

Juth Pakai



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New Thought

Issue 4



Perspectives
on Lao development

**Sanitation, home gardens, human
trafficking and aid corruption**

Juth Pakai

Issue 4

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Sharing Information to Stimulate Development

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.

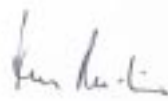
Editorial

Judging by the reaction of people our staff meet, and letters that the editors receive, *Juth Pakai* continues to grow in its momentum and readership. This is gratifying for us in the UN Country Team, but also seems to be a source of pride for Lao people who read or are involved with the journal. We hope that this sense of national ownership of *Juth Pakai* can be sustained and enlarged, and that the publication can win a greater audience of Lao readers and writers.

With this in mind, we have launched a prize for the best research contributions submitted by Lao writers. The details are in the back of this issue, and I urge people who see the announcement to pass it on to their friends and colleagues. This is a good chance to communicate your ideas and experience for the good of everyone in the country.

Issue 4 of the journal continues the *Juth Pakai* style of mixing scientific and practical development experience with topics that are sometimes unpleasant to contemplate but need to be addressed. In "Decentralised Sanitation Systems," Lonkham Atsanavong and his colleagues from the Asian Institute of Technology provide a realistic suggestion for bringing hygienic sewage systems to poor urban communities. The "Home Gardens" paper combines expertise from FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in describing an extremely impressive pilot project that brought immediate economic and nutritional benefits to villagers. The darker side of development is touched on by both Sverre Molland and Cary Feuer in their respective articles on human trafficking and corruption in aid projects. Both these issues are sensitive and difficult to address, but we must all 'grasp the nettle' and discuss such subjects if we hope to bring long-term prosperity to all sectors of the Lao population.

I hope that you find the articles stimulating and fair in their approach. If you do not, let me say once more that *Juth Pakai* is your forum for sharing your opinion. As our prize announcement says, "Get Writing!"



Finn Reske-Nielsen
UN Resident Co-ordinator

Letters

Educating minority children

Colleagues,

Skimming through the three previous issues of *Juth Pakai* I discovered that, in Issue 2, there is an article on educating minority children in Laos by Suksavang Simana. He recently read a paper at the First International Conference on Lao Studies, here at the Northern Illinois University, and was very well received. It occurred to me upon reading his article that our 'Spoken Lao' language lessons might be of some use in teaching Lao to minority children such as the Kammu, whose mother tongue is non-tonal, if and when computers are available for them. We would be able to help any organisation in Laos who wanted to support a pilot project in this area. For young people, the excitement of using technology adds a certain motivation to the task of learning.

It is wonderful that *Juth Pakai* is published in both Lao and English. We will add a link to the journal and place it prominently on our website (www.seasite.niu.edu/lao) so that all of the articles, which should be of wide interest, will be available to those who visit our Lao language and culture website. Congratulations on such a fine enterprise and contribution to Lao Studies!

John F. Hartmann, Professor, Foreign Languages & Literatures
Center for Southeast Asian Studies
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***Juth Pakai* audience**

Editor,

Thank you for your openness to readers' questions. I have a couple of queries and some comments on *Juth Pakai*:

1. Who is the target audience of this journal?
2. Do you agree with the comment in the editorial of Issue 3 that "One of the motives behind publishing *Juth Pakai* is that reading skills are very low in Laos..."?

I have not read the Lao version yet, but I believe that those who would read this publication might be those from certain educational levels or fields of work - these people do have 'reading skills' and they might love reading as well. On the other hand, regarding the audience, I have talked to many people from different backgrounds and places, and reasons they gave why they do not read *Juth Pakai* include (1) they have no interest, (2) they do not need to know, (3) the issues are not for them, (4) they do not

understand the content - this might relate to their education and (5) copies are not available as needed. Therefore, *Juth Pakai* is not for every one - am I right?

On the name *Juth Pakai*, the first meaning that hit me was 'New Hope' ('Juth Pakai' is like the act of lighting up a candle of life). 'New Thought' is the second meaning I know.

Name and address supplied

Editor: You are quite right in supposing that *Juth Pakai* is a specialist journal aimed at a mainly professional and academic audience. We focus on development issues, but do try and make our interest as broad as possible - different articles in the journal will appeal to different people. It does seem that in Laos, even amongst development workers and academic students, reading in any language is not practiced as widely as it is in some other cultures. It is widely acknowledged that there is a lack of publications in Lao language, and *Juth Pakai* was conceived partly with the aim of improving this situation. If any reader knows of people who want to read the journal but cannot access copies, please let us know and we will try to find a solution.

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.

Decentralised Sanitation Systems: Reaching an Under-Served Urban Community

by Lonkham Atsanavong, Ranjith Perera and Thammarath Koottatep

Decentralised sanitation systems can upgrade the living conditions of under-served communities in urban areas. This paper explores the possibility of upgrading sanitation by a participatory approach, through a study conducted in Thongkbankham Neua village, one of the largest under-served communities in Vientiane. The research finds that residents' highest sanitation priority is wastewater disposal. A clear preference emerged for a decentralised system of wastewater disposal based on groups of households, and suitability analysis reveals that this is a practical system to construct. Therefore, the study recommends that the village organisation should help groups of households build communal septic tanks as a medium-term solution, until the city authority is ready to implement a centralised wastewater treatment system.

Rapid urban expansion and population growth have led to persistent gaps between the demand and supply of sanitary infrastructure in the cities of developing countries. In the capital city of the Lao PDR, the central sanitation system is rudimentary and serves only a very small portion of the city; settlements are under-served even in the urban core area. In the absence of a centralised system, many inhabitants are compelled to make their own arrangements and this leads to severe urban environmental problems. Since there are no projects planned to rectify this situation, alternative strategies are needed at least as short- or medium-term solutions.

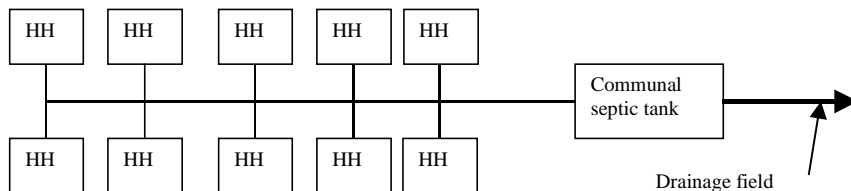
This study explores the prospects of implementing a decentralised sanitation system in a selected urban community, as a project to demonstrate a financially viable and socially acceptable solution to the sanitation needs of Vientiane. If proven viable, a demonstration implementation is planned under the South-East Asia Urban Environmental Management Applications Project (2003-2008) of the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok.

Benefits of a Decentralised Wastewater Treatment System

Centralised systems are most appropriate for sanitation needs in large urban areas, but require colossal investment. The typical alternative to centralised systems is individually arranged on-site systems. These vary from casual discharge to the immediate surroundings to disposal via properly built septic tanks constructed at the cost of the owner/user. Community level

decentralised systems are not commonly found due to difficulties in organising communities on a participatory basis. However, it can be argued that decentralised systems for clusters of houses are a good solution for cities that face problems of land and finance.

Figure 1: Basic Decentralised System



HH = Household

If the community issues can be resolved and suitable plots of land are available, decentralised sanitation systems can be successfully implemented through community participation.

Decentralised wastewater treatment systems offer the following advantages:

1. Saving money: decentralised systems prevent unnecessary costs by focusing on preventative measures (assessment of community conditions/needs and maintenance of existing systems) instead of reacting to a crisis.
2. Protecting the homeowner's investment: decentralised systems maximise the potential for homeowners with existing septic systems to continue to benefit from their original investment.
3. Promoting better watershed management: decentralised systems avoid the potentially large transfers of water from one watershed to another that can occur with centralised treatment.
4. Offering an appropriate solution for low-density communities: in small communities with low population densities (and a smaller tax base), decentralised systems are the most cost-effective option.
5. Providing a suitable alternative for varying site conditions: decentralised systems can be designed for sites with shallow water tables, shallow bedrock, low-permeability soils and small property lot sizes.
6. Furnishing effective solutions for ecologically sensitive areas: decentralised systems can provide cost-effective solutions for areas that require advanced treatment, such as nutrient removal or disinfection, while recharging local aquifers and providing reuse opportunities close to points of wastewater generation (Douglas, 1998).

Decentralised System Principles

The overall goal of a strategic sanitation approach should be to provide services to households as a whole, an ambitious goal that it is often impossible to achieve in one step. Regardless of this, a good general principle is to 'think big but start small'. This concept translates into treatment goals and

effluent quality parameters which are significantly tougher than the ones traditionally applied to small wastewater treatment plants. Decentralised system plants must minimise health risks as far as possible: the solids produced must be fully stabilised and free of noxious odours. The system management concept needs to be low-cost, as well as efficient in operation, so that the total discharge cost of a small decentralised system is less than that of a large centralised system.

Technology for decentralised treatment should fulfil the following criteria:

- Have a limited land requirement;
- Not have a high power requirement;
- Be relatively simple to operate;
- Not degrade the local environment through unpleasant smells;
- Produce an acceptable quality of effluent;
- Reduce overall costs by removing the need for trunk and collector sewers.

The idea of a decentralised system is that a low-income community is able to invest in construction of the system by itself and become the owner of the system. Experiences in some other countries, as described below, reveal that it is viable for a low-income community to mobilise funds and construct infrastructure on a self-help basis or community-construct basis, and also to take responsibility for operation and maintenance of the infrastructure.

Community-Level Decentralised Sanitation Systems: Experiences from Developing Countries

Decentralised sanitation systems are being successfully implemented in some developing countries in Asia. Selected notable initiatives are briefly described below:

Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), Pakistan

With the sponsorship of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the OPP low-cost sanitation programme was initiated in 1980 for the improvement of Orangi Township, Karachi. The residents themselves, with the assistance of the project, constructed sewers to convey sanitary waste out of residential areas. At the time the township housed 800,000 people in almost 100,000 dwelling units. It covered an area of approximately 5,000 acres of land, with 83% of its built-up space totally unplanned. By 1985 the population density was 200 persons per acre.

The purpose of the OPP was to promote community self-help and the provision of affordable sewerage systems in Karachi's squatter settlements, and to develop organisations that could provide and operate the system. Promotion of popular participation was the main feature of the project. Participation meant sharing not only the labour cost but also the capital cost. The OPP solved the sanitation problem by mobilising people through motivational and organisational techniques, and by providing them with technical inputs and guidance to reduce costs. These costs were incurred

through installation of the following infrastructure:

- a) A sanitary latrine inside each home;
- b) An underground sewer system for each land unit (20 to 30 houses);
- c) Secondary collector drains from each lane to a disposal point.

"The OPP has proven that it is possible for low-income people to install their own sewerage system at an affordable cost. It has also demonstrated that the professionals' involvement, through the transfer of technology such as sewerage systems for housing, combined with people's resources and resilience, overcome the problems of the urban poor" (Anzonrena 1993).

Community Participation for Infrastructure Development and Maintenance, Sri Lanka

The National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) in Sri Lanka encourages community participation in the delivery of infrastructure to low-income settlements, but in a different way from Orangi. The NHDA awards contracts, similar to commercial contracts, to local residents' committees in low-income settlements. The community carries out the work with technical support from the NHDA and keeps the profit it makes on the project through the provision of labour, but is also involved in project identification, design and management.

The idea of a decentralised system is that a low-income community is able to invest in construction of the system by itself and become the owner of the system

In 1985, the Government of Sri Lanka launched the One-Million-Houses Programme, to provide basic shelter to the population by 1989. Emphasis was placed on using community participation to meet the goal, encouraging urban low-income communities to take part in the construction of basic infrastructure. The NHDA awarded the first community contract in January 1986, for the renovation of a bathing well in one of the largest shanty settlements in Colombo. The community designed the well itself and carried out the construction work with technical assistance and training from the NHDA. The well was completed one week ahead of schedule with a high quality of work, persuading the NHDA to carry on with this approach. The community also developed a system to increase their community fund by payment of a nominal charge. This fund is used to maintain and develop the community infrastructure.

These committees collect money from families who share facilities such as public toilet blocks, which need daily cleaning, and a regular removal of sewage. Some committees organise cleaning of the toilets by the member families. Other communities pay for the toilets to be cleaned with the money collected

from users. Regular removal of the sewage is the responsibility of the Municipality. Communities carry out minor repairs to toilets and water-taps if skilled persons are available in the community (Pathirana and Sheng 1992).

***Kampung* Improvement Programme, Indonesia**

This programme to upgrade urban residential areas (*Kampung*) from a community-base started in the 1970s, was well supported by local communities, and was highly successful. In the first implementation phase, the communities provided basic construction materials (concrete slabs and gutter elements) and labour. In 1974, the municipal government created a development budget for the *Kampung* after requests from residents. The communities then raised over half of the total project cost. The Public Works Department provided technical assistance for project planning and design. At first, the programme focused on physical improvements (water supply, drains, and sanitary facilities). Between 1974 and 1979, 3.3 million residents benefited from improved sanitation, which was then followed by further development activities such as roads, footpaths and street lighting (Schubeler 1996).

Appropriate Decentralised Sanitation Options for Urban and Peri-Urban Areas in Vietnam (SANDEC)

As a part of a Swiss-funded project with Hanoi University of Civil Engineering, decentralisation concepts and wastewater management technologies are being systematically investigated for practical implementation in Vietnam. The main goal is to develop technical guidelines for the design, operation and maintenance of decentralised, low-cost anaerobic wastewater treatment systems, with special focus on upgrading existing septic systems around urban areas. The system has been installed for monitoring in several houses in and around Hanoi. The idea is to treat wastewater on-site through low-cost systems and make direct use of the by-products (water, compost and biogas). This sustainable option is useful for developing countries where water and sanitation are becoming important issues (Viet et al 2003).

*Vientiane's size, and its clear organisation
into social and spatial communities, are
favourable conditions for a decentralised
sanitation system*

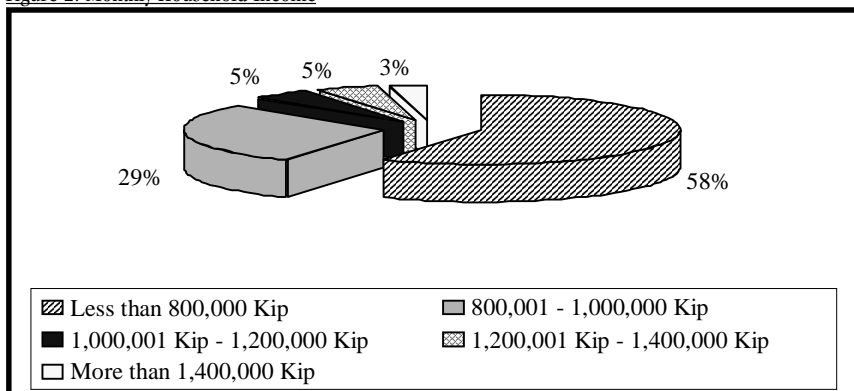
The Study Area

In brief, these programmes in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia aim to provide affordable sewerage systems in urban settlements and develop community organisations that can contribute to and operate the systems. The focus of this paper is to check the viability of a community-managed decentralised sanitation system in a low-income area of Vientiane.

The total number of under-served settlements in the Vientiane urban area is not large but seems to increase year by year. The percentage of the city population living in slum areas is 20% and the sanitation problems of Vientiane are lesser than in mega-cities such as Bangkok and Jakarta. The Vientiane scale is favourable for implementation of a decentralised system and the population is also very clearly organised into communities in both social and spatial terms. This is also a favourable condition for a decentralised sanitation system.

Thongkhankham Neua village is the largest slum community in Vientiane, located in central Chantabouly district and inhabited by 1,574 people (443 households). It covers a total area of 13.6 ha, is bounded by three major roads and displays typical characteristics of under-served communities in the city, making it ideal for a demonstration project. About 60% of the households are poor and the environmental condition of the village makes them even poorer. Presently 67% of the village households use pit latrines, which do not have soak-away systems. Many of these latrines leak and pollute the land surface. Some parts of the village are not accessible by waste collection trucks and as a result, piles of garbage accumulate in the village and clog drains.

Figure 2: Monthly Household Income



The objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess the environmental sanitation systems currently used by residents;
2. Collect household opinions on implementing decentralised sanitation systems in their community;
3. Explore the social acceptability and economic viability of a decentralised sanitation system;
4. Recommend guidelines for a community-based and participatory approach to improving environmental sanitation.

Methodology

The study was based on a questionnaire survey, stakeholder interviews, and observations. The survey involved a sample of 110 randomly drawn households, whose heads were individually interviewed during a four-week period in February-March 2004. Survey questions were centred on the current

general situation of sanitation in the village, the situation in each particular household, opinion of a decentralised sanitation system, willingness to pay a user charge, and ability to participate in the construction and maintenance of a decentralised system.

Stakeholder interviews were based on a simple structured questionnaire and conducted with the village chief, the primary school principal, and representatives from the Lao Women’s Union, the Lao Youth Union, and the social welfare society. Unstructured discussions were held with the deputy chief of Chantabouly district, officials from the Department of Communication, Transport, Post, and Construction of Vientiane Capital, the deputy director of the Vientiane Urban Development and Administration Authority, the deputy director of the Vientiane Urban Cleansing Service and the project manager of the Vientiane Urban Environment Improvement Project.

Observations were made on the sanitation behaviour of villagers during both day and night, while special observation visits were made during the rain to record drainage problems and the flooding situation.

Findings

Analysis of data gathered from the household survey reveals that residents are highly unsatisfied with the overall sanitation situation in the village. Apart from water supply, all other forms of sanitary services do not seem to meet their expectations and even the water supply, improved in recent times, does not meet the expectations of all dwellers (See Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents’ Opinion of Sanitary Conditions

Sanitation Parameters	Highly Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Moderate	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory
Black Water* Disposal	1%	77%	13%	6%	3%
Grey Water† Disposal	11%	75%	4%	7%	3%
Solid Waste Disposal	2%	33%	31%	28%	6%
Storm Water Drainage	1%	57%	26%	8%	8%
Pest Control		50%	38%	7%	5%
Water Supply	1%	2%	4%	53%	40%
Total	1%	46%	32%	20%	1%

**sewage containing faecal matter; †wastewater from kitchens, baths and laundries*

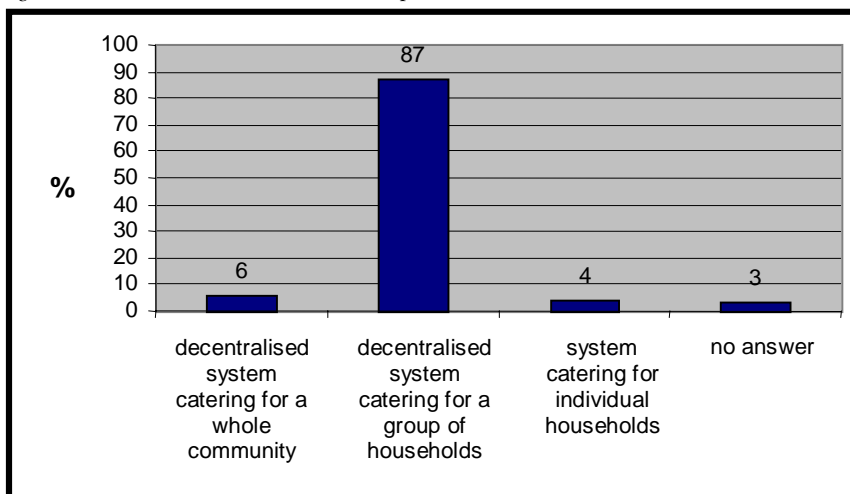
As Table 1 shows, the highest priority for villagers is a sewerage disposal system. Presently 67% of the households use a hole in the ground to dispose of sewage and only 37% of households have a sanitary

latrine with a septic tank connected. The reasons for having poor sanitary arrangements are two-fold. Firstly, most of the people have very low awareness of the sanitation and hygiene standards required in residential premises. This can be seen in the way they often handle food and do cooking next to an unhygienic latrine. Secondly, even if they have awareness, they find it difficult to allocate money to constructing a hygienic toilet and an on-site system of sewage disposal. However, when the options of decentralised disposal systems were explained to them and proposed as alternative arrangements to a centralised system and on-site solutions, they were highly receptive to the proposal. There was an overwhelming preference for a system catering to a group of houses (see Figure 3). Moreover, nearly 90% of the respondents expressed a willingness to spend their own money on building a hygienic toilet if a group disposal system is provided. All but 16% of household heads expressed a willingness to share the cost of the proposed group system: those who do not wish to contribute believe that it is the municipality's responsibility to provide an acceptable system.

Table 2: Sanitation System Priorities

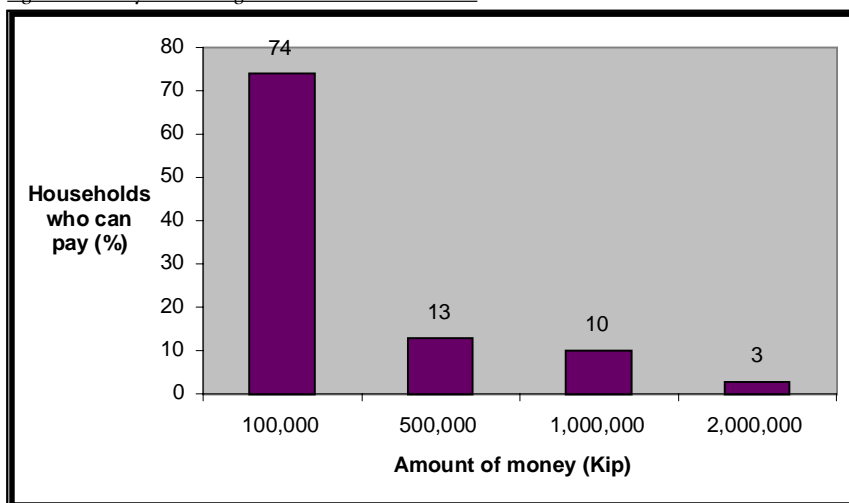
No	Sanitation System	Rank
1	Black water disposal	1
2	Grey water disposal	2
3	Solid waste disposal	3
4	Storm water drainage	4
5	Pest control	5
6	Water supply	6

Figure 3: Preferred Method of Black Water Disposal



The discussion with the village organisations revealed that if the village is selected for a demonstration project, they could fully participate in improving the overall sanitary condition. Willingness to pay a monthly user fee for essential services such as water supply, garbage disposal and wastewater disposal was as high as 97%. Although most respondents were not willing to contribute a significant amount to construction costs, many were willing to provide labour and to share the responsibility of maintenance. Of respondents who said they were able to contribute to the cost of construction if a group sanitation system is implemented, nearly 75% were willing to pay 100,000 Kip (see Figure 4). This indicates that a participatory method of sanitation improvement with cost-sharing is viable in this village. Moreover, it shows that a community-based method can make people responsible for improving and maintaining their living environment and hygiene practices.

Figure 4: Money that Willing Households Can Contribute



Source: Questionnaire Survey, February 2004

Similar analysis proved that a decentralised system for wastewater (grey water, black water) disposal can also be implemented on participatory and cost-sharing principles. However, with regard to solid-waste disposal and storm water drainage, the analysis revealed that the villagers regard these as the direct responsibility of the local authority.

Conclusions

Decentralised sanitation systems are suitable for developing countries, because they involve technology that is manageable by users themselves. It is difficult for a country like Laos to find the colossal sums needed to implement the centralised systems found in developed countries. Recent administrative reforms in Laos designate central government as the policy maker, provincial authorities as the planning agency, district authorities as the implementing agency, and communities as partners in

development. This shift in paradigm requires communities to become active participants instead of passive recipients. The survey revealed that it is a practical idea to make them partners in development, but that the capacity of the communities may limit the extent of their participation.

*Vientiane is not ready to venture into
the public-private partnerships practiced
in some neighbouring countries*

The urban development and environment policies of the Lao PDR favour decentralised administration and decentralised infrastructure solutions, with responsibility increasingly delegated from central government to local authorities and community organisations. This makes the idea of constructing decentralised sanitation systems for under-served communities not only viable, as demonstrated in the study, but also the preferred solution of the authorities. Part of operation and maintenance costs can be recovered through user charges, but the potential for cost sharing in construction is slim. This infers that the local government should implement an enabling policy for environmental improvement and continue investing in public utilities and amenities. Being a city with a large number of poor people, Vientiane is not ready to venture into the public-private partnerships practiced in some neighbouring countries. The idea of a people-centred approach to sanitation improvement in under-served communities is appropriate and viable if awareness is raised through the involvement of local authorities. It is also of paramount importance that authorities make serious efforts to ensure environmental sustainability during the implementation, operational and management phases of decentralised sanitation systems. UN Millennium Development Goal Seven urges countries to:

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources.
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.
- Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

It is strongly believed that a healthy “environment provides goods and services, which sustain human development, so people must ensure that development sustains the environment. Better natural resource management increases the income and nutrition of poor people” (United Nations). In this context, decentralised sanitation systems assure high hygienic standards in a cost-effective, environmentally sustainable way, saving both water and energy and keeping soils fertile for agricultural productivity in the community.

This demonstration project is an opportunity for government organisations and residents to learn the mechanism of public-community partnership in a practical way. If it is completed to the satisfaction of the population, the project could be applied to other urban areas. The initial project should be

technically simple and require contribution by residents, with minimum outside funds. It is hoped that this first project will be implemented in the near future, and will stimulate people through recognition of the power of their collective effort. This project could be very important in motivating people and government organisations to get involved.

Expected Benefits from the Project

These include:

- Physical sanitation will improve, creating a healthy environment and thereby reducing medical expenditure and making households more productive.
- Recreational area will increase in the village, improving opportunities for community activities.
- Residents will become aware of environmental problems in the village area and will spread this awareness to other communities.
- Human resource development will be promoted among the residents, the village committee and district staff.

Recommendations

Participatory decentralised sanitation systems are a new idea in Laos, but it is hoped that after a successful pilot project in Thongkhankham Neua, similar projects can be implemented in all urban areas. However, differing physical environments, economic conditions and population behaviour mean that new studies should be conducted before implementing additional projects. Furthermore, organisational development through the project should be carefully studied, because it is necessary to clearly identify the role and responsibility of each organisation in village development. This approach can build strong partnerships that reduce the burden of sanitation improvement for central and municipal governments and make projects sustainable.

About the Authors

Lonkham Atsanavong (lonkhama@yahoo.com) holds Master's degrees in Urban Environmental Management, and Town Planning. He was engaged in urban planning work at the Vientiane Capital Urban Environmental Improvement Project until 2004 and presently works with the Water Resources and Development Division of the Lao National Mekong Committee.

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Home Gardens in the Lao PDR - Linkages between Agricultural Biodiversity and Food Security

by Pernille M. Dyg and Saleumsy Phithayaphone

FAO has developed a model for household-based integrated agriculture production systems. These 'home gardens', combined with nutrition education, can reduce both malnutrition among children under five, and reliance on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). Home gardens are home to a large diversity of plant species and are important in the conservation and domestication of plant genetic resources. The biodiversity found in such gardens offers households a large variety of nutritious foods, thus providing better nutrition, food security and income. One of the components in the proposed National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme, developed by FAO, UNDP and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), is to further develop home gardens in support of improved food security and nutrition at the household level.

The home garden model helps villagers improve production of vegetables, fruit and animal foods next to their houses, and can enhance rural livelihoods and increase the dietary diversity and nutritional status of the population. With these important opportunities in home gardening, there is a need to expand and improve successful home garden models in the Lao PDR in order to contribute to food security, poverty reduction and conservation of the country's agro-biodiversity.

The Lao PDR has been identified as one of the planet's 'Centres of Origin' of domesticated plants and animals, one of the ten areas with the highest biodiversity in the world (Vavilov, 1940). Home gardens are host to a large diversity of plant species and play an important role in the conservation and domestication of plant genetic resources. The biodiversity found in home gardens provides households with access to an array of nutritious fruits and vegetables, medicines and other beneficial plants.

Agro-Biodiversity, Food Security and Nutrition

Home gardens are good examples of the close link between biodiversity and food security. While they are important micro-environments for in situ or on-farm conservation of a wide range of plant genes, they also provide essential sources of food, fodder, medicines, spices, construction materials and income for rural households in many countries around the world. The International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) has carried out a number of case studies on plant genetic resources in home gardens and established clear links between home garden diversity and household food security (Eyzaguirre and Watson, 2001).

Many new crops have been developed or domesticated in home gardens due to the close interaction between humans and plants in this setting. Home Gardens also serve as informal plant introduction and distribution centres: seeds and information are exchanged among gardens, families and local markets, which can enable new genetic diversity to evolve. Furthermore, home gardens are a place for experimentation with new species and varieties, thereby playing a vital role in crop improvement and evolution. A central function is, of course, as production centres, where crops that are eaten daily or need specific attention are planted. Such gardens are home to the cultivation of species that are underutilised from a research and broader economic perspective, and thus play an important role in national agro-biodiversity conservation strategies. Because they are an important place for use, introduction and experimentation of a variety of species, home gardens are a refuge for genetic diversity. There is often a great variety both in terms of species and also within species (Engels, 2001).

Genetic diversity has an important impact on both production aspects and food security. It is widely recognised that genetic diversity in a farming system provides more crop stability in terms of yields, which has an important impact on food security. Furthermore, it also enables more sustainable production methods, as the interaction between the diversity of plants lowers the dependency on chemicals and other external inputs. This in turn provides a place where plants, animals, insects, micro-organisms and the soil interact, thus maintaining the agro-ecological balance and protecting the soil from erosion (Engels, 2001; Trinh et al, 2001).

Fruit and vegetables cultivated in home gardens are rich in micronutrients and increase diversity of diet, thereby preventing various diseases and malnutrition

Home gardens can also be important in preserving threatened species. In China for instance, home gardens play a key role in relocating economically important swidden-fallow plants. As swidden-fallow cultivation systems are replaced by permanent agriculture in Laos and other Southeast Asian countries, villagers lose access to important plants. In Yunnan, the Daka ethnic group use home gardens to relocate plants formerly cultivated in the swidden fields. Daka home gardens are rich in trees and endangered indigenous plant species, including medicines, wood, vegetables, fruits and ornamental plants that were formerly found in swidden fields. This practice not only helps preserve otherwise disappearing species, but also provides cash income for households. As more and more farmers appreciate the demand for wild vegetables in local markets, the percentage of cash income from these plants is sure to increase (Fu et al, 2003). The same case could apply in Laos, but so far there has been limited focus on the practice of transferring plants from fallow fields to gardens.

Diversity of plant species makes an important contribution to improving the nutrition of rural and urban families. Fruit and vegetables cultivated in home gardens are rich in micronutrients and increase diversity of diet, thereby preventing various diseases and malnutrition. This is especially true when garden-raised meats are used to add important protein. Women are vital to the management, production and utilisation of produce from home gardens. This includes selecting and storing seeds, planting, weeding, and using the produce in the household or selling it. Women's role in conserving local varieties is important and their knowledge has been vital in resource enhancement (Engels, 2001).

Home Gardens in the Lao PDR

Types of Home Gardens and Use of Plants/Crops

Home gardens seem to exist in many areas of Laos but there is limited knowledge of their impact on food security and biodiversity. Observations and experience from projects indicate that there are a number of different types of garden, and that they vary in size, crops and techniques used. A two-district survey of indigenous agro-forestry practices, by the Lao-Swedish Upland Agriculture and Forestry Research Programme (LSUAFRP) and the Northern Agriculture and Forestry Research Centre, recorded that home gardens are well-known and widespread in both districts, and that some kind of home garden is present in almost every village. In the two districts, Namo in Oudomxay Province and Phonxay in Luang Prabang, there are different kinds of home gardens but also similarities. Crops include fruits (papaya, banana, citruses, pineapples, mango and jackfruit) and vegetables (aubergine, chilli, cabbage, beans) plus ginger, taro, bitter bamboo, peanuts and various medicinal plants. In one garden, in the mountains of Phonxay, more than 50 different plants were grown (Sodarak et al, 2003).

Almost 1.5 million Lao people were 'undernourished' between 1997 and 1999. This project specifically targeted those most affected by malnutrition: children under the age of five and women of reproductive age

Domestication of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) is common in home gardens. In one village, Ban Kuang, gardens are based on planting bitter bamboo. The bamboo stems are collected from the surrounding forests and planted close to the houses between pineapples and fruit (Sodarak et al 2003). Home gardens are found in all kinds of environments, from mountain tops to river banks in lowland areas. Some small gardens are found on table tops and bigger home gardens are grown on the ground, where vegetables are intercropped with rice or corn and fruit trees are common as contours along the borders of the garden or scattered within the plot. The LSUAFRP also documented that some farmers had developed home gardens into larger gardens containing several production factors. These included

different plants like teak, fruit trees, vegetables, rice, corn and cassava, and also contained protein sources such as fish ponds, pigs and poultry. These systems are referred to as 'advanced farming systems' or 'household based integrated agricultural production systems', which are very productive but more difficult to run, requiring investment and available land (Sodarak et al, 2003).

FAO Pilot Project on Home Gardens for Improved Nutritional Well-Being

In 2002, FAO initiated an eighteen-month pilot project, entitled Home Gardens for Improved Nutritional Well-Being. The objective was to establish a model to reduce the severe malnutrition prevalent in rural areas and improve the nutritional well-being of the population by increasing production and consumption of nutritious foods, emphasising foods rich in micronutrients. The model includes small livestock and aquaculture, similar to the integrated agricultural productions systems described above. Malnutrition rates in Laos are amongst the highest in the region: 40.7% of children suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), 15.4% have acute malnutrition (wasting), and 40% are underweight. Among adults, 19.2% are chronically undernourished. According to the 2000 National Health Survey, deficiencies in vitamin A, iron and iodine affect about 9.1% of children (Ministry of Health and State Planning Committee, 2001). Almost one and a half million people were categorised as 'undernourished' between 1997 and 1999 (FAO, 2003). The project specifically targeted households with children under the age of five and women of reproductive age, the groups most affected by malnutrition.

Prior to implementation, about 50% of households in the target villages were involved in home gardening within a limited area. However, the yield and quality of their produce was low due to poor techniques and home garden care. Vegetables were grown in the dry season alone and could only meet 10-15% of household consumption. The project thus focused on improving the gardens through the use of a net house technique for year-round production of vegetables. This technique stops heavy rainfall from damaging crops, prevents flooding of soil beds, and provides shade from the hot sun. Home gardens were established both on the ground and on table tops, enabling households to grow leafy vegetables throughout the year (FAO and DOA, MAF, 2004).

Main Findings and Implications

Nutrition was a key component of the project. As a result of the increased production and access to a larger variety of vegetable crops in the participating villages, the average daily production of vegetables reached 245 grams per person, compared to the present national per capita daily availability of 64.3 g. The various vegetables grown during the project contain a number of essential nutrients with important nutritional benefits for combating malnutrition. These include vitamins A, B and C, iron, iodine, minerals, fibre and protein. More than 25 different species of fruits and vegetables were found in the home gardens before the project started, some of which were local varieties. During the project, additional local varieties were recommended, and farmers were provided with vegetable seeds and fruit saplings. Twenty-three different varieties of vegetables were identified and promoted for their important nutritional qualities, as well as fifteen varieties of fruit and nine types of forest food, including underexploited indigenous fruits and nuts (FAO and DOA, MAF, 2004).

Not only did the project improve existing traditional home gardens, it also helped farmers to grow a variety of different leafy vegetables and other crops on a year-round basis, with increased yields and better quality. After one year of project implementation, the area for vegetable production had increased, and the types of vegetables grown had also become more varied. Before the project started, only 23% of the households were growing these vegetables in their gardens, but after project completion, the proportion had reached 75%. Increased home garden production led to a 17% reduction in the ratio of vegetables derived from the forest, thereby alleviating the stress on over-harvested forest resources (FAO and DOA, MAF 2004). This is also likely to have a positive impact on time use and labour, reducing the time women in particular spend on gathering these foods from the forest.

Nutritional practices improved in a relatively short time: the prevalence of underweight children 24-35 months old dropped from 33.3% before the project to 5.6% post intervention

Nutritional Components of the Project

In addition to crop production, other components were also included to enhance food and nutrition security and provide income. The project helped increase farmers' awareness and skills in fish farming techniques. With better management of ponds, fish consumption increased, while improved marketing boosted sales of fish. Poultry production (chickens and ducks) was also included to enhance animal protein and energy in protein-deficient diets. This helped families accumulate income: for a three-month period: at the end of the project, each household had an earning of US\$150 from the sale of poultry, after meeting the consumption needs of the household.

Nutrition education and food preparation activities were closely linked to food production. Food preparation demonstrations were offered to the target households to increase the number of foods used in daily meals. This programme managed to improve nutritional practices in a relatively short time. Generally, households only consumed leafy vegetables one to three times per week before the project. After 15 months the frequency of leafy vegetables had increased to one to three times per day, and similar patterns were noted with the consumption of fruit, fish, eggs and meat. Infant and young child feeding practices were also monitored to address the serious problem of under-nourishment among children under five. After six months of regular growth monitoring combined with nutrition education, anthropometric measurements showed the prevalence of underweight children was declining. The final measurements in July 2004 recorded a rate of 15.6%, down from 23.2% at the baseline (April 2003). For underweight children 24-35 months old, the prevalence dropped from 33.3% to 5.6% post intervention.

This innovative home garden model integrates agricultural production with nutrition awareness. The results have demonstrated that it can serve to:

- Increase food production with optimum use of available area;
- Diversify food production;
- Increase food supply and availability;
- Meet the food and nutritional needs of household members.

All the 204 households have developed their own home gardens and use their produce for the nutritional well-being of the family and for extra income. The technical inputs provided were training, extension services and transfer of technology (field demonstrations). Community gardens were developed in each target village to serve as 'model nutrition gardens'. These could be considered as national models for larger-scale food production and could be replicated by households that have bigger areas of land.

The inter-sectoral collaboration (agriculture, health and education, Lao Women's Union) fostered by the project at district and provincial levels could effectively replicate the home gardens on a broader scale. With input of seeds, fruit tree saplings, fish, frogs, and small livestock, plus nutrition education, home gardens are a cost-effective method of promoting food security and nutrition at household and community levels in poor remote areas.

While the project has contributed to enhancing agro-biodiversity and conserving local varieties of fruits and vegetables, this promotion of diversified production has not been systematic and could be further strengthened. The high levels of plant species and genetic diversity found in home gardens are important for in situ conservation of a wide range of plant genetic resources, which should be taken into account more systematically in future research and development efforts on home gardens.

The National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme and Home Gardens

In the country's current development situation, improved management of agricultural biodiversity provides an important strategy for achieving food security and reducing poverty, particularly in rural areas. The National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme was developed at the beginning of 2004 to support two main development priorities: improved food security and livelihoods for rural communities, and enhanced government capacity to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. To achieve globally agreed commitments to food security and poverty alleviation in the Lao PDR, strategic investments are required. The comprehensive National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme was developed by FAO, UNDP and NAFRI as a framework and long-term strategy for implementing a coordinated approach to better use, develop and conserve agricultural biodiversity (FAO 2004).

One of the programme's five thematic components is 'household-based integrated agriculture production systems', which the development of home gardens can supply. This component includes three main outputs:

1. Assessment of the impact of household-based integrated agriculture production systems (home gardens) on sustainable livelihoods of people. The model home garden project has already documented the benefits of home gardens for nutrition and food security on a small scale. The programme also calls for the identification and documentation of indigenous foods and community food systems, and their contributions to micronutrients and nutrition in general. So far there is limited documentation of the nutritional value of indigenous foods.
2. Expansion and improvement of household-based integrated agriculture production systems in target households to increase the amount and variety of nutritious foods, e.g. fruit, vegetables, small animals, fish and other aquatic resources. This includes training household members and agricultural staff at all levels in household-based integrated agriculture production systems and harvest and post-harvest processing. It also includes provision of seeds, small animals, fish and garden tools and assistance in marketing.
3. Improved understanding of nutrition: planned activities include assessing household awareness of nutritional needs, training extension staff in understanding nutritional needs and developing nutrition education materials. Training on nutrition management and food preparation is also planned for families, while enhanced awareness of nutrition needs and gaps is needed among policy makers (National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme in the Lao PDR, 2004).

Implementation of the Agro-biodiversity Programme could thus build on the model home garden project, and expand its activities geographically and thematically.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The home garden farming system not only ensures household food security and improves nutrition, but can also foster conservation, domestication and development of crops. The close links between biodiversity and food security are evident in home gardens, and although research and development of home gardens is still limited in Laos, the work of LSUAFRP and FAO offers important opportunities for further strengthening these links. The National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme offers a framework for supporting and implementing research and development of home gardens, and for strengthening agro-biodiversity conservation, nutrition improvement and household food security. In summary:

- Home gardens can play a key role in domesticating NTFPs and relocating fallow plants from swidden fields. Therefore, more research and projects should be launched to support the documentation and development of NTFP domestication and preservation of fallow plants.
- Home gardens can make significant contributions to dietary diversity and the food and nutrition security of rural households. The pilot project model and methodologies, as well as other successful home garden experiences, should be expanded and replicated across other rural areas.

- Home garden projects, as well as other agricultural programmes and policies, ought to take agricultural biodiversity considerations into account when promoting new crops or proposing changes to existing farming systems. If agricultural biodiversity concerns are not mainstreamed at the project and policy levels, adverse effects will inevitably result.
- Indigenous foods are important for the food security of many rural households and are likely to contribute micronutrients and other nutritional qualities. However, this needs to be documented and supported through more research. Increasing the limited knowledge of indigenous food nutritional qualities could enable more promotion and marketing of such products.
- Nutrition education should be an integral component of community development activities, so as to promote increased awareness and consumption of the varied diet required to meet dietary nutrient needs.
- Community networks are needed to monitor and promote food security, nutrition, health and home economic improvements. Accordingly, as part of community empowerment and capacity building, a critical mass of community members should be organised and trained in strengthening rural livelihoods and nutrition improvement.

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Human Trafficking and Poverty Reduction: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

by Sverre Molland

This paper explores links between trafficking and the NGPES strategy discussing the relationships between migration, poverty and trafficking. The paper argues that there is only limited data to suggest that reducing absolute poverty will also reduce trafficking: it is doubtful whether the NGPES will be able to curb migration or trafficking. The author also considers the idea that some aspects of the NGPES might actually increase trafficking, both from a supply and demand perspective. The article ends with some observations regarding legal and safe migration policy strategies.

Human trafficking has received increasing attention in Laos over the last few years. It constitutes a relatively young segment of the development sector, with the oldest trafficking project being less than five years old, but it has grown rapidly: there are currently over a dozen trafficking projects on the ground. Laos has new national trafficking legislation and has acceded to the Transnational Organised Crime Convention with its underlying trafficking protocol. In addition, the government has developed the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), a comprehensive policy document on the future direction of development in the Lao PDR. However, the document has limited focus on human trafficking.

While many programmes use poverty reduction as a strategy to curb trafficking, there is limited focus on the poverty-trafficking axis in development discourse. This paper argues that the relationship between poverty and trafficking is at best non-conclusive. There is a lack of data to support the claim that poverty reduction has a direct impact on human trafficking: the assumption that 'the more poverty, the more trafficking' is empirically misleading. In fact, policies that promote legal and safe migration are more likely to have an impact on both poverty reduction and trafficking.

What is Trafficking?

The recently signed UN Trafficking Protocol of the Transnational Convention on Organised Crime defines trafficking as:

"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" (United Nations, 2000).

The Protocol notes that:

"exploitation shall include, at a minimum, 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."

This lengthy definition is slightly easier to digest by articulating it from the point of view of a trafficker: *a trafficker uses deception and/or coercion (the method) to move a person (the action) into an exploitative situation (the purpose)*. Trafficking involves three main elements and provides the trafficker with profit through the exploitative situation. Herein lies the main rationale for this criminal activity. A thorough conceptual analysis of human trafficking is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, the following three points should be noted.

Firstly, the methods by which people are moved are immensely diverse. There are numerous forms and degrees of exploitation within many sectors, so human trafficking accounts for a myriad of activities.

Secondly, the 'trafficking issue' is frequently hijacked by various political, moral and ideological agendas. Human trafficking is one of the outcomes of interactions between societies with huge socio-economic differences and it is a challenge to create a morally neutral basis for discussion and consensus. This is particularly so when it comes to the sex sector, but there are also huge controversies regarding domestic labour (Anderson et al, 2003). Weak legislation and limited judicial precedence (internationally there have been very few convictions) often mean that there is also a lack of legal conceptual clarity.

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trafficking would be redundant*

Thirdly, the way trafficking is defined in the UN protocol is inherently post-factual. This creates huge implications for monitoring, particularity within sending communities. It is after someone is in an exploitative situation that trafficking is manifest. In the protocol only the intent to exploit, not exploitation itself, is covered by the definition. An obvious solution to this would be to simply criminalise the exploitative situation migrants might end up in. However, this would require significant political will among destination countries. As such, the concept of human trafficking reflects the tendency of several governments (many of them Western) not to address exploitation and abuse of migrant populations within their own jurisdictions, but rather to put the main onus of responsibility on the sending communities by stopping movement (ie. trafficking). Semantically, using the very term 'trafficking' gives a bias towards movement, and shades over the arguably more serious and real problem of exploitation. Furthermore, as intent is so difficult to prove, and constitutes simultaneously one of the prime definitional yardsticks which distinguishes trafficking from illegal migration, governments can easily be selective and treat a case as 'trafficking' or 'illegal migration' as they see fit.

If governments were genuine in their attempt to combat exploitation then the concept of trafficking would be redundant. Instead, we would have an international agenda to combat universal labour exploitation, even among illegal migrants, with broad definitions to include activities such as prostitution, domestic work and trafficking for adoption and marriage. The current 'movement bias' within the trafficking discourse is of crucial importance to Laos, and we will revisit this point later when discussing implications for the poverty reduction programme.

The combination of (1) the post-factual nature of trafficking, (2) the complex series of human behaviour it entails, and (3) its inherent political, ideological and moral-laden nature, goes a long way to explaining the limited consensus on what exactly constitutes trafficking, and why there is a lack of knowledge regarding its magnitude. In addition to these three challenges, research into the trafficking sector in Laos is young and limited. Few attempts have been made to link trafficking to larger policy strategies. Hence, articulating human trafficking in relation to the NGPES rests on a shaky intellectual foundation, and as such, this paper is flirting with the speculative.

Migration and Poverty Reduction

Human trafficking is widely understood to be closely linked to poverty. Because people are poor, they engage in risky migratory endeavours; because of poverty, people are naïve and lack awareness, making them vulnerable to 'sweet talk' from traffickers; because people are poor they have low social status which makes them more susceptible to abuse; because of poverty, a huge pool of often young individuals are desperate to improve their livelihood conditions, so creating a competitive supply-driven market that is aided by lax regulations and law enforcement.

On the face of it, there is probably a lot of truth to this view. In a general sense it is correct that the less fortunate move to where there are better opportunities. That there is a strong seasonal migration flow from Laos to Thailand is well documented, and migration generally flows from poorer areas to richer areas (Marshall, 2001; Adams and Page, 2003). However, this general observation does not explain exactly who migrates and why, and more importantly who of these migrants ends up in exploitative situations and why. Hence there are two aspects to poverty and trafficking that should be kept separate for analytical purposes: the difference between absolute and relative poverty, and the difference between what engenders migration and what engenders trafficking. As we will see below, it would be a fallacy to conflate one with the other.

Migration: Absolute and Relative Poverty

As previously mentioned, it is commonly assumed that poverty is a main cause of trafficking. However, there is limited data to support the claim that poor people tend to migrate. On the contrary, research suggests a correlation between migration and villagers with medium levels of income and also tends to suggest that the poorest of the poor tend not to migrate (Adams and Page, 2003; MLSW/UNIAP, 2001; MLSW/ILO, 2003; MLSW/UNICEF, 2004). According to available numbers of repatriated victims, approximately half come from one of the more prosperous provinces in the country, Savannakhet (IOM,

2004). Limited qualitative research suggests that even within a given village, the poorest of the poor tend not to migrate (MLSW/UNIAP, 2001).

The only link documented to date between absolute poverty and out-migration is related to resettlement (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004), which is also linked to vulnerability to trafficking. A more plausible argument for the relationship between poverty and migration relates to disparities and uneven socio-economic development, or in other words, relative poverty. The rationale behind this argument is that it is not so much poverty, but better life options elsewhere which motivate people to migrate. So, the question does not become one of reducing poverty per se, but of reducing inequality.

So, if relative poverty is a reason for migration, then a logical policy response would be to strengthen efforts to level out disparities. Several trafficking projects state this aim more or less explicitly in their interventions, through activities such as micro-credit, vocational training and so on. This begs two questions: is the assumption that relative poverty causes out-migration correct, and secondly is a policy of 'levelling out' disparities a realistic policy option in the Lao context?

Research suggests strong links between relative poverty and the desire for out-migration. One recent study on trafficking notes that:

"Disparities brought about by unequal levels of modernisation and development, both within the region and within Laos, create a climate which encourages those with less opportunity to take risks." (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004)

*Although relative poverty explains migration
to some extent, it only constitutes one of
many reasons why people migrate*

Several studies record that migrants list lack of income and poverty as reasons for migration. However, what these reports also find is that poverty is only one of many reasons why people migrate (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004; UNIAP, 2005). Curiosity, consumerism and pressure from others (agents or experienced migrants) are quoted with similar frequency. The UNICEF report notes that,

"trafficking seems to occur irrespective of economic wealth, especially in lowland situations. Poverty was cited as a cause, but equally the desire for material goods, land, modern conveniences and permanent housing was of equal motivation." (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004)

There seems to be a conflation between poverty, consumerism, lack of jobs and desire for material possessions. Current trafficking research rarely spells out precise meanings of poverty and it remains far from clear how poverty can be understood in relation to migration. So, although relative poverty explains migration to some extent, it only constitutes one of many reasons why people migrate.

Nonetheless, assuming that relative poverty is a major push factor for migration, will poverty reduction programmes aid the levelling out of relative poverty? This question will need to take into account the socio-economic development of Laos's neighbours, particularly Thailand. If current trends are any guide, it is unrealistic to expect Laos to soon catch up and even out disparities with Thailand. On the contrary, it is plausible that the disparity will actually increase, despite planned development efforts in Laos. In this light, cross-border movements would continue and probably become further institutionalised in many communities. In this sense it is even possible to argue that the socio-economic development of Thailand will have a much stronger impact on the future of migration of Lao people than development efforts within Laos itself. In summary, it is doubtful that reducing absolute poverty will have much impact on migration.

Poverty, Migration and Trafficking

Trafficking is just one of many possible outcomes of migration, but which migrants end up in exploitation and why? What is clear is that reasons for migration cannot be taken as reasons why people end up in an exploitative 'trafficked' situation. The desire to leave must not be confused with the various risk factors which might make a person vulnerable to trafficking. It is of course possible that a cause of migration (eg. lack of awareness) can simultaneously be a source of vulnerability to trafficking, but explaining how migration becomes trafficking remains a challenge.

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Reviewing the research to date, there are a few recurring themes that can be highlighted. The first thing to note is that far from all migrants are trafficked (ie. exploited). A study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) documented that

"67.5 % of the migrating population had no problem [in Thailand] and were satisfied with their working conditions" (ILO, 2003).

The ILO study found that only 3.4% had problems and hardships: the majority of migrants appear not to be trafficked. Although it is not always made explicit, there seem to be two links between migration and trafficking: one relates to existing social networks, and the other to how such networks evolve over time in a community where migration is common. There is probably a strong overlap between the two. Regarding the former, a report from 2001 notes the following:

"from a trafficking point of view, social distance is more important than physical distance. The most severe forms of abuse were found among the villagers who lacked a social network in Thailand. But it must also be noted that lack of a social network does not discourage people from going" (MLSW/UNIAP, 2001).

The suggestion here is that informal social networks, often including family members across the border, equip the migrant with a vital safety mechanism and thus give protection from exploitative situations. Another observation is that communities with high migration levels have low levels of trafficking, not high. The same report notes the following trend in Xayaboury:

"Movements are so pervasive in the villages in Khongxedon and Paklai that it would be fair to characterise working in Thailand as an integral part of the livelihood systems in those villages" (MLSW/UNIAP, 2001).

The presence of established cross-border links is stressed in other research:

"According to the Paklai Social Welfare Department, 934 Paklai residents (including 428 women) were working in Thailand before recent elections. Of those, 779 came back to vote, and 'most of them' went back to Thailand after the election. The 1,500 Baht fine for returnees had been waived for those coming back to vote, creating an incentive to come back. The fact that more than 80% knew the elections were on, the fine off, and made it back, gives a good idea of the phenomenon" (Ginzburg, 2001).

As exploited migrants would be unlikely to go back again, high levels of return and re-migration are indicative of low levels of exploitation among the migrants. Knowledge of potential dangers is internalised in the village community, and informal networks, often helped by cross-border family links, provide latent support networks that migrants can draw support from should they face challenges (UNIAP, 2005). In other words, communities with knowledge of migration routes and work might be self reinforcing in terms of migration, but are not necessarily an indication of trafficking. As such, high levels of migration cannot be assumed to be an indication of high levels of trafficking but may rather be an indication of safe migration channels.

*High levels of migration cannot be assumed
to be an indication of high levels of trafficking, but may
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Poverty Reduction - Political Considerations

The link suggested above between migration social networks and trafficking rests on limited data and as such remains more of a hypothesis than a conclusion at this stage. Furthermore, some studies have also documented involvement of relatives in trafficking, so caution needs to be added to this argument. Nonetheless, in relation to poverty reduction, these social networks suggest that trafficking might better be perceived as a social problem rather than an economic one. If the aforementioned observations are correct, it is the social relations that migrants are equipped with that are the key to protection against trafficking, and not their economic status.

Most trafficking interventions in Laos have targeted the 'supply side'. This is not surprising as Laos, being primarily a sending country, can do little about demand which mostly exists across the border.

As already mentioned, human trafficking is contested by various political, moral and ideological agendas. One of these is the conflation between migration, people smuggling and trafficking. How does a poverty reduction agenda fit into this picture and how does such an agenda play out where trafficking occurs within a context of strong seasonal migration?

Firstly, consider the objectives of trafficking programmes. From the perspective of a sending community, there are two possible objectives: reducing movement or making movement safer. Combating trafficking through poverty alleviation in almost all cases implicitly adheres to the former category. Providing alternatives and income at home neutralises the motivation for leaving and so prevents a potential trafficking situation. However, when combating trafficking through poverty alleviation in a context of strong migration, it becomes possible to blur policy objectives. A 2001 report encapsulates this danger:

"Authorities in sending countries can also be driven to equate illegal migration to trafficking, and the official Lao discourse on migration sometimes exemplifies this trait. Although Lao authorities may be unhappy with current migration trends to Thailand... the economic situation in Laos does not give them much latitude to curb these trends. In the meantime international organisations are willing to invest resources in the fight against trafficking, i.e. the exploitation of migrants. There is no total overlap between these two agendas, but there is obviously a point where they meet. By blurring the boundaries between trafficking and migration, authorities can promote their migration priorities under the auspices of the organisations' anti-trafficking agenda." (Ginzburg, 2001)

What and whose agendas are being served? Combating trafficking through poverty alleviation runs the risk of making a subtle retrospective transformation in terms of objectives. What originally had the stated aim of combating trafficking becomes an aim of poverty reduction. Hence, combating trafficking by reducing poverty takes away attention from the more immediate challenges of trafficking, such as developing community-based strategies to deal with agents.

Trafficking and Development

It cannot *a priori* be assumed that development programmes only have positive results. Despite best intentions, development projects do not always achieved the desired effect. It is not argued here that this is necessarily happening in Laos in regards to trafficking, but the possibility is certainly there.

In regards to supply, although economic activities such as micro-credit and vocational training can certainly reduce poverty, they also bring communities further into the cash-based economy. With a market-based economy come consumerism and changes in spending patterns. Hence, in relation to migration and trafficking, such activities may well raise unrealistic expectations about development in communities. In fact, one study from 2001 reported that improved education has provided access to

knowledge and new ideas, but no means to apply this knowledge, thereby producing a feeling of boredom among youth. The report concludes:

"Thus have development efforts, (IMF, WB, ADB, UNDP etc) provided the enabling environment for trafficking, especially when coupled with strong social and family ties all along the border." (MLSW/UNIAP, 2001)

Hence modernisation can potentially create a supply of migrants. This appears already to be happening in parts of northern Laos, where there is concern about resettlement and trafficking (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004). It should be noted that this is a symptom of poverty created by human intervention and does not constitute an endemic predisposed condition of poverty. In addition, road projects are likely to stimulate migration and trafficking. In Thailand, similar modernisation programmes have made highland people one of the populations most vulnerable to human trafficking (Feingold, 1997).

Another specific challenge regards micro-credit schemes, which involve small loans to trigger economic activity among poor people. It can be very risky to introduce loans to a migratory population - if recipients have problems repaying debt, an instant solution can be to earn a 'quick buck' across the border. There is no present evidence that this is a trend among micro-credit schemes in Laos, but the scenario is certainly imaginable.

*Modernisation can potentially
create a supply of migrants*

In regards to demand, the NGPES puts emphasis on industrialisation and modernisation, including the development of special economic zones, energy and rural electrification, development of agro-forestry industry, the tourism industry, mining and so forth. It is impossible to predict how this policy will play out in practice but it should be noted that these sectors can potentially generate demand for trafficking within Lao itself. There are some signs this already is happening within the garment and entertainment industries (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004). It is also possible that the phenomenon of 'reverse trafficking' (where the exploiter is moving, not the victim), as witnessed in the Cambodian sex tourism industry, could become a problem in Laos. In addition, large infrastructure projects such as road construction and hydroelectric power create huge concentrations of a predominantly male labour force within confined areas. It is possible that this can also stimulate demand for various goods and services which may involve trafficked labour. To be fair, the NGPES recognises the policy challenge of growing disparities within Laos, and it remains to be seen how internal trafficking will develop.

In summary, although migration and trafficking are related to poverty, they are equally entangled in 'development' and 'modernisation'. Hence, programmes with the objective of development can actually increase trafficking risks. Trafficking response will need to move beyond equating supply reduction with poverty alleviation, and explore ways to deal with law enforcement, and equally importantly demand reduction (law enforcement, clients, factories, employers, etc).

Conclusions

Although there are certainly links between poverty reduction and trafficking, these links are far from clear and as such it is doubtful whether poverty reduction projects will have much impact on trafficking. Instead, there is a real possibility that such programmes will in some cases displace trafficking and in other cases increase the problem.

There is one link between poverty and trafficking which does suggest a way to reduce the problem: policy support for legal and safe migration. It has already been noted that many Lao migrants are actually not subject to exploitation. A study carried out by ILO in southern Laos found that approximately half of the migrant population sends remittances back home (ILO, 2003). This observation is supported by other trafficking research which suggests that although a sizeable minority of migrants are at risk of trafficking, there are also many who opt for migration as a poverty reducing strategy (Ginzburg, 2001; UNIAP, 2005). No one knows the exact magnitude of resources going back into Lao communities, but research suggests that remittances translate into considerable consumer power. It should be noted that global estimates of migrant remittances supersede the total amount of international development aid (Adams and Page, 2003). Perhaps migrant labourers' income and the remittances sent back constitute one of the most effective poverty-reducing interventions in Laos. A critical aspect that requires further exploration is the extent to which remittances are based on exploitative or fair labour. Although they are more likely to come from the latter, this is an assumption that needs to be treated with caution until further research is carried out.

*Perhaps migrant labourers' income and the
remittances sent back constitute one
of the most effective poverty-reducing
interventions in Laos*

Another nexus between vulnerability and trafficking is to be found in a migrant's legal status. As one ILO report has noted:

"Labour trafficking should not, in theory, take place if the jobseeker has freedom of geographical movement and freedom of access to employment" (ILO, 2003).

So, if migrants have improved legal protection and access to legal means of employment, they will be better protected against abuse and exploitation. This is particularly relevant to Thailand and Laos, as Thailand depends on low-skilled labour in several sectors, and Laos can meet this demand with a large and growing young population. The Lao government has recognised this to some extent by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand to create formal and legal channels for labour migration (Marshall, 2001).

There are several reservations to be made here. Firstly, it is doubtful how legal and safe migration can benefit children, as they are in most cases excluded from access to legitimate employment; Second, legal migration does not help migrants who end up in illegal and semi-legal industries, such as prostitution, domestic work and fisheries, as these are poorly covered by labour laws.

Nonetheless, access to legal and safe labour migration channels does give an alternative for village communities and as such has potential for reducing trafficking. Furthermore, safe and legal migration constitutes a significant shift in how the whole *problematique* of migration, poverty and trafficking can be perceived, as it allows for a shift away from seeing migration as 'bad' and re-defines 'exploitation' as the problem that should be tackled. Also, it recognises migration as possessing huge potential for a positive contribution to poverty reduction.

A policy option for the government - and for organisations that provide technical and financial support - is to reconsider whether poverty reduction is a feasible strategy for combating trafficking at all, and instead shift towards working on legal and safe migration. The link between poverty and trafficking does not lie in removing incentives for movement, but in promoting its legality and safety.

About the Author

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Perceptions of Corruption in Foreign Aid Projects

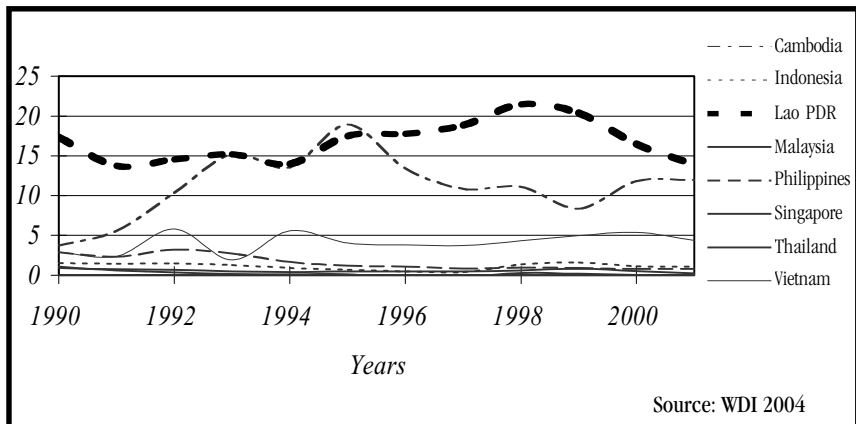
by Cary Feuer

In recent years researchers and overseas development assistance (ODA) professionals have devoted much energy to understanding the problem of corruption in the context of international development assistance. In particular, efforts have focused on the macro- or micro-levels, dealing broadly with so-called 'grand corruption' or the behaviour of firms and individuals. This paper, however, focuses specifically on project-level corruption. Through means of a perceptions-based questionnaire distributed to foreign project managers in Laos during the summer of 2003, the study analyses how ODA workers see the impact of corruption on projects.

Laos and ODA: Overview

Laos has been receiving ODA from the World Bank and IMF since 1961 and 1977 respectively, from Japan since 1958 and from UNDP since 1957 (World Bank, 2003; IMF, 2003; Japanese Government (GoJ), 1999; UNDP, 2003). The largest bilateral donor by a wide margin is Japan, whose 1997-2001 ODA to Laos (US\$430.5 million) was higher than the ODA contributions of the next 20 donors combined (CPC, 2002). The largest multilateral assistance comes from the international financial institutions (IFIs), with 1997-2001 disbursements totaling \$593 million (ibid). All told, in the five years ending in 2001, Laos had received \$1.43 billion in ODA, or about 18% of total GDP (WDI, 2004).

Figure 1: Overseas Development Assistance as % of GDP (ASEAN excluding Myanmar and Brunei)



Objective of the Study

In the late 1990s, a large round of anticorruption initiatives began among OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) members, UN agencies, the IFIs and bi/multilateral donor agencies (ADB, 1999; OECD, 1997; UNGarc, 1997; GoJ, 1999; USemb, 2000; ARMM, 1998). These efforts have largely been aimed at the higher administrative and institutional levels, through the creation of anticorruption departments or agencies, and national integrity surveys (GoJ, 2002). Yet up to now a project-level anti-corruption approach has been lacking both in fieldwork and academic study (Akiyama et al, 2003; Langseth, 2001). With corruption afflicting so many foreign aid projects, the ultimate ambition of this research is to provide planners with a means of making more informed decisions in the initial stages of project design vis-à-vis corruption mitigation.

Methodology and Scope of the Study

A survey of expatriate ODA project managers based in Luang Prabang and Vientiane was conducted over five weeks in the summer of 2003. In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted with ODA professionals and researchers active in Laos, as well as one expert in project cycle management in Tokyo.

Corruption Defined in the ODA Context

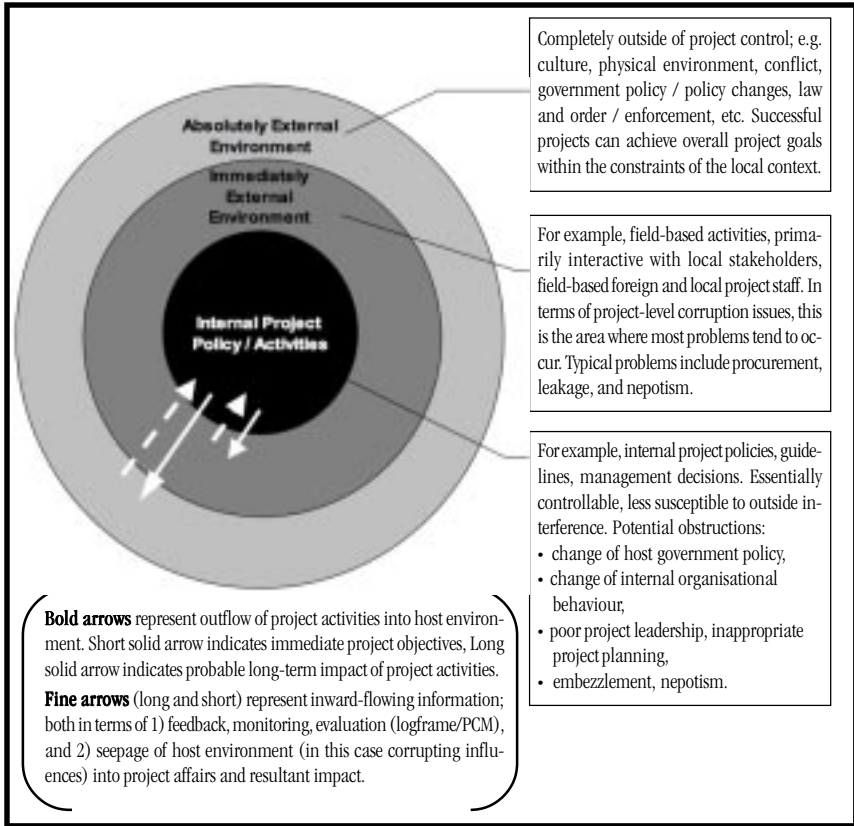
The most widely-employed definition of corruption in the ODA context originates with the World Bank: "the abuse of public office for private gain" (World Bank, 2004). However, this paper favours a definition that includes both public and private sectors, such as that given by UNODC: "the abuse of power for private gain" (UNODC, 2004). Both definitions were used for reference and clarification during this research.

Current Anti-Corruption Efforts, Briefly

A large debt is owed to groundbreaking corruption-related perception surveys such as Transparency International's (TI) Corruptions Perceptions Index and UNODC's Global Program against Corruption (TICPI, 2003; Langseth, 2001). Field-level activities too, such as National Integrity Surveys, compile perceptions-based datasets that provide researchers with abundant quantitative and qualitative data (Langseth, 2001).

While the above-mentioned initiatives bode well for long-term broad-based corruption mitigation, there is a lack of attention to the vulnerabilities of development projects themselves. Figure 2 overleaf effectively illustrates the situation of donors. As illustrated in the diagram, while activities are directed out towards immediately and absolutely external environments, elements of those environments invariably filter back into the project. These elements have both positive and negative impacts on projects and their internal organisational behaviour. The element that this paper focuses on is corruption: according to the survey results, nearly all managers indicate that corruption is a significant problem for their projects and that they are not sufficiently equipped to handle its impact. Thus, despite ongoing anti-corruption efforts, projects are still largely at risk.

Figure 2: Project Activities Interacting with Local Environment



The Questionnaire: Design and Distribution

Given the void of published corruption-related data at the project level, it was decided from the beginning that primary data collection would be undertaken by means of a perception-based questionnaire. A total of 45 project managers in Vientiane and Luang Prabang were selected as a sample. Of those, 25 returned a questionnaire for a response rate of 55%.

Survey Results: Descriptive Observations

This section presents the survey findings in descriptive and graphical form with relevant observations. For graphical representation, histograms have been constructed to illustrate frequency distributions of respondents' answers. In the histograms, heights of bars represent observed frequencies, in this case number of projects.

Lao Language Skill among Foreign Experts

Abilities varied drastically. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 representing highest (fluency), the average was 4.5.

Translation

In all, nearly two-thirds of project documents were asserted to be available in Lao. For some projects it is policy to have every document produced available bilingually, from planning and implementation through to close-down. Managers of such projects did not emphasise the success of this policy.

Planning and the Participatory Method

84% of projects were planned according to the participatory method, with 88% planned locally, inside Laos.

Predetermined Guidelines for Corruption

40% of projects indicated that their project documentation includes predetermined guidelines for handling incidences of corruption. However, throughout the interviews, nearly all managers expressed that administrative decisions regarding corruption matters were entirely at their discretion. Therefore this number is unreliable.

Accounting Standards

All but one project claimed to follow international accounting standards.

Auditing

88% of respondents employed independent firms for project auditing. These included well-known multinational firms, in addition to one locally-based firm. In interviews, project managers were divided over the stringency of the auditing, with some managers asserting that project staff have been known to collude with auditors

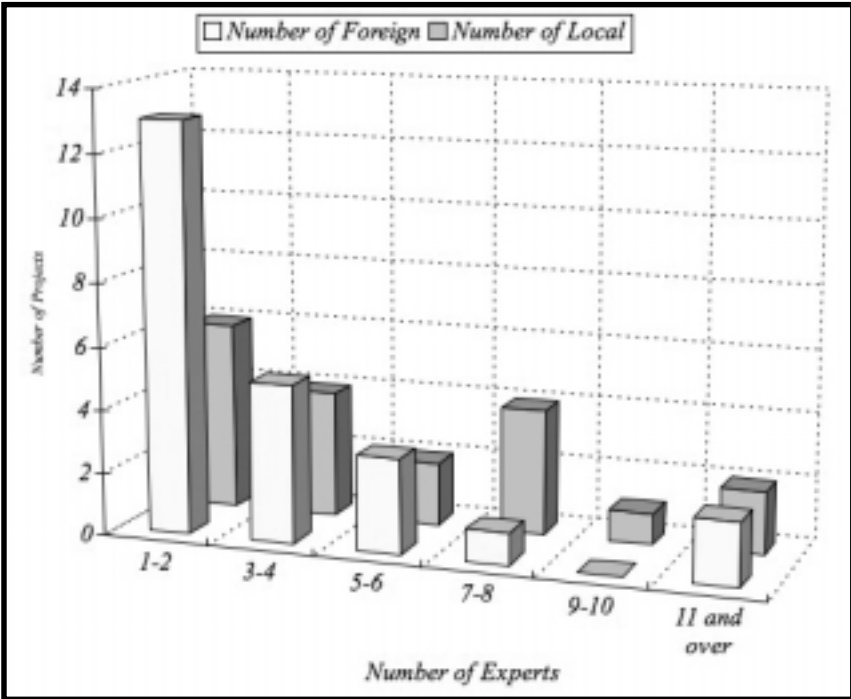
Number of Experts by Nationality

The mean number of foreign experts employed per project was three and the standard deviation was 2.81. 75% of projects employed just one to two foreign experts (see figure 3). For local experts the mean number employed was five, with a standard deviation of 3.97. The average total number of experts per project was 9.3, with the average ratio of local to total experts being 40%.

Salaries

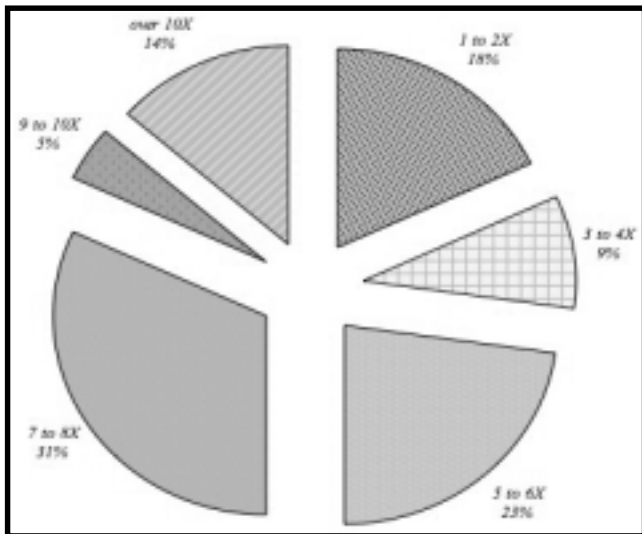
Figure 4 illustrates the salary gap between local and foreign experts. According to the survey data, 31% of foreign experts earn seven to eight times the salaries of their Lao peers. Moreover, nearly 75% of foreign experts earn over five times as much as their Lao peers. Foreign experts enjoy an average annual salary of US\$41,340 whereas Lao experts receive on average \$8,096. The average annual salary for civil

Figure 3: Frequency Distribution of Foreign and Local Experts



servants in Laos is approximately US\$300, which is sometimes paid in rice or food credits. Furthermore, certain sectors of the Lao civil service (e.g. medical doctors, police officers and teachers) are known to work for months consecutively without salary.

Figure 4: Ratio of Foreign to Local Experts' Salaries



The chart illustrates the percentages of foreign experts' salaries which are X times higher than local experts' salaries.

Professional Experience and Age

While local and foreign experts average roughly the same amount of professional ODA experience (seven and nine years respectively), their distributions are quite different. In the case of foreign experts, experience was skewed towards ODA newcomers with 40% of staff having between one and five years' experience. On the other hand, the majority (56%) of local experts had between six and ten years' experience.

Figure 5: Frequency Distribution - Years of Experience of Foreign and Local Experts

Here the issues of experience and age are closely linked. 66% of foreign experts are over 40, whereas 69% of local experts are under 40. This should come as no surprise in the case of foreign experts, as many are recruited from those with long career experience in their field of expertise. As for local experts however, two possible conclusions may be drawn: 1) local human resources capacity has only recently met the standards that projects consider 'expert' and 2) salaries of local experts are roughly 25 times those of government staff, explaining the high retention rate. In fact, given the trends, we can expect the number of local experts with less experience to rise along with increasing HR capacity. At the same time, we might expect decreases in the overall numbers of foreign experts as more local experts enter the sector.

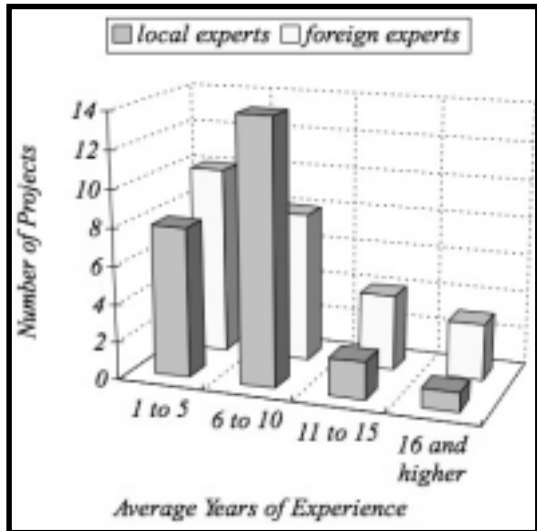
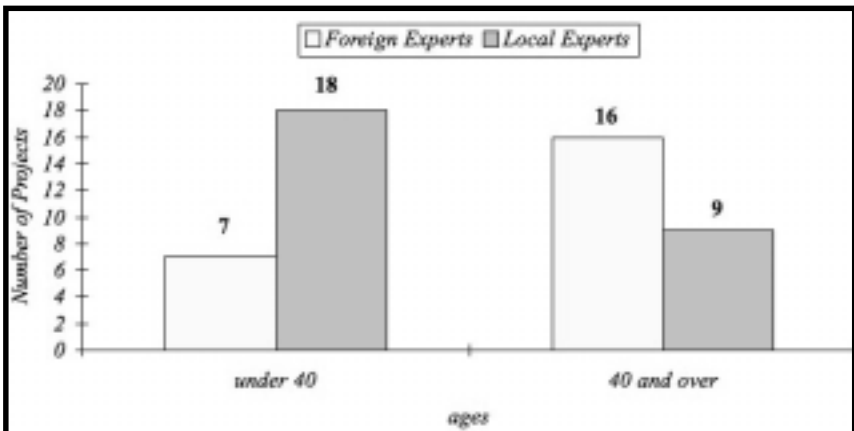


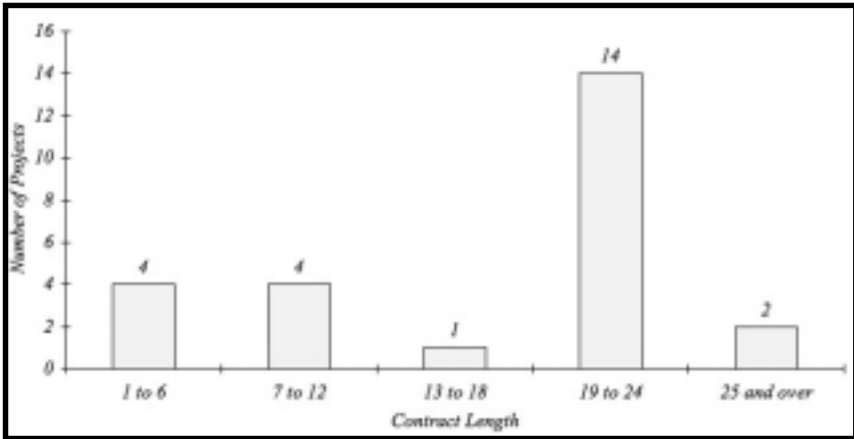
Figure 6: Frequency Distribution of Ages of Foreign and Local Experts



Contract Lengths for Foreign Experts

Over half (56%) of foreign experts were contracted for around two years, with a mean of 21 months. Those contracted for under one year tend to be short-term consultants (with contract extensions). Interestingly, one project's foreign experts are all volunteers contracted in six-year placements.

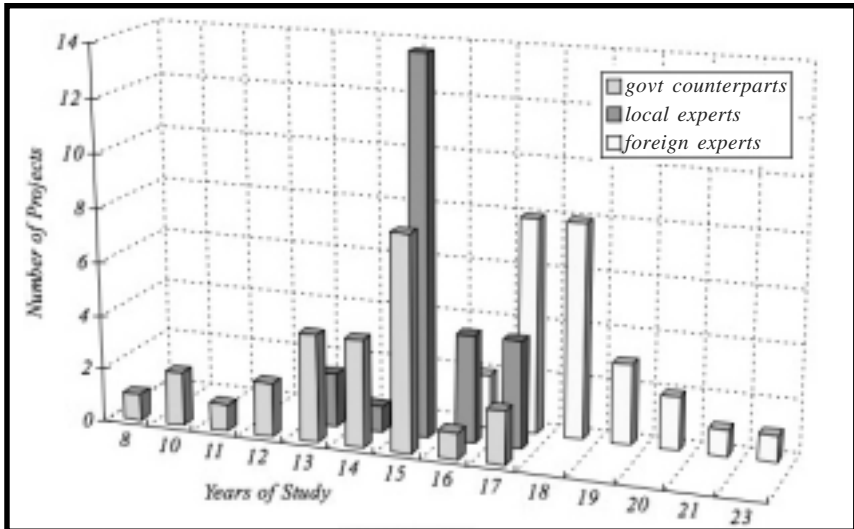
Figure 7: Frequency Distribution - Contract Lengths of Foreign Experts (in months)



Education Background

Average length of formal education was 14, 15, and 18 years for government counterparts, local experts, and foreign experts respectively. 32% of local experts hold at least a master's degree, compared to roughly 85% of foreign experts.

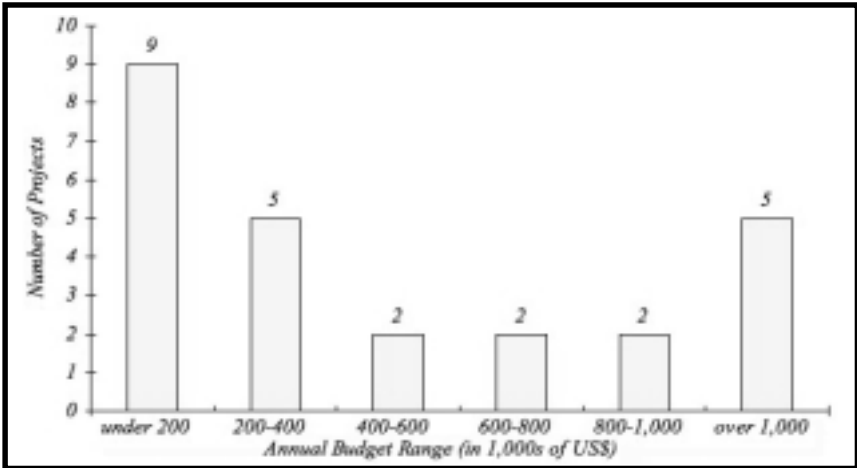
Figure 8: Frequency Distribution - Education Levels of Project Staff



Budget

Annual budget sizes varied greatly throughout the sample, from US\$25,000 up to US\$11.3 million. Discounting outliers, standard deviation is about US\$10,000 with a mean of US\$722,000. We should also note the median annual budget of US\$400,000 is far lower than the mean since almost 25% of projects had budgets of over US\$1 million.

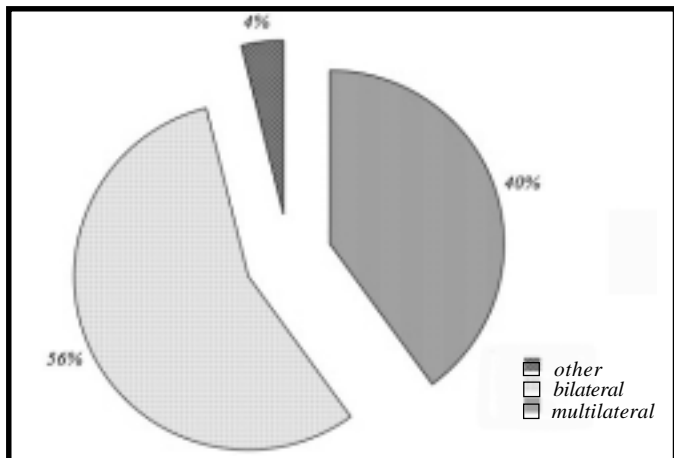
Figure 9: Frequency Distribution of Total Annual Budget (1,000s of US\$)



Funding

56% of projects were funded on a multilateral basis, 40% bilaterally funded, and 4% could be classified as absolutely independently-financed by NGOs. However, as NGOs accounted for over 4% of the sample group this suggests that NGOs may receive part (in some cases most or all) of their funding from bilateral or multilateral agencies.

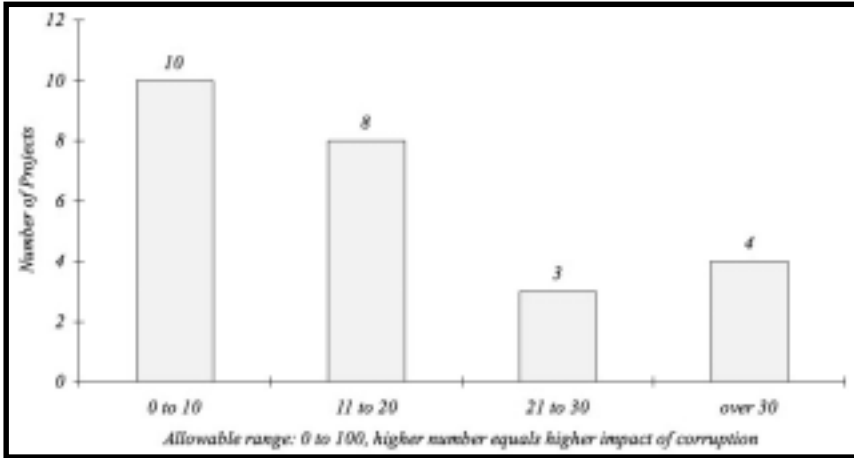
Figure 10:
Distribution of
Types of Project
Funding



Project Managers' Perceptions of Corruption Impact

Overall, 72% of project managers answered within the 0 to 20 range, with an average response to this question of 21. Managers with higher estimations of corruption impact were comparatively few.

Figure 11: Frequency Distribution - Project Managers' Perceptions of Corruption Impact



Conclusions

This section aims to apply the results of the perceptions-based survey and interviews to practical strategies for corruption mitigation. For example, as shown in Figure 3 there is no trend in the number of local experts per project. On the other hand, there is a clear trend in foreign expert staffing, with fewer and fewer projects hiring large numbers of foreign experts. With the number of local experts increasing as human resources improve, a gradual but steady increase of local expert hires, with a corresponding drop in foreign expert hires, seems to be appropriate. Certainly, with salaries averaging 25 times their civil servant peers, local experts have a strong incentive to join and remain in the ODA sector.

The interviews and open-ended section of the questionnaire suggest that the funding channels preferred by some organisations particularly increase the likelihood of 'government irregularities'. One project manager noted that after "rigorous controls were imposed by the aid organisation, intense lobbying was undertaken [by the host-country agency] to try and get a different donor who was more liberal with the way funds would be distributed." Another project manager contracted to a multilateral organisation stated unambiguously, "projects which assign more responsibilities and control [over funds disbursement] to local authorities are more vulnerable." Repeatedly, the culprit for multilateral projects was identified as 'national execution.'

One interesting statistic gleaned from the questionnaire is project managers' perception of corruption impact on their projects (see Figure 11). Results from the questionnaire indicate that on a scale of zero to 100, mean perceived project-level corruption impact was 21, which corresponds with information obtained in the interviews. Specifically, many project managers stated their willingness to "tolerate up

to 20% losses" of project resources, or, put another way by a different manager, that corrective measures are not taken as long as losses "do not exceed 20%". According to another manager, 15% was the level that Donor Q established as 'sustainable'. Project Q had been losing to up to 40% of resources under his predecessor, but this manager succeeded in reducing losses to 15%. Asked how he achieved this, the manager replied, "the Lao have always known that [Donor Q] will tolerate 15% losses." Losses at the 40% level merely reflect his predecessor's failure to maintain the status quo.

Of course, resources are not always financial, and each manager's assessment of corruption impact is highly subjective. Still, with annual budgets among this sample averaging \$722,000 and ranging to over \$11 million, even losses of just five percent of financial resources should be sufficiently worrying. Indeed, according to most respondents, the current situation is alarming. Nearly every manager agreed that corruption is a significant or "severe" problem for ODA projects. In fact most respondents agreed that managers are "definitely not" equipped to deal with project-level corruption. Comments such as these below illustrate the sense of dread common among interviewees:

"In about three quarters of projects, serious and constant irregularities occur."

"The irregularities in Indonesia were significant and resulted in millions of dollars in funds disappearing. Although [the donor] was aware of it little was done. I have the feeling that in Laos the people here are just becoming aware of how much they are able to utilise the system for personal gain. I have seen a large increase [in corruption] over the past 12 months."

"Unless donors are more pro-active and are seen to be doing something [about corruption], then locals will continue to push the limit. Despite the [donors'] professed stand against corruption, their actions on the ground do not meet their words."

The above statement suggests that managers will implement or abide by anti-corruption measures when they enjoy actionable donor support at the field level. According to the survey results, 40% of projects already have pre-determined anti-corruption guidelines. Yet some project managers, lacking donor enforcement at the administrative level, have introduced their own 'country-level' or 'field-level' anti-corruption policies independent of wider organisational culture.

Limitations of the Survey

With a statistical population of up to 250 project managers in Laos, the general rule of 'the larger the sample the better' was followed. Limitations pertain primarily to the choice of a perceptions-based survey, in that the data gained through such means is objectively unverifiable (Lim and Stern 2002). Moreover, perceptions-based data must be considered 'static' - essentially a snapshot of the subjective impressions of respondents at the time the questionnaire was administered. While TI has been able to minimise this problem by using 'rolling averages' over three-year intervals and obtaining multiple surveys from one project or organisation, such strategies were impossible in the case of this research (TICPI 2003, Seligson 2001). A further limitation of the survey pertains to the small sample size.

Final Remarks

The author had hoped to garner a sample of about 60 observations, but over five weeks was able to find just 45 individuals willing to accept questionnaires, of which only 25 were returned.

The questionnaire was based primarily on observations over nearly four years' experience working closely with the ODA sector in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. As such it is limited to those experiences as well as those of peers and former colleagues who assisted with field checking. Despite the limitations that accompany the conclusions presented above, they are nevertheless valid within the constraints of this research and are certainly applicable to the current project-level situation of ODA in Laos.

The problem of project-level corruption shows no sign of abating. On the contrary, where controls have been lax, experience suggests that the opposite is true. The conclusions presented in this paper are intended as a modest signpost towards less fettered project-level activities, of which the ultimate beneficiaries are target groups in Laos and taxpayers in donor states.

About the Author

This paper is condensed from a thesis written by Cary Feuer for an M.A. in International Development at the International University of Japan in March 2004. For interested persons the full paper, including both quantitative and descriptive analysis is available at the author's website: <http://feuer.seph.ws/hp>. The author worked in Laos between 1997 and 2000 and currently lives in Niigata, Japan.

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