

Juth Pakai



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New Thought

UNDRA 2006 Edition



**UN Development Research Award:
The Winning Articles, 2006**

**Community learning centres, rural access
roads, and poverty alleviation planning**

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2006 United Nations Development Research Award Issue

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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

Welcome to this second special edition of *Juth Pakai*, again featuring the winners of the annual United Nations Development Research Award. I am delighted to see that research and development literature is growing in popularity in the country.

Our voluntary review panel members, although faced with a challenging task, have done a wonderful job choosing the authors for this year's Research Development Award, and I trust that you will enjoy and gain some insights from reading the three articles chosen for this issue. Malabou Baylatry, the winner of the award, has produced an important piece of original research on the value of Community Learning Centres in rural villages. This pioneering work provides a good example of how thorough research can produce not only a valuable record of the situation in specific areas of the country, but also crucial information for development planners and policy-makers.

Honourable mentions are made for the efforts of Somphavanh Nakhavong, who points out the value of access roads in bringing a variety of benefits to remote communities, and Phisanexay Phouthonsangsavanh, who expresses some forthright views on development planning. The work of these writers serves as an inspiration to Lao academics and all those who would help the country move forward to greater prosperity. I would like to applaud everybody who submitted work to the UNDR A award this year and to encourage you all, and others, to continue in your efforts. As in all fields, practice and persistence will eventually bring their rewards.



Olivia Yambi

UN Resident Co-ordinator a.i.

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.

Non-Formal Education for Community Development

by Malabou Baylatry

This article studies aspects of village livelihoods before and after training at Community Learning Centres. These centres provide villagers with an opportunity to obtain vocational skills, which lead to better and more varied prospects for full- and part-time employment. Income and expenditure then increase as general quality of life rises to a higher level. This step allows villagers to improve their community and, in the long run, contribute to national socio-economic development. However, centres are hindered by a lack of facilities and variety in the training curriculum. Some participants are unable to use the vocational skills gained, especially to establish their own businesses. This article records suggestions made by participants, in order to address such problems and enhance the efficiency of the centres.

Community Learning Centres

Establishment of Community Learning Centres (CLC) began in the Lao PDR in 1990 as a project to eradicate illiteracy, raise educational levels, and provide vocational training to educationally disadvantaged women in Luang Namtha province. Two CLCs were initially built, one in Luang Namtha district and one in Sing district. The centres at that time offered basic literacy lessons, and training in the fields of weaving and clothes-making, agriculture and livestock, and cookery. Following training programmes, loans were provided to help participants use their new skills to start generating income and begin a new career.

In 1992 Unesco pilot projects started opening CLCs across the Asia and Pacific region. Two Lao villages in Vientiane province received pilot centres, Ban Keoku in Udom district and Ban Nanokkhum in Thulakhom district. Villagers were involved in contributing funds and labour to build the centres, and in discussing and planning CLC activities, which were based on meeting their needs and solving their problems. The government and Unesco acted as facilitators, providing only some necessary assistance. This pilot project seemed to show that CLCs brought villagers an opportunity to get involved in learning and other activities that are useful for their lives. The benefits of non-formal education attracted the attention of neighbouring villagers who had not participated, prompting them to want a CLC in their own locality (Ministry of Education, 2001a).

By 2002 there were 305 CLCs nationwide (Luangxay, 2002) and the government, which can build eight CLCs per year, is concentrating considerable attention on establishing more CLCs throughout Laos. From 2006, the plan is to enable 50% of school drop-outs to join non-formal education and life-skill training projects, and to give illiterate rural adults the chance to participate in non-formal education and vocational training projects that were set up in 2005. Mobile training units were created in 2006, and by 2015 500,000 of the illiterate population of 1.47 million people - aged 15 to 40 - are expected to have benefited from this mobile training (Boupha, 2004).

Theoretical Framework: What is a Community Learning Centre?

Roles and Functions

A CLC is a place for non-formal educational activities, such as basic education for illiterate people, higher education programmes, basic vocational training, and meetings and exhibitions. Centres also provide a medium for knowledge and information regarding improving quality of life – scientific, social and basic technical knowledge and information can be communicated to interested villagers at CLCs (Ministry of Education, 2001b).

Principles

The key principle allowing a CLC to function effectively is that targeted participants must understand the significance and the usefulness of a CLC. In addition, while assistance may be given by concerned parties such as the government and NGOs, the building and running of a CLC should rely on the resources and labour of the local area. What is not available in the locality should be provided by the external parties, but administration, maintenance and general utilisation of the centre are the responsibilities of the villagers (Ministry of Education, 2001b). It is also vital that training curricula be based on the practical needs and desires of the participants.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in four CLCs in Vientiane Capital: Khokphueng village CLC in Sangthong district, the Simmano and Hom village CLCs in Hadsaifong, and the Ban Tha Khok Hai CLC in Pak Nguem district. Primary data was generated through questionnaire surveys to collect information on respondents' livelihoods both before and after their participation in CLC training. Data from these surveys was keyed into a computer for comparison and analysis. Relevant secondary data was derived from official documents from the Ministry of Education, the non-formal education division of Vientiane Capital, and the National University of Laos library.

The sample totalled 62 of the 139 villagers who finished CLC training in 2005. Females accounted for 58% of the sample. Nineteen respondents trained at Khokphueng CLC, seven at Simmano, 22 at Tha Kok Hai, and 14 at Ban Hom. The research also made close observation of the facilities, location, trainers and trainees at each CLC.

Findings

Full-Time and Part-Time Jobs

Prior to joining CLCs for training, almost 70% of the respondents worked as full-time farmers (Table 1). Eight percent had some level of education already but could not find a job, while very few worked in other skilled occupations. For those looking to work part-time, 29%, could not find a job, 8% raised

livestock, and 1.6% were seamstresses. After completing CLC training, the picture changed noticeably. The percentage of farmers declined to 56%, those unable to find work dropped to under 2%, and the number of skilled workers began to increase.

Table 1: Full-time and part-time jobs of participants before and after joining CLCs

Occupation	Full-Time Workers		Part-Time Workers	
	Before training (%)	After training (%)	Before training (%)	After training (%)
Farmer	69.36	56.46	4.84	8.06
Gardener	0	1.61	20.96	8.06
Merchant	0	3.23	9.68	6.45
Animal Raising	0	1.61	8.07	17.75
Labourer	0	1.61	6.45	3.23
Weaver	6.45	9.68	14.52	11.29
Builder/Carpenter	1.61	6.45	1.61	1.61
Civil Servant	9.68	11.29	0	0
Seamstress	1.61	3.23	1.61	16.14
Cook	0	0	0	12.90
Job-Seeking student	8.07	1.61	0	0
Beauty-related job	1.61	1.61	0	0
Unemployed	0	0	29.03	12.90
Other	1.61	1.61	3.23	1.61
Total	100	100	100	100

Income and Expenditure

Before joining CLCs, most participants had a monthly income of 100,000-500,000 kip (Table 2). The groups with higher or lower earnings than this, and with no income at all, were all measured at 8% of the sample. After vocational training at the CLCs, the medium and high earning groups grew and the number of people in the lowest or no income brackets declined.

Table 2: Income of the participants before and after training at CLCs

Monthly Income (kip)	Before Training (%)	After Training (%)
< 100,000	8.06	0
100,000 - 500,000	74.21	75.81
500,001 - 1,000,000	8.06	17.74
1,000,001 - 1,500,000	0	3.23
1,500,001 - 2,000,000	0	0
2,000,001 - 2,500,000	1.61	0
> 2,500,000	0	1.61
No income	8.06	1.61
Total	100	100

Expenditure of villagers rose alongside income, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Expenditure of the participants before and after training at CLCs

Monthly Expense (kip)	Before Training (%)	After Training (%)
< 100,000	11.29	6.45
100,000 - 500,000	85.48	82.26
500,001 - 1,000,000	3.23	8.06
1,000,001 - 1,500,000	0	0
1,500,001 - 2,000,000	0	3.23
2,000,001 - 2,500,000	0	0
> 2,500,000	0	0
No income	0	0
Total	100	100

Analysis

Before obtaining training from CLCs, most of the respondents were working as farmers and gardeners. It is obvious that the variety of full-time jobs was limited. The participants were limited in terms of vocational skills, narrowing their opportunities to have a career in broader fields other than farming and gardening, the jobs traditionally practiced for many generations. This limitation directly affected the villagers' lives in various ways. Firstly, their paddy fields were entirely rainfed, and no advanced production techniques were known or used. A year with sufficient and timely rain resulted in a good rice yield, but a year with insufficient or unusually timed rain meant insufficient rice for feeding families throughout the year. Secondly, villagers were unable to depart from their nature-reliant careers even if they wanted to, as they lacked the technical skills required for other jobs.

Completing CLC training courses gave villagers the ability to start a career in jobs that had seemed impossible in the past. Moreover, before the training some respondents who had just finished their studies needed employment but were unable to find a job, partially due to their limited education level. After training, the percentage of these respondents reduced significantly, from 8% to under 2%, meaning that almost all of them were able to find a job related to newly-learned skills.

It can be observed that there were fewer changes among those in full-time jobs than in part-time employment. This is because most of the respondents already had a stable full-time job, and were unlikely to need to change it, while many of the skills gained from training were used to start part-time jobs. In farming villages, part-time jobs are common after the harvest season at the end of the year, and when farmers do not grow rice in the dry season. For the four to five months between production seasons, many people were unable to work part time for extra income because they did not possess any sort of expertise other than farming. However, after vocational training from CLCs, the number of respondents with no part-time job dropped significantly from 29% to just under 13%. Women working casually as seamstresses increased significantly from under 2% to over 16%, and the percentage of cooks rose dramatically from zero to 12.9%.

The number of people raising livestock also increased from 8% to almost 18%. Raising livestock is generally common among countryside communities because animals function as a savings mechanism in times of need. However, the amount of beasts dying from disease is a perennial problem that results in a substantial loss of money. After learning appropriate husbandry techniques through training, participants became more confident in starting part-time jobs such as livestock raising. In general, with the possession of vocational skills, doors to part-time jobs become open, and participants are able to work in a wider variety of occupations.

In addition to using the knowledge obtained from training to earn employment, villagers can beneficially apply their various new skills in their everyday lives. Skills such as carpentry and building can be used to improve houses and to save money by avoiding hiring other people. Sewing can save money spent on buying and altering clothes, while cooking skills improve food hygiene and lead to less sickness.

The changing trends in full-time and part-time employment have had an effect on participants' income. After training, although the majority of participants still had an income of 100,000-500,000 kip, the proportion of those with an income of less than 100,000 kip decreased significantly, from 8% to zero. At the same time, those with no income dropped from 8% to just 1.6%. The number of people with earnings of 500,000-1,000,000 kip more than doubled, while more people entered the top income brackets in this area for the first time. Although these changes may not be very grand, and while it could not be said that all the respondents became wealthy after training, the figures suggest a general overall increase in income – an important first step by the villagers to becoming self-reliant and self-sufficient. When villagers are able to reduce their financial dependency on the government, the government can then redirect capital to development in other socio-economic fields.

After completing training, respondents found that their expenses tended to increase along with their income, which now provided more opportunity to consume products and afford services. Increase in expenditure does not mean that villagers spend their money unproductively. Most expenditure goes towards basic needs such as food, clothes and healthcare services. Some money is also spent improving general quality of life. This encompasses education for family members, household appliances and travelling (Table 4).

Table 4: Kinds of expenditure after income increases

Kinds of Expenditure	%
Food	33.14
Healthcare	15.73
Clothes	25.84
Household appliance	9.00
Education	5.06
Travelling	11.23
Total	100.00

In general, the most essential point is that human resources in the community as well as in the nation are being developed to a more qualified level. They might not be as developed as those in urban communities, but this is a crucial first step of community development, and of paving a path for future development. When human resources are strengthened, other development work can operate more smoothly, quickly, and effectively, starting from community development to the development of the country.

Limitations and Recommendations

Some participants did not take any new job despite the skills they obtained from training. For some, this was because they already had a job, while others wanted to establish their own business but were constrained by a lack of set-up capital, premises, business advice, and markets for their production. If these deficiencies could be solved, many CLC trainees would be able to start their own business. This would increase not only employment, but also income. When asked their opinions on the future development of CLCs, over a quarter of respondents said that the centres should provide a wider range of vocational training to respond to the demand and suit the circumstances of the community (Table 5). Some villagers have the resources to start a new venture but not the skills. For instance, some villagers have enough capital to start their own business. They may also own ponds to breed fish, sewing machines for tailoring, and tools for making furniture, but they cannot do much with those resources because they do not possess the skills to get the business going.

CLCs do not have unlimited funds and cannot provide training in every field demanded. Therefore, before setting up a CLC, the involved parties must always carefully survey a community to find out which kinds of training are most in demand, and what resources the community has. Apart from wanting more varied fields of training, the respondents also requested improvements in other areas, such as more technical personnel, to increase the professionalism of the training so that they can catch up with the modern world, and loans for establishing their own businesses.

Table 5: Respondent CLC improvement suggestions.

Establishment loan	25.25
More varied curriculum	27.27
More technical personnel	26.26
Venue for doing activities	13.64
Library	3.03
Production market	0.51
Facilities for training activities	1.01
Activity monitoring programme	3.03

It is acknowledged that there is a limited budget and that not everything can be achieved in a short period of time. However, the government should pay continuous attention to this work. Success may take time to occur, but once it is achieved, everyone benefits. In terms of loans, there is a natural concern that credit granted might become non-performing loans. It should be realised that even after going through training, villagers may have certain vocational skills

but are still not versed in economic calculation. Therefore, before granting loans to villagers for production purposes, there should also be training on economic calculation. This, combined with close monitoring and advice for borrowers, could ensure appropriate, effective and productive use of loans.

To ensure the sustainability of CLCs, the principles below should be considered (Boupha, 2004):

- CLC Directors must have a clear and deep comprehension of CLC concepts and a high level of enthusiasm towards developing CLCs;
- Volunteer teachers must work full-time with CLCs and should know how to monitor and liaise with the people and organisations involved. It is also important that they work voluntarily, wholeheartedly and sincerely.
- Every single step of CLC development should respond to villagers' needs and should overcome problems previously encountered. Simultaneously, villagers must be constantly reminded of the role and significance of CLCs so that enthusiasm flourishes and there is an incentive for villagers to actively participate in training.

Conclusion

CLCs provide a precious opportunity for disadvantaged villagers to obtain basic vocational training suitable to local resources and potential. After completing training at CLCs, the employment rate increases, especially for part-time workers, and participants are able to work in more varied fields. Importantly, their income also increases, indicating a step towards a sufficient livelihood and an improved general quality of life. However, the training curriculum does not always accord with the community's demands. A number of important elements are still missing, particularly funds for both improving the centres themselves, and for providing loans to villagers to set up their own businesses.

To ensure the longevity of centres as they grow, more facilities should be present as well as a support system to assist participants after they complete the training. Importantly, all parties – the government and other involved organisations, trainers and trainees - must be truly devoted to performing their duties as best they can. Ultimately, CLCs set an appropriate model for the country's sustainable development because they develop human resources. Once human resources are improved, local communities, and the country as a whole, can increasingly develop.

About the Author

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Impact of the Rural Access Road Network on Poverty Alleviation in the Lao PDR

by Somphavanh Nakhavong

Access roads have undoubtedly affected the economics of rural villages, but not all people have been able to improve their situation. This paper records research carried out to compare the economic status of villagers before and after construction of a rural access road, built in 1998. The surveys allowed a picture to emerge of how different economic groups are affected by this new dynamic. It seems that rural access roads have an indirect impact by creating income generation opportunities. They have both positive and negative impacts, and which is greater may depend upon perspective. The economic disparities, studied using statistical indicators such as the Lorenz curve and Gini coefficient, lessened slightly, though it was people with capital who were most able to benefit from the new opportunities.

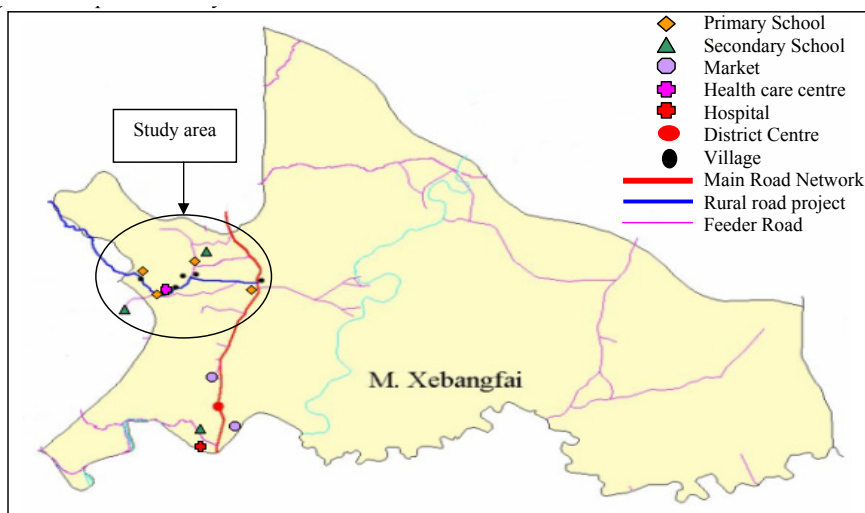
Poverty alleviation has been given first priority by the United Nations in its Millennium Development Goals plan of actions. The Lao PDR is considered a poor country both regionally and globally, with a low GDP and little infrastructure. Approximately 30.7% of the population live in poverty, with 33% of rural people and 23% of urban dwellers classified as poor (LECS 2003). Major reasons for rural poverty include the lack of infrastructure such as roads, markets, hospitals and educational institutions. Enabling remote areas to be accessed throughout the year could bring or at least ease the access of other facilities to the rural poor, and therefore help to reduce poverty (Warr, 2005). Data from 2004 indicates that total road length is 31,210 km, of which 4,500 km or about 14% is paved, and 10,097 km or about 32.35% is gravel road. The remaining 50% plus of Lao roads are earth, and most are impassable during the rainy season.

Roads help to create opportunities for local people to generate income, and enable traders to visit villages and link them to markets. Roads allow transport services to reach villages, improving accessibility to social services and information. These indirect impacts of rural road construction can therefore affect both the income generation and development of a community. Previous studies have concluded that rural access roads contribute to poverty reduction (Warr, 2005; Chamberlain, 2003; SIDA, 2004) and, because of their labour-based construction techniques, cause few environmental problems in the short term (Anderson, 1982). Khandker et al. indicate in their 2006 study that rural road investments benefit the poor more than the non-poor. This paper analyses possible beneficiary groups of already constructed rural access roads using specific parameters and indicators.

Study Area

This study analyses a rural access road project, built by labour-based road construction technique in 1998. The project covered four villages in Xebangfai district, Khammouan province: Ban Ghang Yai, Ban Som, Ban Nakhom Thong and Ban Nakhom Kao. The total sample was 100 people from these four villages. The condition of respondents was compared between two periods of time: before and after the road. Distinction was made between people in different income groups: a high income group or *the rich*, a middle income group or *the middle*, and a low income group or *the poor*.

Figure 1: Map of the study area



Identification of Income Groups

Economic Status

The economic status of people within the sample was calculated by identifying and grouping their income levels. Changes in the economic status of respondents between each period could thus be analysed. Economic status was calculated from:

- The annual income of individuals;
- Household assets such as televisions, radios, telephones, motorcycles, cars, etc;
- Agricultural assets such as land, paddy production, poultry and livestock (Table 1).

Annual Income

The respondents reported their own income per month or year. Farmers' income was calculated in terms of the poultry, livestock, rice and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) they could sell over a year. Non-farmer respondents reported a monthly salary, which was converted to an annual income by assuming twelve working months per year.

Household Possessions

Each family owns various household tools as well as electrical accessories to make life more comfortable and easier. All the items respondents had in their households were listed both before and after the project, and their value converted into monetary terms to make it easy to compare level of change. It was assumed that all items held the same value at both times as change in the price of the commodities was marginal.

Agricultural Assets

Nearly 95% of those who participated in the survey were farmers. Most of them had agricultural assets such as farm land, poultry, livestock and other agricultural products. The value of these assets was calculated as follows:

- Farm land value was calculated based on the area of land held, using the same unit cost for all respondents.
- Rice production was based on sufficiency of rice for household consumption throughout the year. Male adults in Laos are each assumed to consume 540 g of sticky rice per day and children under 12 years old 470 g per day. Females are assumed to consume 10% less than males (IDRC, 1999). Thus the amount of rice required by each household can be calculated and compared with the rice that family can produce in a year.
- If there was a surplus, income from rice production was calculated after deducting expenditure on agricultural inputs such as seed, fertiliser, and pesticide.
- If there was no surplus, rice production was not included in the calculation of economic status.
- The number of poultry and livestock belonging to each respondent was recorded. The numbers were multiplied by the unit cost of each type of animal, and added to the total economic status of respondents.

Table 1. Calculation of Economic Status

Annual Income	Description	Unit price (10,000 kip = c.USD1)
1. Any salaries	As reported by respondents	
2. Farm production		
• Land	Area x unit cost	6,000,000 kip/ha
• Rice	Rice production - Σ rice consumed in family = paddy surplus * * If positive, this value was included in the calculation, minus expenditure on agricultural inputs. * If negative, the value was not included.	Rice consumption assumption (grams per day, females 10% less than males) Male adult: 540 Male child: 470 Female adult: 486 Female child: 423
• Livestock	Number of poultry or livestock x unit cost	Kip Buffalo or Cow: 800,000 Horse: 500,000 Pig: 100,000 Duck: 18,000 Chicken: 15,000
3. Household assets	Asset x unit cost	Kip Refrigerator: 680,000 Pick-up truck: 16,000,000 Television: 600,000 Tuk-Tuk: 8,000,000 CD player: 380,000 Hand-tractor: 3,000,000 Telephone: 215,000 Motorbike: 1,400,000 Radio: 50,000 Bicycle: 70,000 Fan: 15,000 Cart: 10,000
4. Economic status	$(1 + 2 + 3) / \text{Number of household members}$	Kip

Source: Field survey, 2005.

Note: Calculation was based on the average value of each product/asset on the central market of the study area. Furniture was not considered in the calculation.

Identification of Income Groups

Income is influenced by how much, how many and what assets a family has in hand. All respondents in this survey were divided into three economic status groups. A mean and standard deviation technique was applied to classify the ranges of each income group, using minimum and maximum values: the mean was calculated for all values and then the standard deviation of each samples. The class interval for each income group was identified by the range shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Income groups, as identified through mean and standard deviation (SD) technique

Income group	Class interval	Income range (Kip)
Low	$< \text{Mean} - \frac{1}{2} \text{SD}$	$< 1,658,377$
Middle-low	$(\text{Mean} - \frac{1}{2} \text{SD}) \text{ to Mean}$	$1,658,377 - 3,208,979$
Middle-middle	$\text{Mean to } (\text{Mean} + \frac{1}{2} \text{SD})$	$3,208,979 - 4,759,581$
Middle-high	$(\text{Mean} + \frac{1}{2} \text{SD}) \text{ to } (\text{Mean} + 1 \text{SD})$	$4,759,581 - 6,310,182$
High	$> \text{Mean} + 1 \text{SD}$	$> 6,310,182$

Source: Field survey, 2005.

The three levels of middle income group were grouped together as a single classification, meaning that all respondents were bracketed into three single income groups (low, medium and high) throughout

the study. The number of samples in each different income group both before and after construction of the rural access road is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of samples in each income group

Income Group	Number of samples		Change	
	Before the road	After the road	No.	%
Low	42	31	-11	-26.2
Middle	51	61	+10	+16.4
High	7	8	+01	+12.5

Source: Field survey, 2005.

Livelihoods Before and After Road Construction

Income Generation

Before the road, farmers in the study area mostly relied on paddy cultivation, which was possible only once per year as the area was drought-prone and had no irrigation facility. After harvesting their crop villagers had no non-farm activity; their area was far from the city and could not be reached easily. There was thus no commercial activity in the village which could generate extra income. Without a good road, farm production - for domestic consumption only - was the major source of income.

Even after construction of the road, most of the people are still engaged in farming. However, villagers now have more opportunity for income generation as they can work on other farms as wage labourers during the farming season and in other jobs outside the village during the off-farm season. Some of those with capital and the ability to run a business have also invested in small businesses like grocery stalls, which they run from home.

After the road, more traders and middle-men started visiting the village looking to buy agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, poultry, livestock and NTFPs. This has encouraged villagers to start dry-season cultivation of crops such as cucumber, water melon, or cow peas to earn money for their households. Villagers can now go outside the village more often, and communication with the district and provincial centres has improved. People get more information from the local authority as well as enhanced connections with other villages. With the information they receive from outside and the incentive given by middle-men, they have started applying pesticides and manure or chemical fertilisers to increase production. Farmers can now sell their surplus cultivation to get income. With increased rice production and dry-season cropping, the middle income group in the village has grown following construction of the road.

Income Disparity

Income disparity in the study area was examined and quantified by calculating and drawing a Lorenz curve and Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient was calculated for both before and after the road construction project in order to visualise the effect of the project on income distribution in the study area.

Lorenz Curve

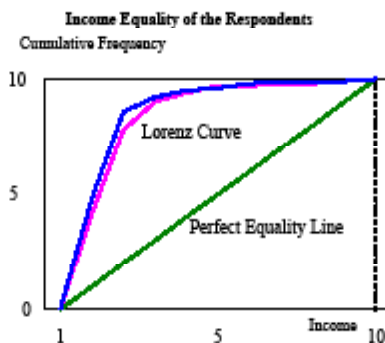
The Lorenz curve is a graphical representation of the proportionality of a distribution (the cumulative percentage of the values). The curve is compared with the perfect equality line, which is a linear relationship that plots a distribution where each element has an equal value in its shares of X and Y.

Table 4: Lorenz curve for income inequality of respondents

Income group (thousands of kip)	Before the Road					After the Road				
	Frequency	X	Y	X	Y	Frequency	X	Y	X	Y
<2,000	48	0.1	0.48	0.1	0.48	41	0.1	0.41	0.1	0.41
2,000-4,000	38	0.1	0.38	0.2	0.86	37	0.1	0.37	0.2	0.78
4,000-6,000	6	0.1	0.06	0.3	0.92	12	0.1	0.12	0.3	0.90
6,000-8,000	3	0.1	0.03	0.4	0.95	4	0.1	0.04	0.4	0.94
8,000-10,000	1	0.1	0.01	0.5	0.96	3	0.1	0.03	0.5	0.97
10,000-12,000	2	0.1	0.02	0.6	0.98	0	0.1	0	0.6	0.97
12,000-14,000	1	0.1	0.01	0.7	0.99	1	0.1	0.01	0.7	0.98
14,000-16,000	0	0.1	0	0.8	0.99	0	0.1	0	0.8	0.98
16,000-18,000	0	0.1	0	0.9	0.99	1	0.1	0.01	0.9	0.99
>18,000	1	0.1	0.01	1	1.00	1	0.1	0.01	1	1.00

Source: Field survey, 2005

Figure 2: Lorenz curve showing income disparity before and after the road



Source: Field survey, 2005.



The width of the gap between the Lorenz curves and the perfect equality line shows the relative income disparities between the rich and poor both before and after construction of the road. It can be argued from the graph that inequality has to some extent been reduced since the road was built. The exact value of this inequality can be quantified with a Gini coefficient (Table 5).

Gini Coefficient

The Gini coefficient was developed to measure the degree of concentration (inequality) of a variable in a distribution of its elements. It compares the Lorenz curve of a ranked empirical distribution with the line of perfect equality. This line assumes that each element has the same contribution to the total sum of the values of a variable. The Gini coefficient ranges between 0, where there is no concentration (perfect equality), and 1 where there is total concentration (perfect inequality). Here, the coefficient was calculated both for before and after the road construction.

i. Before the Road

$$G = [1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^K (\sigma_{Xi-1} - \sigma_{Xi}) (\sigma_{Yi-1} + \sigma_{Yi})}{\sum_{i=1}^K (\sigma_{Xi-1} - \sigma_{Xi}) (\sigma_{Yi-1} + \sigma_{Yi})}]$$

$$G = [1 - 1.72] = 0.72$$

The Gini coefficient of respondents' income before the road was 0.72 (Table 5), which implied very high inequality in the study area. There were many poor people with a few rich people. This could have been because most respondents could earn little income without market access or commercial activity. People relied on rice, which they could cultivate only once per year.

ii. After the Road

$$G = [1 - 1.68] = 0.68$$

The Gini coefficient of 0.68 from after the road was built shows that while respondents' income improved slightly overall, inequality remains very high. Why were some people able to improve their income level while many still could not? It could be that those who were very poor did not have capital to invest in increased cultivation. Therefore, their productivity remains low and with no surplus to sell they are unable to benefit from the new market access. In addition no credit was provided to the farmers, so many were not able to afford the cost of the agricultural inputs required to boost their farming.

In contrast, some villagers with capital managed to buy agricultural inputs or invest in small or medium businesses to generate income; others with certain abilities or skills found employment outside the village in order to support their families.

Table 5: Summary of Gini coefficient calculation

Income group (thousands of kip)	$\sigma X_{i-1} - \sigma X_i$ (B)	Before the Road		After the Road	
		$\sigma Y_{i-1} + \sigma Y_i$ (A_1)	$A_1 * B$	$\sigma Y_{i-1} + \sigma Y_i$ (A_2)	$A_2 * B$
<2,000	0.1	0.48	0.048	0.41	0.041
2,000-4,000	0.1	1.34	0.13	1.19	0.12
4,000-6,000	0.1	1.78	0.18	1.68	0.17
6,000-8,000	0.1	1.87	0.19	1.84	0.18
8000-10,000	0.1	1.91	0.19	1.91	0.19
10,000-12,000	0.1	1.94	0.19	1.94	0.19
12,000-14,000	0.1	1.97	0.20	1.95	0.20
14,000-16,000	0.1	1.98	0.20	1.96	0.20
16,000-18,000	0.1	1.98	0.20	1.97	0.20
>18,000	0.1	1.99	0.20	1.99	0.20
			1.72		1.68

Source: Field survey, 2005.

Transport

Transport becomes an even more crucial issue once road access becomes possible. Transport in Laos is mostly land-based, with roads supporting about 90% of freight and 85% of passenger traffic (LRD, 2004). A good road and transport network could open a window for poor people by allowing farmers to reach markets, sell their products and generate income.

Before the road, villagers in the study area rarely travelled. When they did, they mostly walked, spending little on transport. With the road, transport services became available within villages, but unfortunately these services were operated by private providers - people who had money had seized this opportunity. Initially villagers paid 4,000 kip for a return trip to the market, but recently, following increases in the price of fuel, the price of a return trip to the market reached 20,000 kip, five times higher than before. This has led to an increase in the number of villagers who choose to sell their produce to middle-men rather than travelling to market themselves. Some respondents reported that when they did go to the market, the money they made was just enough to cover their transport fee and they did not want to take that risk again. When selling to middle-men, although they received a lower price than at the market, they had more power to bargain with buyers and could choose to keep their produce for sale on another day if not satisfied with the price.

Findings and Discussion

Advantages of Rural Access Roads

Access roads bring many developments to rural areas and accelerate poverty eradication to some extent. Roads provide links to the city and market economy; access to markets influences commercial activities and stimulates income generation. Roads also increase access to social services such as schools and

health care. Children can save time by cycling instead of walking to school, while in emergencies patients can reach hospital at any time of day. Information also travels along the road: villagers can now get news from outside newspapers and farmers can update their knowledge of market prices.

Disadvantages of Rural Access Roads

Roads encourage increased expenditure and thus a higher cost of living: after gaining road access people need more money to purchase foodstuffs and consumer goods that they never bought when there was no road. It is also possible that roads lead to more environmental degradation, deforestation, migration, road accidents, and spread of HIV and other diseases.

Conclusion

Roads have both positive and negative impacts on communities: which is greater may depend upon different points of view. However, development without road access is impossible, and the important role of roads in reducing poverty cannot be ignored. The crucial issue on development of the rural access road network is *not how much benefit people will gain from the road*, but rather *how roads could benefit the poor more*. It is also unclear whether roads add to or reduce income disparity and equity. This study found slight decline in income disparity seven years after construction of a road, but intangible issues like equity are more difficult to measure.

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Prerequisites for Poverty Reduction

by Phisanexay Phouthongsavanh

If the Lao PDR is to exit the ranks of least developed countries, the first priority is to improve the livelihoods of the poor. To accomplish this, there is a need to develop all resources, including human and other physical resources in each poor locality. This article points out three significant elements which must be taken into account when creating poverty reduction policies: local development potential, human resources, and financial assistance. These three elements cover five major factors which help strengthen poverty reduction strategies: infrastructure, local economy, psychology, skill improvement, and finance. These factors are based on the premise that poverty differs in each locality depending on geography and livelihoods. The important thing however, is to encourage villagers to be more self-reliant in leaving poverty behind.

Poverty eradication encounters various problems, the seriousness of which depends on each locality's unique features. Based on that reality, this article analyses three elements that are related to poverty reduction strategies, namely local development potential, human resources and financial assistance (Figure 1). These three elements play a significant role in measuring the level of development in each village and in determining how successful the poverty reduction strategies implemented in a village are likely to be.

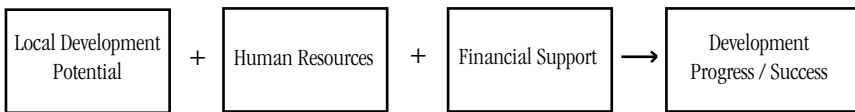


Figure 1: Three influential elements in the progress of development

From the three important elements above, five essential factors that help alleviate poverty can be identified. These factors, the 'prerequisites for poverty reduction', include infrastructure, local economy, psychology, skill improvement and financing. These prerequisites provide a basis for in-depth identification and assessment of the capability of poverty eradication policies in a particular area.

Local Development Potential

Local development potential refers to the economy and general livelihoods of villagers in a given area. This includes geographical setting, customs and rituals, consumer behaviour, income generation and daily food finding. Studying the local development potential is a necessity: what fields of development can be initiated in a locality and how? Solutions to this question can be found by analysing the first and second prerequisites for poverty reduction.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the first and foremost prerequisite because it opens doors through which development can enter villages. An absence of infrastructure decreases the ability of development fields to reach a locality. Inevitably, the problem of the cost of infrastructure development surfaces as budgets are limited and it usually takes an extended time for such work to be completed. In building infrastructure for rural villages, roads must have first priority because they bring activities from outside into villages and enable local livelihoods to be seen by the outside world through naturally occurring socio-economic mechanisms. Moreover, an area with road access has potential for trade, which is a means of generating income.

The Lao situation, where some villages consist of a small number of people living in a remote area, can be a great obstacle to building infrastructure. According to economics theory, development involves cost and benefit comparison because when a certain amount of money is directed to development of a certain facility, the budget for other facilities is unavoidably decreased.

Villagers living in localities with no possibility of road access in the future should be encouraged, but not forced, to relocate to where there is already road access or the possibility of road access. Where there is a road, there is a good chance that other public facilities will be built to facilitate production and trade. Relocated villagers must be provided with suitable production land and livelihood support while they are adjusting to the new environment. In areas with suitable conditions for road construction, the costs and benefits must be considered to determine whether money should be directed to constructing a road to reach that area, or should be used to develop other urgent requirements in an area where there is already road access.

Local Economy

The local economy factor refers to the ability to create trade in a specific area. Development specialists must identify strengths and weaknesses and then try to maximise the strengths and minimise the weaknesses. In local economies two points, production target and marketing, are worth focusing on (Sidavong & Sengsouvanh, 2003).

Production Target

In rural villages, production targets should be centred on agriculture and handicrafts. In terms of agriculture, it must be known whether farming or raising livestock is suitable for a particular locality. Production of crops, animals and home-made crafts must concentrate on commodities that are practical for each area.

Marketing

Marketing plans analyse how products can be sold: a product without a market is meaningless when it comes to improving the livelihoods of the poor. Products that do not meet demand result in a loss of money and energy. Villagers who have invested in products that do not sell may lose trust in organisations and policies to promote and expand local production. This provides significant hindrance to future development efforts.

Human Resources

Human resources, the basic skills of residents in rural villages, can be improved. This work is complicated by differences in customs, rituals, beliefs and general livelihood. To address these differences, the third and fourth prerequisites must be considered:

Psychology

Psychology has a role to play through special training designed to introduce new ideas and new ways of thinking to villagers. The goal is to establish trust in new development policies. If trust is present, villagers will respond positively to poverty reduction strategies. For trust to be sustained, however, work with villagers must be systematic, well planned and able to cover every aspect of community development. After trust is established, the ideas of economic calculations and family budgets can then be introduced.

Establishing Trust

Once villagers' trust is gained, development projects will be less likely to encounter serious disagreement with recipients, who will be more cooperative with the projects. Rural livelihoods are heavily dependent on nature, but often villagers do not know how to utilise natural resources sustainably. People in some rural areas are still engaged in slash-and-burn cultivation, which can be destructive to nature without guaranteeing an adequate livelihood. Therefore, villagers must be introduced to new forms of livelihood, but only after work to establish and strengthen the foundation of trust in government assistance, and to reassure people that poverty reduction projects will improve, not control, their livelihoods.

Introducing the Idea of Economic Calculations

When commodity production first appears in a village, in other words when household production is turned to production for market, then economic calculation will be required. Economic calculation is the comparison of costs and benefits to determine if a gain or loss will occur and whether it is worthwhile making an investment. To step up to commodity production, villagers must be taught how to ensure that production is on a low-cost basis but will receive maximum benefit. These concepts should be introduced not through a professional workshop but through informal, friendly and participatory discussions with the villagers. Recommendations must be given to the villagers in a simple and comparatively

comprehensible way. The economic calculations required take three basic forms: cost comparison, production comparison and production planning (Mingmanikhin, 2005). These must all be presented in an uncomplicated way that guarantees the villagers truly understand the concepts.

Introduce the Idea of Family Budgets

Villagers' income, unlike their daily expense, is irregular. Moreover, unforeseeable emergency situations which urgently require money can happen at any time. Therefore to ensure well being and avoid financial difficulties, each family should manage their finances, making plans and budgets for future expenses based on their household circumstances. Development organisations should encourage and help villagers to make family budgets. Financial management can be adapted to rural communities using simple forms and tables which can be explained without much complication.

Skills Improvement

Working skill is a crucial component in turning production for family consumption into production for markets: to increase production to supply markets, technical skills must be improved. If villagers are open to new ideas, skill improvement will run more actively and more effectively. Development specialists must focus on improving useful and necessary skills appropriate to the potential of the local economy, gradually turning abstract development ideas into concrete actions.

Skill improvement is usually practiced in one of three different forms: training at a targeted village, cross-village training or training through a model production group. These three methods differ in content and strategy. The amount of time required to gain visible results depends upon the trust among the participants and support from involved organisations.

Training at a Targeted Village

This training takes place at the targeted village and is open to unlimited numbers of participants. The better the cooperation, the more successful the training is.

Cross-Village Training

This involves a certain number of active family leaders joining cross-village training in other villages to learn lessons from other communities and to create strong ties between different localities.

Learning From a Village Model Production Group

This is an indirect way of training. A model production group is established in a village for people to observe and learn from. When villagers see the positive financial results of the model group, they will be motivated to imitate what the model group does.

The development of local skills, no matter what forms it takes, should allow villagers to participate in terms of expressing ideas and any difficulties they feel, especially as concerns their traditional livelihoods. The aim of skills transfer is to impress the villagers and make them want to really use their newly-learned skills. One of the most important things is that financial assistance should be provided once the training is finished, in order to hand people a chance to apply their new skills in actual production. After the training is finished, it does not mean that the mission is accomplished. The trainers or experts involved must closely follow, monitor, and assess what the villagers do after training and make recommendations accordingly.

Financial Assistance

The four prerequisites mentioned above might not develop or could be meaningless if the last prerequisite, financing, is missing.

Financing

This last prerequisite is crucial to the progress or success of turning villagers' household production to commodity production. Even with the best plans and strategies, projects cannot operate without capital funds. Many villagers in poor and rural areas lack both funds and effective technical skills and even if their skills are improved, they will still struggle without funds.

*Village banks would allow money to
circulate around villages*

Villagers require a certain amount of money to turn small-scale household production to larger scale commodity production. How can these funds be raised and in what form should they be provided? If in the form of loan, what criteria should be applied to ensure that it will not become a non-performing loan? In fact, one of the best possible ways of providing financial assistance is to grant loans for production purposes rather than for consumption purposes. Providing loans for production helps villagers increase output and consequently income. There are currently various projects participating in fund provision, with the Poverty Reduction Fund perhaps the most well-known. Low-interest loans for production purposes are also available from various banks.

In poverty alleviation work, strong finance can strengthen production and trade. Specific attention should be paid to microfinance. Usually less developed areas have meagre funds and limited distribution. To overcome that limitation the government should consider establishing village banks, which would allow money to circulate around villages. Such banks could provide loans to villagers who need money for production or trade, and would not require people to have a lot of assets to be eligible for credit.

The major element of a village bank is villagers themselves. Generally people have to deposit a sum of money monthly, with the minimum amount depending on each bank. The savings deposited can be used for future production purposes and at the same time are circulated in the form of loans to other villagers. These banks cannot rely only on customer deposits for their capital funds as villagers normally have small savings. Financial assistance is required from other organisations, in the form of low-interest loans from corporate banks and financial help from development organisations (Figure 2). For a village bank to have adequate money for circulation and to meet credit demand, active assistance is essential.

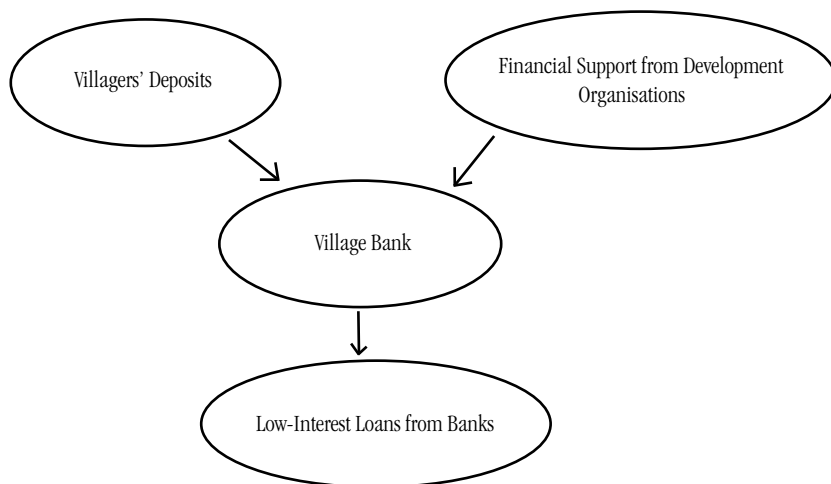


Figure 2: Sources of Village Bank Capital

The village bank itself will encourage villagers to save money. They will be motivated to save a sum of money to deposit. If they do not save they will not be eligible for larger loans, or will have to meet special conditions such as using assets as collateral. Such special conditions are usually almost impossible for villagers in rural areas to meet. Villagers who deposit money monthly are granted loans more easily. This process motivates villagers to be disciplined and save money rather than spending it unnecessarily. It also greatly promotes investment in rural areas.

After people in a community have completed training and want to make use of their new skills and knowledge, they are able to apply for a loan to use in a particular production or trade to generate a greater amount of income. Generally, microfinance works well in local villages. It understands local financial situations and can operate in all villages because the people themselves take part in setting it up and participate in every process. Village banks are not a dream but already exist in several villages such as Ban Khamhoung and Ban Natanmixay in Xaythani district, Vientiane Capital. These banks have performed excellently in managing villagers' finance. The capital funds of the banks are increasing, indicating security and a strong ability to help villagers.

A couple of questions may arise from Figure 2. Why do commercial banks not grant loans to the villagers by themselves? The reason is that their procedures for loan applications might be too long and complex for some villagers to follow; others might have absolutely no idea how to ask for a loan. Moreover, such banks do not know much about the financial background of villagers and are unlikely to approve loans. With village banks, applying for a loan is a shorter and quicker process. Village banks that receive low-interest loans from commercial banks can directly grant loans to rural people. A second question might follow: why are the capital funds provided by other organisations kept only in the village bank? This practice increases the capital of the village bank and circulates money around the village, creating more chances for villagers to make use of the money. If the capital were kept by various parties, the money left in the bank would not meet village demand.

Considerable attention should also be paid to the fact that the establishment of a village bank must follow a detailed and careful plan. Transactions must be recorded to ensure transparency and to make account statements convenient to create. However, registering for a bank account need not be overly complicated as the bank operates in a specific village where villagers normally all know each other very well and know how to find each other. Before a village bank is set up, studies are required on whether the locality has suitable conditions, such as infrastructure, geographical location and population density, for launching a village bank. After the bank is set up, it should work closely and cooperatively with other financial institutions such as provincial institutions or branches of commercial banks. These should provide consultancy to the village bank, because the villagers themselves might not have adequate knowledge and ability to operate the bank independently. Knowing that local villagers are limited in terms of human resources, the local government authorities should provide a lead in helping the village to set up and operate the bank, and should also make information on the project available to higher authorities, for future assistance. The financial institutions and/or banks involved must also work together with the village authority to monitor use of the bank's capital very closely, to ensure that it is used properly and according to the agreed purposes.

Conclusion

Poverty eradication work is challenging and is a national priority. As people in different areas of the country vary in terms of economic, social and cultural characteristics, poverty alleviation work must take into account the five prerequisites discussed here: infrastructure improvement, local economic potential, psychology, skill improvement training, and providing funds in the form of village loans.

Infrastructure, specifically roads, plays an essential role in developing local economies. Improving the way people think and their technical skills is also vital as people become linked to today's competitive markets. However, the improvement of ways of thinking and skills should take local knowledge and skills into account. These should be used suitably to develop local resources, maximising the benefit for the locality. Finance can be considered the determinant of the existence of the other four prerequisites. Without funds, development will be hindered or might not happen in the first place. Financial support does not mean always providing money to villagers, but rather giving training, setting up village banks and granting appropriate loans. This will enable villagers to manage their income and expenditure and

to begin making savings. Importantly, the money will be circulated around the village. The policy of this development is not to provide everything for villagers but to train them, with active assistance from aid organisations, to be more qualified and more self-reliant, and to encourage them to move to commodity production, which will lead them to sufficient livelihoods and ultimately free them from poverty.

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Glossary

Article 1 (Non-Formal Education)

perennial happening every year.

Article 2 (Rural Access Roads)

empirical adjective indicating knowledge gained from trial and experiment.

Gini coefficient used in statistics as a measure of inequality of distribution. Developed by an Italian statistician, Corrado Gini, the Gini index is the Gini coefficient expressed as a percentage, and is equal to the Gini coefficient multiplied by 100. The Gini coefficient is equal to half of the relative mean difference and is often used to measure income inequality. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gini_coefficient

mean adjective used in mathematics for *average* or intermediate.

Lorenz curve technique in statistics, a graph for showing the concentration of ownership of economic quantities such as wealth and income. See <http://www.answers.com/topic/lorenz-curve>.

standard deviation in probability and statistics, the square root of the variance in the dataset.

disparity gap, or difference between two things that are being compared.

livestock animals raised for food or sale.

middle-man trader who buys from one party and sells to another.

Article 3 (Poverty Reduction)

prerequisite action or characteristic that is needed before a plan can work.

microfinance credit (money) that is loaned to people on a small-scale to stimulate development.

Juth Pakai

Contributions Welcomed

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

The journal, published around three times a year, seeks voluntary written contributions from the development community, including national and international development practitioners, government officials, staff from bilateral and multilateral agencies and NGOs, journalists, academics, researchers or anyone with a keen interest in Laos. The journal is printed in English and Lao and is also available on the web at: www.undplao.org and www.unlao.org.

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