tour (2)
5. Green Discovery	Namtha (est. 2000)	10 male 0 female (2) ethnic minority	Trekking (5) River rafting (3) Mountain Biking (5) Camping (1)
6. Vientiane Travel & Tour/Exotissimo	Sing (est. 2004)	2 male 0 female (0) ethnic minority	Trekking (1)
<b>Total</b>		<b>138 (79 ethnic minority)</b>	<b>35 tours</b>

\*est. = established

The 35 tours regularly sold in Luang Namtha also generate income and employment for an estimated 30 villages that provide a variety of goods and services to tour groups. Villagers work as guides (over 100 village guides have been trained), provide food, beverages and lodging to tourists on overnight tours, sell handicrafts, provide some land- and river-transport to tour groups, and are paid by the Provincial Tourism Office and Nam Ha NPA Management Unit

to maintain trekking trails. From March 2001 to February 2006, a total of 2,574 trekking and river tours were sold in Namtha and Sing districts, generating \$293,049 in gross receipts and \$174,036 in financial benefits for local service providers. If the modest revenue generated in Vieng Phoukha is added to these totals, the gross provincial ecotourism tour-sales revenue for the industry's first five years rises to \$305,520.

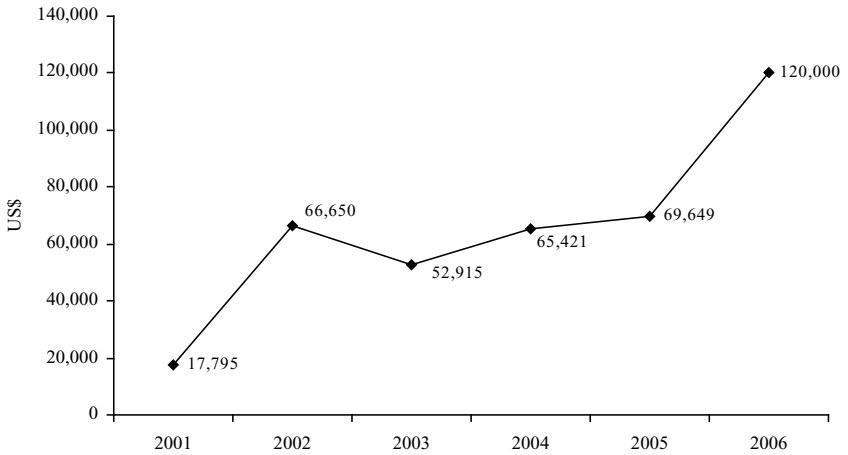
**Table 3: Tour operator sales data and cash flow in Luang Namtha. 2001-2006**

	No. of Tours	No. of Tourists	Sales Revenue (US\$)	Benefits to Local People	PTO taxes	NPA Permits	Provincial Taxes	Village Fund	Other Expenses
Luang Namtha Guide Service (2001-Feb 2006)	1,414	7,165	150,051	103,565	6,982	7,155	2,770	10,262	19,279
Green Discovery (2002-Feb 2006)	564	2,110	76,963	39,022	3,265	2,160	6,538	0	20,320
Muang Sing Ecoguides (2003-Feb 2006)	596	2,214	66,035	31,449	2,206	0	1,165	2,790	6,544
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,574</b>	<b>11,489</b>	<b>293,049</b>	<b>174,036</b>	<b>12,453</b>	<b>9,315</b>	<b>10,473</b>	<b>13,052</b>	<b>46,143</b>

PTO = Provincial Tourism Office

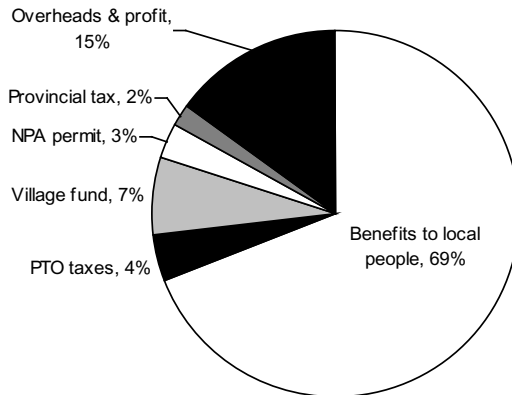
What is most encouraging is the success that is following the multi-million dollar investments made by the Lao government and donor agencies to develop the infrastructure and human resources needed to establish ecotourism and better manage the Nam Ha NPA. 2006 proved to be Luang Namtha's most lucrative year yet in terms of number of tours sold, public and private sector revenue generation and job creation at the village level. In the first two months of 2006, 979 tourists purchased 248 tours, generating sales revenue of \$33,060. Based on these figures, a conservative estimate of \$15,000 monthly sales turnover for the four months of the high-season, \$10,000 per month for the mid-season, and \$5,000 per month for the low-season months, will result in a total of \$120,000 in revenue for 2006 (figure 1).

**Figure 1: Total annual ecotourism tour sales revenue in Luang Namtha, 2001-2006**



Based on Jan-Feb 2006 sales data from four tour operators

**Figure 2: Luang Namtha Guide Service revenue distribution, 2005**

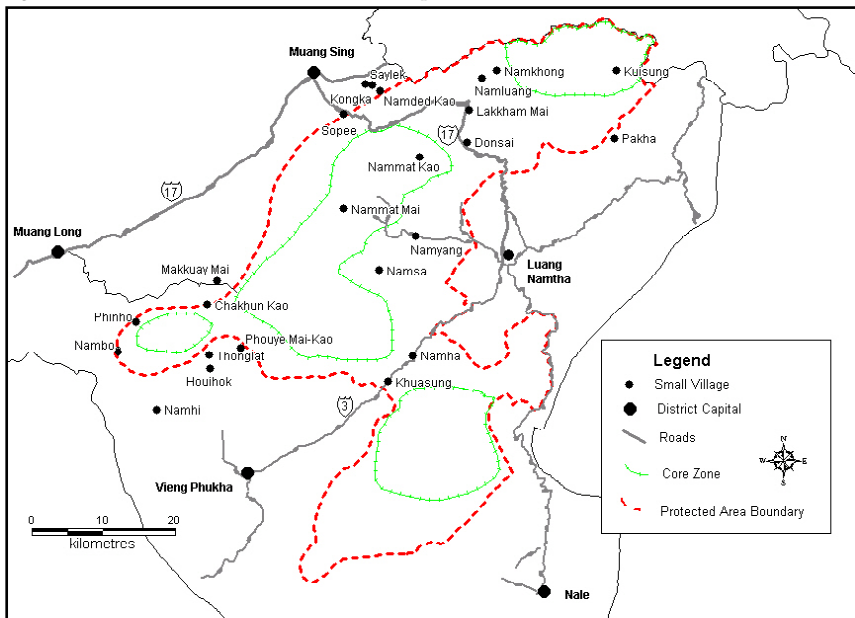


### **Rubber and Ecotourism in the Nam Ha NPA**

By 2005, over 4,580 ha of degraded forest and fallow swidden fields had been cleared and replaced with small to intermediate rubber plantations in close proximity to a number of trekking routes in Muang Sing and Namtha district (Alton et al, 2005). Thus far clearance has mainly been limited to corridors along roads: Route 3, which runs north-south between

China and Thailand, Route 17A connecting Luang Namtha to Muang Sing, and also along most rural roads radiating from Muang Sing. A large concession was recently granted to a Sino-Lao consortium which plans to plant up to 3,000 ha on the southwestern periphery of the NPA in Vieng Phoukha (Vieng Phoukha Department of Forestry, 2006). Figure 3 shows that the encroachment of rubber into the Nam Ha NPA and its adjoining older-growth forests is presently most prominent along route 17A. Based on the trend of expansion from 2000–2005, there is a real threat that more rubber will be planted inside the protected area in the future.

**Figure 3. Ecotourism areas and areas with rubber plantations in and around the Nam Ha NPA, 2005**



Experience in Luang Namtha shows that once natural forest is cleared and an area converted to rubber plantations, it immediately loses its attractiveness to tourists seeking ecotourism activities, and existing tours must be relocated or suspended. For example, in 2005, following the removal of natural forest cover where trekking trails once existed, it was necessary to re-route two tours in Namtha, one in Muang Sing and one in Vieng Phoukha. In Muang Sing, land clearance has caused one formerly popular trekking trail to stop operating altogether.

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

From a protected area management standpoint, the introduction of rubber into the NPA contradicts Prime Ministerial Decree 164 (GoL, 1993) and the 1996 Forestry Law (GoL, 1996), which state that the primary objectives of Lao Protected Areas are to conserve biodiversity, protect watersheds, maintain ecological stability and protect scenic beauty for leisure and research. Establishment of monocrop rubber plantations in protected areas meets none of these objectives. Ecotourism as it is presently practiced in Luang Namtha arguably meets all of them.

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*Ecotourism is generating significant  
levels of foreign exchange without  
clearing large tracts of land*

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Understandably, land-use planners and local villagers in Luang Namtha are actively looking for new income generating activities and ways to diversify the local economy, especially by using what is commonly perceived as ‘unproductive land’, i.e. degraded forest and fallow swiddens. While planting rubber can be a viable alternative income generating activity for some families - as has been demonstrated in Had Yao Village (Alton et al, 2005) - so is community-based ecotourism in close to 30 villages. Ecotourism in Luang Namtha is generating immediate and significant levels of foreign exchange without clearing large tracts of land. Consequently, through indigenous Lao business ventures, economically important non-timber forest products are preserved and there is no loss of local land stewardship or ecological services.

Alton et al. (2005) have calculated that the total revenues or benefits of planting one hectare of rubber trees in Luang Namtha, undiscounted for a thirty-year period, is \$23,148. Depending upon the level of fertilisers and other inputs used, total variable costs range from \$3,471 to \$6,303, and the net returns range from \$18,204 to \$19,677, thus placing the annual net value of the venture at \$617 per hectare. How does the value of the present provincial investment in rubber (4,580 ha) compare to the value of the provincial tourism industry? Based on the above

assumptions, the province's 4,580 hectares of rubber will produce an annual income stream of \$2,825,860, which is about 10% lower than the \$3,152,512 generated by the provincial tourism industry in 2005. Most rubber earnings will not come on line for a number of years, while ecotourism is generating revenue today. What about prospects for future earnings growth in the ecotourism sector? Assuming that the province can sustain growth in tourist arrivals on a par with 1998–2005 (when the number increased from 18,600 to 49,258), by 2013, when the majority of rubber planted in 2004–2005 will begin to yield latex, the province can expect to receive 79,916 tourists. Using conservative expectations that daily expenditures will rise to \$27.2 per day (based on 2000–2005 trend data showing a \$1.4 per year rise in daily expenditures) with the average length of stay increasing by only one day to five days, Luang Namtha's estimated gross revenue from tourism will be \$10,868,576 in 2013. This is about 3.8 times higher than the province will earn from 4,580 ha of rubber.

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*Increasing the amount of land under rubber  
would probably devastate the provincial  
ecotourism industry and result in a painful  
blow to the local economy*

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Based on 2004 net-value calculations by Alton et al, for rubber to approach the earnings that tourism will generate, about 17,615 ha of rubber are needed, along with 13,550 labourers to maintain the plantations. Increasing the amount of land under rubber cultivation to 17,615 ha would be especially troublesome if it means further encroachment into the Nam Ha NPA. Doing so would probably devastate the provincial ecotourism industry and result in an immediate and painful blow to the local economy. Moreover, since both the number of annual tourism arrivals and latex export prices are vulnerable to forces largely outside the control of villagers in Luang Namtha, it is prudent to minimise controllable internal risk factors for both industries. For ecotourism, this means that the resources which support it i.e. natural forest cover, wildlife and ethnic minority culture, need adequate protection. For rubber, it is critical that the provincial authorities ensure that technical resources and extension services,

labour, land tenure and equitable contractual agreements are in place to make certain rubber will produce the income streams envisioned by farmers and investors.

## **Conclusion**

Experience from Luang Namtha shows that ecotourism activities and rubber plantations can be conducted viably in the same province, but not in the same immediate areas. Designating which areas will be converted to rubber plantations, and which areas will be set aside for ecotourism activities is therefore one priority for provincial planners. Since the forests of the Nam Ha NPA already provide ecotourism income, food, medicine, and ecological services, and are an irreplaceable repository of biodiversity, it is strongly recommended that the authorities in Luang Namtha formulate and enforce a long-term zoning plan that protects the profitable ecotourism industry and limits further introduction of rubber into the Nam Ha NPA. If the current rate of land clearance and rubber encroachment into the Nam Ha NPA continues to go unchecked, the province will not be able to sustain its profitable and growing ecotourism sector, and the thousands of people that rely on the NPA's diverse forests for ecotourism, food and ecological services may soon find themselves bankrupted by Luang Namtha's dubious 'rubber boom'.

## **About the Author**

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Vieng Phoukha Department of Forestry. 2006. Personal interview. 8 April.

# Approaches to Lao Minors Working in Thailand

by Roy Huijsmans

*Recent studies have observed in Thailand a growing number of working Lao minors. By law, these may be regarded as victims of human trafficking. This paper observes, however, that some older teenagers who are still under 18 may be seeking and finding legitimate working positions. The phenomenon of minors migrating may thus be addressed from different points of view, including a rights-based approach that takes into account the views of children themselves. The author discusses three different perspectives identified in approaches to children and teenagers in development practice. In doing so, he teases out the underlying ideas of childhood and relates them to recent empirical observations on Lao minors working in Thailand.*

Since embracing the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in the late 1980s the Lao PDR has gradually adopted a very different politico-economic orientation. In economic terms this has entailed a gradual departure from state-planned to market-driven economics. In political terms the global collapse of state-communism induced a shift from almost exclusive dependence on the old 'socialist bloc' to an increased participation in regional politics.

The impact of this change has carried well beyond the economic and the political spheres of life, with the effects being felt in the social and cultural lives of Lao people. However, it should be noted that the extent to which the NEM has triggered change differs greatly between localities, and furthermore has affected different social groups in varying ways within localities. In geographical terms, the impact of policy reorientations is probably most dramatic in already dynamic regions, such as cities, towns, border regions and border-crossings, as well as in newly-accessible areas following road construction. With regard to social groups, much has been written about the way different socio-economic groups are faring in relation to development. However, much less emphasis has been put on different generations within socio-economic categories.

This paper builds on the proposition that different generations have experienced the recent changes in quite distinct ways. In this respect, this paper highlights the role and position of children and teenagers in development by focusing on specific development related themes: labour migration and human trafficking. This specific focus on the current generation of teenagers and children seems justified since they have grown up under different political and economic realities and may thus have different world-views than their parents. This suggests that the differences observed in lifestyles between the young generation, and their parents and grandparents can only partially be attributed to their respective positions in the human life-cycle. It is likely that the differences between these generations rather signify something of a structural reorientation of social life in Laos.

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*An apparently growing number  
of Lao 'children' work willingly or  
unwillingly in Thailand*

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The starting point of this paper is the observation that an apparently growing number of Lao 'children' work, for some time, and willingly or unwillingly, in Thailand. The term children is put in quotation marks since although by both Lao and international standards any person below the age of eighteen is regarded as a child, here it generally refers to older children so the terms 'teenager' or 'minor' may be more appropriate. The phenomenon of Lao minors working in Thailand can thus technically be portrayed as 'child labour migration' and is highly delicate, not in the least because of the hazy boundaries that this trend shares with 'human trafficking'. It is precisely on account of this high degree of delicateness surrounding any discussion on 'child labour migration' and 'human trafficking' that this paper seeks to critically discuss particular ways in which the phenomenon is being addressed in Laos. The paper argues that the varying ways of addressing human trafficking and teenagers as migrant workers are based on different views of teenagers' and children's positions in development. These positions emerge from particular underlying ideas on children and childhood which are not necessarily made explicit. By discussing these ideas, the article aims to open more space for addressing some of the difficult challenges of development in relation to young people.

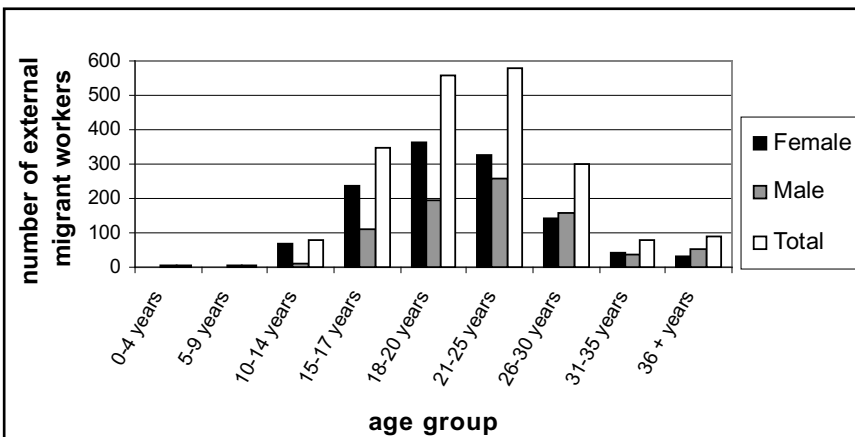
## Lao Children Working in Thailand: Vague Figures, Firm Responses

Following relative isolation from Thailand between 1975 and the late 1980s, Laos has gradually opened its borders to its western neighbour. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in movements of goods and people between the two countries. These changes should not be evaluated in quantitative terms only. Current migrations from Laos to Thailand should also be viewed in a more qualitative light than earlier and at times illegal practices, since the current phenomenon takes place in a dramatically different politico-economic context.

### Vague Figures

Figures given for Lao migrants working in Thailand should be treated with extreme care. The majority enter Thailand illegally or over-stay their border-passes (Thammavongsa, 2006) and are thus excluded from official figures. Estimates on the true numbers vary greatly, ranging from 100,000 according to Thai authorities to 300,000 according to some NGOs (SCUK et al, 2004). There is, however, agreement on composition. As is usual in migration flows in various parts of the world, the Lao working in Thailand are predominantly young people. More specifically, a considerable proportion of these young people are under the age of eighteen, and thus are children according to national and international standards.

Figure 1: External migrant workers by age and sex (Champassak, Khammouane and Savannakhet)



Source: Adapted from MoLSW & ILO-IPEC/TICW 2003, Table 27.

Figure 1 presents a visualisation of how migration is predominantly located in the lower age cohorts, with the majority of the migrants between 18 and 25 years of age, and a significant proportion in the age group 15-17 - technically children. The figure further illustrates that very few child migrants are under the age of 10, or in the case of boys, under the age of 15. The low number of very young migrants and the rapid rise in teenage migrants suggest that the former category should be seen as part of family migration, whereas the latter probably represents 'independent child migration'. Lastly, figure 1 suggests a strong link between age and gender: younger migrants are likely to be female.

### **Firm Responses**

While a significant proportion of Lao migrants fall into the grey area between adulthood and childhood, policy responses set a sharp divide based on the internationally agreed age of eighteen. As a consequence, while the experiences of 17- and 19-year-old Lao workers in Thailand are unlikely to differ greatly, their situation may be subject to dramatically different policy responses. Laos and Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 'Employment Cooperation' in 2002 (Muntarbhorn, 2005), and newspapers continue to make frequent mention of how labour shortages in Thailand will be amended by Lao labourers (Vientiane Times 2005; 2006). However, it must be noted that the gradual trend towards recognition, facilitation and protection of labour migrants tends to apply predominantly to adults, and in most cases male adults. This represents a significant gender and generational bias. At the same time, strong statements are made against human trafficking, most powerfully through a 2005 MoU between Laos and Thailand (Muntarbhorn, 2005). In contrast to action taken following the 'Employment Cooperation' MoU, measures to combat trafficking tend to explicitly focus on children and women.

### **Migrant Labour, Children and Development**

The discussion here aims to break away from a static and falsely simplistic presentation of different forms of labour migration as a binary construction of adult versus child (O'Connell-Davidson, 2005). This is done by scrutinising three alternative ways in which labour migration and/or human trafficking is addressed in Laos. It is argued that these different approaches are not just different ways of addressing similar phenomena, but are based on fundamentally

different perspectives on the position of children and teenagers in development processes in the country. Hence, the implications of each particular perspective are manifold, not least for the children themselves. In so doing, this paper touches on fundamental questions such as what is childhood? What is a good childhood? What is adulthood? When does one stop being a child? These questions are not explored in detail here but some consideration of them should be intrinsic to any approach and critique.

### **Lao Children as Victims of Development**

The perception of children and teenagers as victims of development-induced migration takes two forms. The first evolves around the notion of being 'left behind'. This mostly applies to young children whose parents have migrated to work elsewhere and who are often left in the care of grandparents or one parent. Concern has arisen about the health, education and psycho-social well-being of such children. However, despite moral judgements, recent research in this field from the Philippines has concluded that 'left behind' children cannot simply be regarded as passive victims. Instead, the effects of migration on 'left behind' children are more ambivalent. While migration may create emotional displacement for the 'left behind' children, it also opens up possibilities for children to act more independently (Asis, 2006). The second form, the 'victim children' label, has proven to be more sticky. This version applies to children, mostly teenagers, drawn into migration processes as workers. Conventional wisdom tends to assume that these young workers become migrants either unwillingly or on the basis of false information. This section explores this second form in greater detail.

The notion of children and teenagers as victims of development is rooted in particular readings of capitalist socio-economic development. Capitalism, the argument goes, and particularly in its relatively untamed versions, inherently creates dark corners within the economy which exist on the exploitation of the most vulnerable in society – such as migrant workers or children. Proponents of this theory, while diverse in the emphasis and detail they give, agree on the general observation that the exploitative use of migrant labour, and by implication, child migrant labour, is inherent to global capitalist expansion and is thus unlikely to cease any time soon, particularly if no firm measures are taken (Castles & Kosack, 1973; Piore, 1979; Cohen, 1987; Sassen, 1999).

Laos displays a relatively low degree of industrialisation and for this reason is often seen as not having a child labour problem (Ennew et al, 2005). This is in stark contrast with Thailand, where the capitalist economic path of development has long been associated with a prevalence of child labour. It has been argued that demographic changes and expanding education levels in Thailand have led to a decreased incidence of Thai children in the worst forms of child labour (Baker, 1998). Yet, there is concern that child labourers from neighbouring countries such as Laos have now replaced their Thai peers in these worst forms of child labour, often in association with child trafficking.

Intervention driven by a notion of children and teenagers as victims of development-induced migration is based on a particular conceptualisation of children and childhood. In this, childhood is primarily seen as a preparatory stage of life before adulthood. Early exposure to labour, lack of parental care and protection, and compromising on school attendance are seen as harmful to the process of becoming a successful adult. From this can be deduced a notion of children as incompetent, fragile, incomplete and passive, in contrast with the opposite qualities that are attributed to adults.

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*Early exposure to labour is seen as  
harmful to the process of becoming a  
successful adult*

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## **Human Trafficking**

The notion of human trafficking, particularly when the term is applied uncritically, is filled with a strong sense of children and teenagers as victims of capitalist development. This can be illustrated by the phrase “human trafficking, a modern form of slavery,” which regularly surfaces in academic and activist writings (Williams, 1999). This phrase draws an explicit comparison, based on a notion of commoditisation of human beings, between the role of slave trade in early European capitalist expansion and current forms of exploitation under capitalist expansion, often in relation to women and children from the Third World.

Despite the moral outrage such phrases create, it is important to take a closer look at what human trafficking actually refers to and how children are seen in this regard. A commonly used definition of human trafficking incorporates much of the above mentioned idea of children. Article 3, subparagraph (a) of the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children* supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime (signed by Thailand and ratified by the Lao PDR) and states the following:

“ ‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

Subparagraph (c) adds that in the case of children “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a)”. Thus, the underlined section of the above definition has no relevance when dealing with children. This in effect means that in determining what constitutes a case of human trafficking of children - any human being aged between 0 and 18 years of age according to the UN definition - exploitation at the work place becomes the key factor. However in practice exploitation (defined by the UN above as “forced labour or services”) is, apart from in the most obvious cases, extremely difficult to establish since it refers to relations which may be subject to constant change. With this lack of clarity in the definition of exploitation, there is considerable leeway in defining cases of Lao children working in Thailand as cases of human trafficking.

The rationale of the definition assumes that children’s interests can be better protected by not granting children the right to consent to migration and work. While the good intention of this

policy is not in question, all its implications should be considered. An approach that regards children's consent, and by implication children's voices and their varied experience, as irrelevant, and relies on firm measures to prevent children working abroad, may in the end not suit all concerned children best. It adheres to a singular notion of 'the trafficked child', who needs to be rescued from exploitation and abuse and given back his or her childhood. This does not explore possible alternative avenues, such as inquiring whether the 'exploitation' could be addressed or to what kind of childhood the child is sent back. It is rather a 'one size fits all' response revolving around a 'rescue-rehabilitate-reintegrate' approach. This policy, which criminalises the employment of Lao minors in Thailand, may not reduce the number of Lao minors working in Thailand, but will certainly make their work even less visible, which as is argued elsewhere, could make young migrant workers only more vulnerable to exploitation (Busza et al, 2004).

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*Current policy is rather a 'one  
size fits all' response*

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### **Lao Children as Recipients of Development**

UNICEF gives a concrete definition of childhood. "Childhood," its flagship *State of the World's Children Report* states, is "a time to grow, learn, play and feel safe," with access to "essential services such as hospitals and schools" and the protection of family and community (UNICEF, 2005). Such global visions of childhood may risk reducing children, or young people in general, to uniform and passive recipients of development. In addition, this very idea of development may then be based on a global consensus on what constitutes 'children's needs', in most cases determined by adult specialists and policy makers whose understanding of childhood is often skewed towards particular middle-class realities (Boyden et al, 1998).

In relation to children and migration, such a vision has contributed to a reality in which the phenomenon of Lao children studying in Thailand, which can be seen as migration for a rather specific form of children's work - school work - receives hardly any critical attention, since it corresponds with what is considered to be good for children. Yet, without denying the value

of education, it cannot simply be said that placing children in schools abroad is indisputably in the children's best interest. This point is sadly illustrated by reoccurring reports from richer and poorer countries, including Thailand, that mention severe pressure on students as well as neglect or even abuse of overseas pupils in schools (Bunnag, 2005; Kwankhom, 2006).

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*Criminalising the employment of Lao  
minors could make them only more  
vulnerable to exploitation*

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Uniform and static ideas of childhood forego explicit inquiries into contextual differences and the way children and teenagers engage with development projects. Keeping children and teenagers in school is generally, and again uncritically, conceived as one of the major measures to reduce the incidence of human trafficking involving minors. Alternatively, for those beyond school age, employment generation at local level is seen as a way of reducing the risk of falling prey to trafficking (Phetsiriseng, 2001). However, several reports emphasise the fact that Lao teenagers do not just leave for Thailand due to lack of jobs in their own localities. Rather, they are often also driven by a desire to do kinds of work different to those available in their own village, which especially after some years of education, are frequently perceived as hard or boring. Moreover, a simple desire to see the world beyond the village is also frequently stated as one of the factors driving Lao teenagers to Thailand and possibly into trafficking situations (Phetsiriseng, 2001; Wille, 2001; Ginzburg, 2004; SCUK et al, 2004). In this respect, increased education and local employment generation seem not to guarantee a reduction of Lao teenagers migrating to Thailand; instead, they may well contribute to an increase.

## **Lao Children as Actors in Development**

The idea of viewing children as actors in, rather than merely recipients of development activities finds its theoretical and conceptual roots in the "new sociology of childhood" (James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 2005). This perspective differs from the dominant strand in psychologically informed studies on childhood, in which childhood is mainly studied as a rather universal

stage of life leading to adulthood. The new sociology of childhood does not deny the fact that particularly young children may not be able to think and act like most adults, yet, it refrains from universal trajectories of child development by emphasising that “what children do and what is expected from them is largely historically and culturally determined” (Qvortrup, 2004).

These theoretical and philosophical ideas underpin a new approach to children in development which is moving away from needs-based approaches, often rooted in universally assumed and undifferentiated needs, to rights-based approaches backed up by the near-universally ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A major implication of this approach is that children cannot be reduced to victims or passive recipients of development any longer but must be granted the status of agents in the process of development (Bourdillon, 2004). Article 12 of the CRC explicitly states that children, and this refers again to all persons under the age of 18, have the right to participate in all matters affecting them. Motivations for greater child participation are not just distant calls from western textbooks or international conventions. Sound reasons for greater child participation also emerge from practical observations in mainstream studies on human trafficking and child labour migration in Laos. For example, it is not uncommon for Lao children to leave for Thailand without informing their parents (Phetsiriseng, 2001; Wille, 2001). This suggests that parents, or adults in general for that matter, may in such cases only be of limited value as informants on child labour migration or human trafficking. In addition, it has frequently been observed that Lao children and teenagers migrate with the help of adults, often friends or relatives, who cannot be seen as traffickers. This observation runs parallel to ‘network theories’ in migration studies, in which the migrant is conceptualised as an actor in a web of networks (Massey et al, 1993). This contrasts with the uni-directional relations underpinning trafficker-victim relations. Lastly, studies in the field of ‘rural change’ have long highlighted the active role teenagers play in various migration processes, and in consequent developments, across Southeast Asia (Wolf, 1992; Koning, 1997; Rigg, 2003, part III; Rigg et al, 2004).

The Save the Children Alliance has actively promoted rights-based philosophies in Laos in relation to human trafficking and child labour migration to Thailand. Two examples are

particularly worth mentioning. Firstly, Save the Children UK (SCUK) designed and implemented participatory research on Lao youth as migrant workers in Thailand with the aim of gaining greater understanding of the phenomenon. The involvement of local youths in this study as peer-researchers brought to the surface numerous insights into the experiences and perceptions of Lao youth working in Thailand (SCUK et al, 2004). Secondly, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), SCUK ran a series of ‘Children’s Fora’ in the Mekong Region to explicitly seek children’s views on how to address human trafficking (ILO & SCUK, 2005).

While insights can be gleaned in this way, new buzz-words like ‘listening to children’, ‘children’s participation’ and dealing with ‘children’s agency’ present their own problems as well. First, there is the issue of selecting participants. For example, who should be listened to, and which children are to participate? Second, while listening to children is certainly very effective in gaining a greater understanding of dynamics and processes, there remains the problem - present in most participatory research – of how to aggregate numerous diverse qualitative responses and how to distil coherent policy responses. The latter issue may be particularly problematic in cases where children’s recommendations are in direct opposition with the interests of adults, who in most cases have the final say in policy formulation. Lastly, the pitfall of methodological individualism looms in relation to children as well. When concentrating on children’s agency, too narrow a focus may obscure “larger frames of meaning and action” such as gender, class and generation (Long, 2001). This may falsely homogenise social phenomena on the basis of realities experienced by some children.

## **Conclusion: from Competing Views to Alternative Approaches**

The discussion above has presented three perspectives on the role of children and teenagers in development, as can be distilled from current approaches towards human trafficking and/or child labour migration from Laos to Thailand. Despite the fact that all three perspectives can to different degrees be found in Laos, the most prominent images of Lao children and teenagers working in Thailand are those of trafficked victims, often connected to the Thai sex-industry.

The perspective of children and teenagers as passive victims of development thus has a high profile. To the extent that this translates into concrete and urgent actions to address the worst and most obvious forms of child labour exploitation, as for example outlined in ILO convention 182, such projection may perhaps be exempted from further critique. Viewing children and teenagers as recipients of development can help in formulating a range of preventative measures to stop children and teenagers falling prey to exploitation and abuse.

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*Most Lao migrant workers of minor age  
prefer to remain in their Thai jobs rather  
than returning home*

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A growing body of research however observes that in most cases it is not the nature of the migrant's job that leads to exploitative outcomes, but rather the subordinate position of the young worker. The following forms of exploitation are most common: late or non-payment of salary, long working hours, and mistreatment by employers or police (SCUK et al, 2004). Furthermore, studies have observed that most Lao migrant workers of minor age have positive migratory experiences, and that despite certain forms of exploitation, they prefer to remain in their Thai jobs rather than returning home (Ginzburg, 2004).

Similar observations emerge from studies set in different contexts and which question the uncritical application of the term 'human trafficking' to minors working abroad (Bastia, 2005; Whitehead & Hashim, 2005). However, attempts to add some nuances to the human trafficking debate seem to be swimming against a particularly strong current. Anti-trafficking projects and research have been mushrooming all over the globe during the last decade (Laczko, 2005), and in Laos over the last five years (Molland, 2005). This has led not only to an increase in knowledge about and interventions to address human trafficking, but has also contributed to a perception of trafficking as the predominant form of labour migration at minor age. The establishment of a United Nations Inter-Agency Project on human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and in Laos of a National Committee on Human Trafficking, combined with NGO initiatives such as the broadcasting of a television drama on human trafficking, have further contributed to this dual outcome.

This has created a situation in which the space to address child labour migration as anything other than human trafficking is extremely narrow (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005). The fact that the worst forms of abuse do occur should not be forgotten, and this makes finding such a space a particularly difficult endeavour (Caoutte, 2001; Beesey, 2004; UNICEF & MoLSW, 2004). The various studies that have documented the exploitation of Lao minors working in Thailand show that child abuse and exploitation in relation to migrant work are very real. Yet, Jenks (1996), writing about child abuse in a largely western context, argues that while ‘child abuse is real . . . it is equally a device for constituting a reality’. Jenks was passing comment on the ‘better safe than sorry’ approach, which regards all potentially abused children as abused. He argues that increased mention of child abuse is a response to contemporary conditions in which nostalgic visions of the child are desperately preserved following a general “pain at the loss of our social identity” in a vastly changing world. The extent to which Jenks’s observation is relevant to Laos can be debated. However, as with the three alternative perspectives of child labour migration/human trafficking presented in this paper, such an observation aims to provoke further thinking. Further thinking and new ideas are urgently required to make sense of the multiple realities and interpretations, and to be able to responsibly balance the different and conflicting interests associated with labour migration and human trafficking involving children.

### **About the Author**

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# Do Men and Women Benefit Equally? Social and Gender Equity in a Foreign-Assisted Rural Development Project in Laos

by Sisavanh Phanouvong and Masaaki Yamada

*This research analyses socio-economic and gender equity in rural development, using the case of an international aid project to better understand benefit distribution among project beneficiaries. Participatory collection of data showed that all social classes and both sexes benefited: household income increased and workloads substantially decreased during the ten years of the project. However, more affluent households made better use of project services than disadvantaged households with limited resources. Moreover, men's working hours were shortened more than those of women, and as a result the gender gap in working hours increased. This study concludes that to ensure better distribution of benefits in communities, explicit measures are needed to involve all social classes and both sexes in all stages of development intervention.*

## Background

Different societies show recognisable patterns of disparity in the economic freedoms that various groups of people enjoy, and these disparities are often not based on income and resources alone (Ahmed & Laarman, 2000). Social and gender-based disparities in economic development are commonly observed throughout developing countries, including Laos. Economic development in Laos over the last three decades has compelled development planners/researchers to take a closer look at equity issues. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2001), the growth of the Lao economy has not contributed substantially to poverty reduction as the positive effects of growth have been largely offset by an increase in inequality. This is true, even though the degree of inequality in Laos remains less pronounced than in neighbouring countries such as Thailand. The pattern has produced a reaction during the last decade, with rural development initiatives in Laos evolving into an integrated approach to poverty eradication. Large amounts of financial and technical assistance, both in terms of grants and loans, have flowed in from

international agencies and non-governmental organisations. However, the expected goals have not been fully achieved, partly because of insufficient attention to the interests of stakeholders involved in project activities. This planning deficiency has resulted in unequal distribution of project benefits among beneficiaries.

Until recently, recognition and treatment of equity in Lao rural development have been superficial. Unequal distribution of benefits from economic development has been observed between urban and rural communities, the rich and poor, women and men, and among various ethnic groups (ADB, 2001; UNDP, 2001). The need to redress these inequalities has been recognised by the government in its strategy to eradicate poverty while ensuring equal benefits for all (CPC, 2003). Detailed studies are needed, however, to better understand how this government strategy is actually being implemented at grass roots level.

### **Development of the ADSC and Issues in Social and Gender Equity**

The Huay Sone–Huay Sua Agricultural Development and Service Centre (ADSC project) began operations in 1994 under the sponsorship of the Lao government and with financial support from the King of Thailand through the Chaipattana Foundation. The ADSC is dedicated to developing integrated farming systems suited to local conditions, and to serving as a demonstration site for local farmers and visitors from other areas. The project consists of seven major components: 1) infrastructural development, 2) water resource development, 3) farming activities, 4) land development, 5) livestock raising, 6) aquaculture, and 7) training. Advanced agricultural techniques have been introduced in the fields of rice cultivation, soil enrichment, poultry raising and fish raising. In order to facilitate project activities, basic infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity, tube wells, fishponds, and local irrigation networks was installed. The project covered an initial five villages and four other villages were added in 1999.

Social and gender equity within the ADSC initiative is a complex issue. To date, only one evaluation has been carried out to learn how ADSC's work has helped meet its objective of contributing to improved socio-economic conditions for villagers. Even that study made no attempt to disaggregate the different groups of people in the community. This means that project

managers and staff remained unable to perceive inequity in the receipt of project benefits. This lack of information motivated the current research focus on women and income classes.

## Research Questions, Objectives and Methods

This research examined socio-economic and gender equity in the distribution of project benefits. It focused on how the project affects different groups of people in three communities. The primary research question was whether all community members face the same constraints and receive similar benefits from project intervention. Specific objectives were to:

- Quantify the economic change sustained by different socio-economic groups in the rural communities;
- Identify how women's workloads have changed in relation to those of men.

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Primary and secondary data from a wide range of publications was used. The primary data collection involved several visits to the project office, plus field research. In each community, a series of participatory tools were used: Methodology for Participatory Assessment (MPA) (Dayal et al, 2000; WSP and IRC, 2003), Participatory Rural Appraisal (FAO, 1997; Mallick et al, 2002), and Livelihood Analysis (Wilde, 2001; IFAD, 2003). The techniques applied were key informant interviewing, focus group discussion, social mapping, and household survey. Various other qualitative techniques such as field observation and personal discussion were also used to validate the information gathered.

## The Samples and Field Data Collection

Three villages were randomly selected out of the nine communities currently being assisted by the project. Two of these have been under the auspices of the project since it began operations, namely Ban Nayang and Ban Namkieng Tai. The third community, Ban Nasap, joined the project in 1999. All three villages are located 22 kilometres north of Vientiane Capital and are accessible from the capital by National Road No. 13. Through participatory exercises held in

each community, the villagers classified their households according to three socio-economic categories, better-off, medium and worse-off. In all cases, the level assigned was determined by the household's rice sufficiency and other assets including land, livestock, and family business income. Following this classification process, separate discussions were conducted with householders from each of the three household categories. In addition, villagers from each category were randomly selected for interviews to discuss their household socio-economic situation. In order to examine gender equity, discussions with men and women were held separately. The majority of men and women were between the ages of 20 and 70.

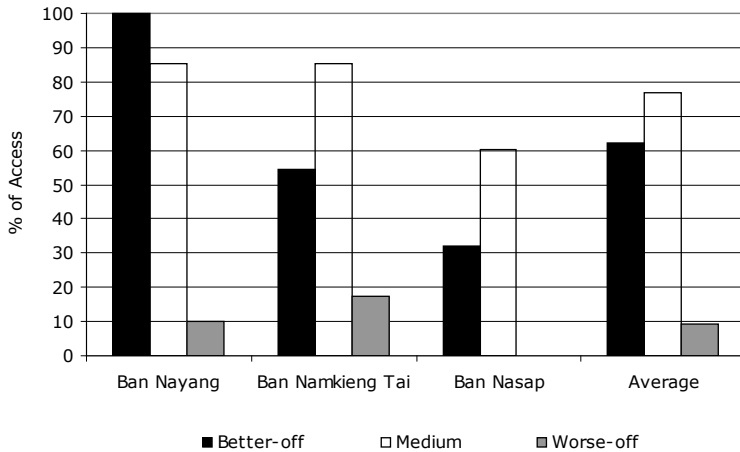
The field data collection team consisted of five government staff who are all experienced in the application of participatory approaches and are members of the National MPA Core Team. A review of the participatory methods and questionnaires was conducted by the field team members prior to field data collection, which took place from August 5–25, 2003. In addition, the team made visits to ADSC and carried out field observations and personal interviews with key respondents to cross check the validity and accuracy of the information gathered.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Access to Project Services**

Access to project services determined the level of involvement of villagers in the project activities. Access was attained either by direct project encouragement or by the motivation of villagers themselves. The study showed that none of the three communities studied displayed full use of all project services (irrigation, training, in-kind agricultural finance, revolving credit funds, ponds, improved water supply, etc). The overall use rates for Ban Nayang, Ban Namkieng Tai and Ban Nasap were 78.2%, 62.9% and 48.8% respectively. Use of project services also varied by socio-economic class. In all three communities, the better-off and medium households enjoyed more project benefits. In Ban Nayang particularly, the rates of access were 100%, 85% and 10% for the better-off, medium and worse-off households respectively (Figure 1). A similar result was found in Ban Namkieng Tai, where the worse-off households exploited project services less than medium and better-off people.

Figure 1: Use of project services by socio-economic class



### Household Economy

In the past, as in other rural Lao villages, subsistence farming was the norm in these three communities. Most of their own rice and vegetable production was consumed at home. Simple agricultural tools such as wooden-handed hoes, knives, spades and draft animals were commonly used. Since the last decade however, a major change has been occurring in the production systems of these villages. Many better-off families have begun to invest in agricultural machinery such as hand-tractors. Results from the household surveys showed that all households classified as ‘better-off’, and nearly all households in the ‘medium’ category, owned at least one hand-tractor. In contrast, the worse-off farmers were still using traditional tools, since they could not afford machinery.

The most commonly grown crop in all the communities was rice with a wide range of vegetables cultivated as secondary crops. Livestock raising activities also had the potential to improve household economies in the research area. A number of off-farm activities were undertaken by the villagers, such as family businesses, handicraft production, and selling of labour. However, no baseline data was available to compare changes in off-farm income before and after project implementation. Many of the villagers interviewed stated that before the project there were few off-farm income generation opportunities because of limited access to infrastructure

and the traditional nature of livelihoods that emphasised self-sufficiency. Most households were dependent on family labour, with some labour exchange in the busy seasons. Moreover, handicraft production was not popular due to marketing difficulties. Thus, it can be assumed that income from non-farm activities was minimal during the time prior to the project. At the time of this field research in 2003, off-farm household-owned businesses varied widely, and included running transport services such as school vans, ice production, small general stores, etc. These businesses were run by better-off and medium households, some of whom had taken advantage of the benefits supplied by the project. The business of an ice producer, for instance, was facilitated by the clean water supply from a tube well.

In general, during the project period inflation-adjusted household income increased among all socio-economic classes (Figure 2) except the medium income class of Ban Nayang. According to the people in this particular village, many youngsters of medium income class households moved to the city to acquire higher education and employment. Thus the farm production of these families, especially of rice, was reduced. For other families, farm income increased or at least remained stable. Additional off-farm income was accrued following project intervention, thanks mainly to project infrastructure investment.

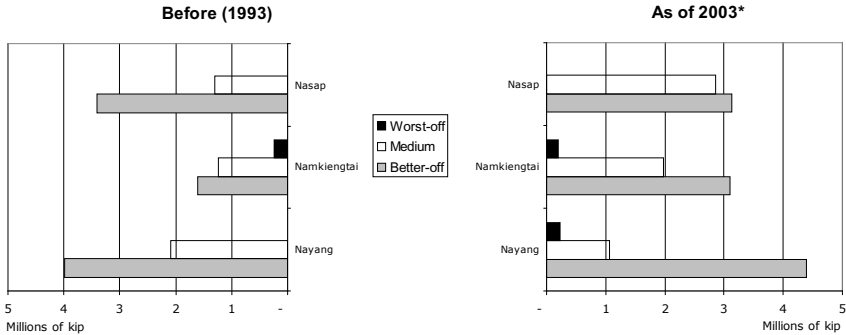
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*Those who already had financial and land  
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This study identified a big gap, however, between the increases in income among the better-off, medium and the worse-off groups (Figure 2). In 2003, the better-off group (averaged across all three communities) earned almost eight times more income than the worse-off group did (averaged over two of the communities). The medium group (averaged across all three communities) earned more than three times the income of the worse-off group. These results imply that those who already had financial and land resources were more able to use the services offered by projects. The worse-off, lacking such resources, fell further behind the better-off and medium income groups.

**Figure 2: Mean household total income by socio-economic class**



\*Monetary value adjusted for threefold increase in consumer price index in ten years

## Gender Division of Labour and Time Allocation

A starting point for thinking about gender equity is the division of labour between men and women (FAO, 1997). In gender group discussions, men and women tallied the hours they allocated for each daily activity, characterised as being either productive or reproductive, before and after project implementation (1993 and 2003). Productive work means activities that generate income, including subsistence farming. Reproductive activities comprise child bearing and domestic work, necessary for support and reproduction of the work force. Leisure, sleep, chat and entertainment were not accounted for in this survey.

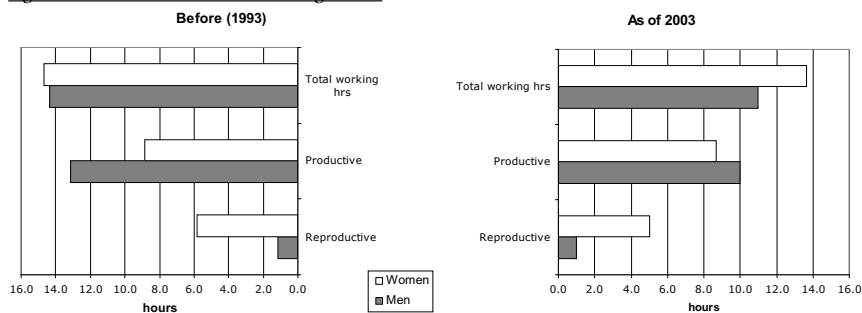
The study found that the activities of each gender were rather complementary in the productive domain, especially with respect to farming activities (Table 1), even though the actual workload of men and women often varied. Small livestock such as indigenous black pigs, ducks, and chickens were taken care of by women. These animals were raised mainly for home consumption, and women could sell them if they needed money. Men were responsible for large livestock such as cattle. Most reproductive tasks, however, were borne by women. Male input in this work category was limited to house repair. In some kinds of income generating activities, such as handicraft production, men and women shared similar roles.

**Table 1: Division of labour by gender**

	Activities	Women	Men	Both
Cultivation activities	Land preparation		√	
	Ploughing		√	
	Sowing	√		
	Planting	√		
	Weeding			√
	Fertilising		√	
	Harvesting			√
	Sorting			√
Rearing of small animals	Feeding	√		
	Forage gathering	√		
Rearing livestock	Watering		√	
	Feeding		√	
	Forage gathering		√	
	Herding		√	
Reproductive activities	Preparing food	√		
	Fetching water	√		
	Cleaning	√		
	Laundry	√		
	Gardening	√		
	Child care	√		
	Repair work		√	
Additional income-generating activities	Handicrafts			√
	Selling labour			√
	NTFP collection			√

In the ten years of project implementation, the workload borne by both men and women decreased (Figure 3). Men’s total working hours per day fell from 14.3 hours in 1993 to 11 hours in 2003. Similarly, women’s total working hours per day dropped from 14.7 hours to 13.7 hours. Note that the difference in hours worked per day by women and men increased over these same ten years, with women’s workload diminishing only modestly.

**Figure 3: Women’s and men’s working hours**



Productive work: farming & other income generating activities; Reproductive work: domestic work

Productive work done by women did not change much (8.8 hours in 1993 and 8.7 hours in 2003) during the ten-year research period, while men's productive work decreased by more than three hours (13.2 hours in 1993 and 10 hours in 2003). This finding indicates that the effect of the introduction of farm machinery has so far been limited to the men's domain, e.g. tractor for ploughing and field preparation, while transplanting of rice is still carried out manually by women. The introduction of secondary crops would contribute even further to the gap in working hours between women and men, because cultivation of secondary crops is usually mainly the task of women.

No significant changes in the reproductive tasks of men and women were recorded over the ten-year research period. Men's participation in household chores has always been very limited (1.2 hours in 1993 and 1 hour in 2003). Although the daily reproductive tasks borne by women have declined slightly (5.8 hours in 1993 and 5 hours in 2003), women continue to work for longer hours than men. Thus, men obtain more time to devote to community management. In contrast, women remain tied to reproductive tasks, and thus have less time for involvement in either community management or leisure activities. This finding has been supported by the studies cited in Henderson et al. (1995) that concluded, "rural women in many regions of the Third World work longer hours than their male counterparts and have less personal or leisure time".

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## **Conclusion**

This study identified two aspects of possible socio-economic and gender inequity in the ADSC project. First, although the project significantly improved the living standards of villagers through various services, some disparities in the distribution of advantages were apparent among different socio-economic classes. The better-off and medium income groups were more able to

use project services than the worse-off group that had limited resources. In order to reduce the economic gap among community members in future development initiatives, special emphasis should be given to income generation activities that are not based on ownership or control of land, such as weaving and handicrafts. If activities like these are targeted towards resource-poor families, they may provide both relative and absolute improvement in the economic condition of worse-off groups. Providing small-scale rural credit to poor families is another option, as this can help shift livestock raising activities from self-sufficiency into market oriented production. The second inequity concerns the gender gap. While household income increased and workloads substantially decreased, men's average daily working hours dwindled by 23.3%, compared to a drop of only 6.8% in women's work time. Women are thus now working considerably longer hours than men. As gender equity is a crucial issue in development, measures are needed to lessen women's domestic workload so as to enhance their ability to contribute to income generation and community management activities. In this regard the project has not yet been able to modify the traditional inequitable division of tasks and workloads between men and women in these Lao communities.

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The authors recommend that in future, the entire process of project intervention be based on participation of villagers representing both genders and all socio-economic classes, so that development opportunities can become equally accessible to the entire community and a more balanced distribution of project benefits may result among beneficiaries.

## About the Authors

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# Glossary

## Article 1 (Ecotourism)

<b>core zones</b>	these are large areas within National Protected Areas that provide essential natural refuge for wild animals to safely reproduce, and where hunting is prohibited
<b>deciduous</b>	deciduous trees are those that drop their leaves as seasons change.
<b>latex</b>	the white milky sap of the rubber tree, processed to make rubber for industry
<b>mammal</b>	type of animal that feeds its young with milk

## Article 2 (Lao Minors in Thailand)

<b>binary</b>	an adjective for a system that involves only two factors
<b>demographic</b>	referring to numbers of people and different population groups
<b>hazy</b>	unclear; foggy
<b>homogenise</b>	mix together into one amorphous entity
<b>leeway</b>	space to change direction or decisions
<b>minor</b>	someone still in legal <i>minority</i> , under 18 years of age, which is the legal age of <i>majority</i> in most countries
<b>proponent</b>	someone who proposes a particular theory
<b>trafficking</b>	illegal trade

## Article 3 (Unequal Benefits)

<b>disaggregate</b>	break apart: modern development policy insists on 'disaggregated' statistics: this means information that is separated according to the age, gender, ethnic group, economic status etc. of the people being assessed
<b>tube well</b>	a well made by driving a tube into the earth to a stratum that bears water

# Juth Pakai

## Contributions Welcomed

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The UN Country Team in the Lao PDR supports the production of a development journal called *Juth Pakai*, Perspectives on Lao Development. *Juth Pakai* ('new thinking' in Lao) aims to stimulate dialogue on all issues related to development in Laos. The journal disseminates knowledge and serves as a forum where debate and analytical thinking can be shared, while also promoting the goals and commitments embodied in the Millennium Declaration.

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