



CONCERN LAOS

ANNUAL REPORT FOR COMMUNICATIONS DEPT 2005

Lao PDR Country Context in 2004

Rural Development Programme

Project Aim:

The aim of the project is to improve the livelihood security of poor ethnic minority communities living in remote villages in Thapanthong District (in southern Laos) and Houay Xai and Pha Oudom districts in Bokeo province in northern Laos. The projects employ a strategy of capacity building and facilitating informed livelihood choices which allow villagers to plan and implement their own development initiatives with the support of the local government.

Activities:

There were a variety of capacity building activities but the focus was largely on learning by doing or from experiencing practical applications. Thus Concern's local staff act as mentors for their government counterparts and there is considerable on the job coaching. Study trips and exposure visit were facilitated for both villagers and government staff and as a result they gained ideas in different forms of agriculture, income generation, and better health, education and birthing practices.

Impact:

The projects use processes which allow women and men in the villages to plan activities according to their own needs and priorities. This process is empowering and when coupled with capacity building has greatly increased the sustainability of the activities beyond the life of the project. Many of the ideas that have been learned from visiting other projects have been applied by villagers including the construction of birthing huts for women instead of the traditional practice of giving birth in the field. These projects have impacted on the lives of over 10,000 people.

Microfinance Capacity Building Research (MCBR) Programme

Project Aim:

The aim of this national programme is to assist the government in developing and promoting a pro-poor microfinance policy framework for Lao PDR.

Activities:

With the regulations successfully in place, the programme sought to strengthen the capacity of the institutions monitoring and promoting the regulations in Lao PDR.

Impact:

The development of the pro-poor microfinance policy provides the greatest potential for the project to impact upon the lives of the economically active poor in Lao PDR. The central Bank of Laos estimates that about 100,000 people have already accessed microfinance services under the new regulations that Concern helped to create. These regulations provide security for savings (guaranteed by the state) and this has significantly increased confidence in the sector and interest of the poor in investing in microfinance institutions. Already under the new regulations, six microfinance projects have become registered microfinance institutions (MFI) in Lao PDR.

Disaster Preparedness Programme

Project Aim:

The Disaster Preparedness Programme aims to increase the livelihood security of villagers by reducing their vulnerability to disasters in southern Laos which were affected by flood, drought, agricultural pests, and disease

Activities and Impact:

Most successful was the introduction of 'rice banks' and micro credit schemes at the village level through the injection of capital and provision of training. Villagers have used these funds to start small enterprises which provide a buffer that will make them less vulnerable to crop failure and seasonal fluctuations. In addition clean water systems were installed to overcome the primary cause of preventable illness ie., diarrhea. Illness not only causes suffering and distress but in these marginal villages the cost of treatment and loss of productive labour constitutes a disaster for the poorest families. About 3,000 villagers directly benefited from this project.