

Communication for Empowerment in Lao PDR

An assessment of communication and media needs among ethnic peoples

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Acknowledgments

This assessment was produced under the initiative 'Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment (C4E) of Asia's Indigenous Peoples' in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok (RCB) led the implementation of this initiative.

UNDP RCB wishes to acknowledge the dedicated contribution of Dr. Roger Harris in leading the research process in Lao PDR and throughout the process of producing the draft report. Special thanks go to the national research team's local researchers, who assisted in data collection in three field locations and provided critical assistance on the ground.

UNDP RCB would like to express its gratitude to the Ministry of Information and Communication and the UNDP Country Office in Lao PDR for their invaluable support during the research process and, in particular, for organizing the national stakeholder consultations in March 2009. Particular appreciation must be given to Matthias Meier, Heather Shere-Massey and Sarah Ransom for their substantive contributions and dedication in making the C4E initiative meaningful in the specific context of Lao PDR.

Substantive inputs were provided by Chandra Roy, R. Sudarshan and Saara Frestadius in the review process. Furthermore, acknowledgement should be given to Lars Bestle and Ryce Chanchai for coordinating the Regional Initiative on C4E and for providing substantive revisions and their contributions to the overall writing and analysis of the report. Without the views and information provided by various organizations and individuals interviewed and surveyed, particularly the ethnic peoples in the three participating districts, this study would not have been possible.

Finally, special appreciation must be given to the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre and Communication for Social Change Consortium for their enriching collaboration and partnership and for providing funding mobilized through UNDEF. This made operation of this unique initiative possible at the global, regional and national levels simultaneously and planted the seeds for additional funding to enable expansion of the C4E initiative to other countries in 2010.

Foreword

Indigenous and ethnic peoples are highly marginalized and vulnerable. Largely excluded from mainstream development processes in many countries, their participation in decision-making and governance is limited. Many ethnic communities have neither the voice nor the means to influence and shape policies and outcomes affecting their lives.

On 13 September 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted, by an overwhelming majority, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).¹ The Declaration acknowledges that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, and that this has prevented them from exercising their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests. The Declaration is hailed as a landmark instrument and is gaining recognition as the most comprehensive standard by which to articulate the vision, aspirations and rights of indigenous peoples. The Declaration provides a benchmark to guide and inspire our work to promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights. It also recognizes the importance of media in reflecting indigenous cultural diversity.

In December 2007, in response to the need to implement the Declaration, UNDP's Regional Centre in Bangkok launched the Regional Initiative on Communication for Empowerment (C4E) of Asia's Indigenous Peoples.² The initiative emphasizes the role of communications as an empowering mechanism to enhance inclusive participation and governance.

Lao PDR is a country rich in cultural diversity, with 47 ethnic communities living in peace and harmony. Lao PDR has taken ambitious steps in providing access to information to remote communities as a prerequisite to development, and is engaged in implementing innovative pilot programmes in this field. The prospect of more inclusive participation, access to information and wider communication channels in Lao PDR has been stimulated by changes in the legal and policy environment towards civil society and the media and more generally towards poverty reduction and social inclusion of ethnic peoples.

As part of the overall effort to strengthen access to information and communication channels among indigenous and ethnic peoples in Asia, UNDP's Regional Initiative on C4E provided support for an information and communication needs and opportunity assessment as a preliminary approach to identify strategic C4E priorities for Lao PDR. The study was conducted in 2009 in selected areas, and key findings describe the underlying challenges to access to information, and identify opportunities for ethnic peoples to voice their concerns through appropriate communication channels at the national and sub-national levels. The report outlines key recommendations and strategic actions to enhance C4E for ethnic peoples in Lao PDR with particular attention to specific policy and programme interventions.

This study was made possible through a fruitful collaboration between the Ministry of Information and Communication (MoIC), UNDP Lao PDR, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre and the Communication for Social Change Consortium.

UNDP is dedicated to supporting inclusive media and access to information for marginalized and vulnerable groups in Asia due to the critical importance of these communication elements in making democratic processes participatory, transparent and accountable and inclusive. Evidence shows that access to information and a free, independent and pluralistic media environment encompassing rural and remote areas is essential for fostering inclusive democratic governance.

I hope that this report will contribute to the work of UNDP and other development agencies in enhancing and expanding opportunities for ethnic people to access information and communication channels in Lao PDR. We remain committed to making this a reality.

Sonam Yangchen Rana
Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Lao PDR
Resident Representative, UNDP Lao PDR

1 Laos voted in favour of the Declaration.

2 This is a joint project between the Asia Regional Governance Programme (ARGP) and the Regional Initiative on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Development (RIPP) of the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok.

Preface: A Step Towards Inclusive Participation

Communication underpins human development because it enables people to access, produce and transfer to others information that is important for their empowerment and progress. Through communication people are able to arrive at their own understanding of issues, to consider and discuss ideas, and to engage in national public debates. Communication thus enables people to negotiate, develop and act on knowledge, and it facilitates the formation of public opinion without which democracy cannot exist.

While being very different types of organizations and working with very different mandates, the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre and the Communication for Social Change Consortium share an understanding of the importance of communication as a tool and a methodology that can make development strategies more effective, more sustainable, more pro-poor and more gender sensitive.

In the case of UNDP, the recently approved 2008-2013 Strategic Plan recognizes that communication channels are key determinants of inclusive participation. Inclusive participation is a focus for the work of UNDP in the area of democratic governance. The approach is rooted in the knowledge that one of the challenges facing developing countries is the lack of inclusion and participation of poor and vulnerable groups in decisions that affect their lives.

The Communication for Social Change Consortium fundamentally believes that communication has the power to change societies. Participatory communication approaches can help us to better understand how commonly held social values and beliefs are nurtured and spread within cultures, and this knowledge is a powerful step towards helping people decide upon and begin to make the kind of changes they want and need in order to make their lives better.

Said differently, the Consortium helps people to obtain necessary skills and feel empowered enough to advocate for changes that will make their communities healthier, their countries stronger, and their families more productive. When people come together in dialogue – and plan and act together – it is the truest form of democracy.

One of the most exciting manifestations of democratic principles is understanding how information flows within communities and unleashing the voices of those people who are often not heard or seen. We have looked forward with great anticipation to the findings of the Communication for Empowerment pilot projects.

A few years ago, the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre developed the UNDP Guidance Note on Communication for Empowerment, drawing upon the expertise of the Communication for Social Change Consortium. The purpose of this Guidance Note was to turn the above general insights into mainstream planning tools that facilitate an understanding of the information and communication needs of the poor and the marginalized, hopefully also making this a permanent feature in national development planning processes.

This report is part of a series of pilot Needs Assessments in five Least Developed Countries, funded by a grant from the UN Democracy Fund. The country pilots will be followed by a global synthesis report that will reflect on the experience of the five pilots and provide tools for national actors to conduct their own assessments and to develop their own strategies for incorporating Communication for Empowerment into national planning processes and programmes.

We hope that this partnership between UNDP Lao PDR, other stakeholders in Lao PDR, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, and the Communication for Social Change Consortium can offer a contribution towards listening more effectively to the needs and views of communities throughout the country, and that these needs and views will increasingly inform our approach to development.

Denise Gray-Felder
*President, Communication for Social
Change Consortium*

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UNDP Oslo Governance Centre

Contents

Acknowledgments

Foreword

Preface: A Step Towards Inclusive Participation

Terms and Definitions

Executive Summary

Challenges in Communication for Empowerment 1
Opportunities for Communities for Empowerment 2
Recommendations on Communication for Empowerment 3
Proposed C4E Interventions. 4

1. Introduction and Background 7

The Concept of Communication for Empowerment 8
The C4E Practical Guidance Note and Project: Developing Media Strategies in Support of
Vulnerable Groups 8
The Regional Initiative on Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of
Asia’s Indigenous Peoples 9
The C4E Approach and Process in Lao PDR 12

2. National Overview Study 15

2.1 Inclusion and Development of the Ethnic Peoples 16

National Context. 16
Demographic Profile 17
Development Situation of the Ethnic Peoples 17
National policy and Legal Framework: Implications for Inclusion and Participation of
Ethnic Peoples 21
Key Challenges and Opportunities for the Ethnic Peoples 24

2.2 Media and ICT Landscape in Lao PDR 25

Overview of the Media Landscape 25
Media Policy and Regulations 27
Ethnic Peoples in the Media 28
Examples of Participatory Communication Channels for Ethnic Peoples 28
Overview of ICT and Telecommunication Landscape 29
ICT Policy and Regulations 31
ICT and Ethnic Peoples 33
Rural ICTs Initiatives. 33
Key Challenges and Opportunities for Ethnic Peoples in Media and ICT 35

3. Communication for Empowerment Field Study 39

Field Research Methodology 40
Findings in the Three Districts 42
Comparative Analysis of the Three Districts 50
Summary of Key Information and Communication Needs, Challenges and Opportunities
Identified through Field Research 51

**4. Analysis of the Findings from the National Overview Study and
Field Research 53**

Development Situation for Ethnic Groups 54
Communication and Information Needs 54

Appropriate Communication Channels for Empowerment, Inclusion and Participation of Ethnic Groups55
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5. C4E Recommendations and Proposals for National C4E Interventions 59

Improving the Enabling Policy Environment on C4E for Ethnic Peoples60
Proposed C4E Programme Interventions . . . . .	.61

Appendix I: Field Research - Household Survey Questionnaire . . . . .	.67
Appendix II: Research Data Nga District Oudomxay Province. . . . .	.70
Appendix III: Research Data Khoun District Xieng Khouang Province . . . . .	.79
Appendix IV: Research Data Dakcheung District Sekong Province . . . . .	.84
Appendix V: List of Meetings . . . . .	.91

List of Tables

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Three Districts . . . . .	.50
Table 2: Priority Areas for C4E Interventions . . . . .	.65

List of Maps

Map 1: Lao PDR . . . . .	.16
Map 2: Ethnic Group Population Percentages by Province . . . . .	.18
Map 3: Vulnerability Analysis . . . . .	.20
Map 4: Districts in Lao PDR . . . . .	.21
Map 5: Locations of Field Research for C4E Study . . . . .	.41
Map 6: Location of Field Study in Nga District . . . . .	.42
Map 7: Location of the Khoun District . . . . .	.45
Map 8: Location of Dakcheung District. . . . .	.48

Abbreviations

ARGP	Asia Regional Governance Programme
ADB	Asian Development Bank
C4E	Communication for Empowerment
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ETL	Enterprise for Telecommunications Lao
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IWGIA	International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs
LCDC	National Commission on Drug Control and Supervision
LDC	Least Developed Country
LFNC	Lao Front for National Construction
LNR	Lao National Radio
LTC	Lao Telecommunications Company
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoIC	Ministry of Information and Culture
NAPT	National Authority of Post and Telecommunications
NAST	National Authority of Science and Technology
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
OCISP	Oudomxay Community Initiative Support Project
OGC	Oslo Governance Centre
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RIPP	Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme
STEA	Science, Technology and Environment Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP RCB	United Nations Development Programme Regional Centre in Bangkok
CO	Country Office
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol

Terms and Definitions

Terms	Definitions
Access to Information and Communications	The study has examined information and communications separately and not as interchangeable concepts. On one hand, access to information is a precondition for empowering IPs through understanding of issues and rights. On the other hand, communication means the ability of the people to express their voice, participate in a dialogue and influence decisions that affect their lives. The two complement each other but also embody separate meanings, which are necessary for understanding and implementing the C4E study.
Communication for Empowerment (C4E) Approach	C4E encompasses the role of communications as an empowering mechanism to enhance inclusive participation and governance. It is based on the fundamental belief that social inclusion and participation through access to information and effective communication channels are integral parts of democratic governance and sustainable development for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups. In essence, the C4E approach focuses on the governance dimensions of poverty, which recognizes the lack of voice, participation and choice as a result from social exclusion and discrimination.
Indigenous peoples or ethnic peoples	<p>The concept of indigenous peoples is not used by the government in Lao PDR. Since the passing of the 1991 Constitution, the government uses the term <i>Son phao Lao</i>, usually understood as meaning “non-ethnic Lao”, or more general, “ethnic group” or “ethnic people”. Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those that have a historical continuity to earlier societies and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and a collective social and cultural identity that is distinct from dominant groups in society. United Nations human rights bodies, ILO, the World Bank and international law apply four criteria to distinguish indigenous peoples: (a) indigenous peoples usually live within (or maintain attachments to) geographically distinct ancestral territories; (b) they tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories; (c) they typically aspire to remain distinct culturally, geographically and institutionally rather than assimilate fully into national society; and (d) they self-identify as indigenous or tribal. Despite common characteristics, there does not exist any single accepted definition of indigenous peoples that captures their diversity as peoples. Self-identification as indigenous or tribal is a fundamental criterion for determining whether groups are indigenous or tribal, sometimes in combination with other variables such as ‘language spoken’ and ‘geographic location or concentration’.</p> <p>(Source: United Nations, <i>The Concept of Indigenous Peoples</i>, the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 19-21 January 2004; UNDP, <i>UNDP and Indigenous Peoples: A Practice Note on Engagement</i>, 2001; and IWGIA, <i>The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book</i>, 2008)</p>
Voice	‘Voice’ is defined as representation in formal institutions to enhance participation. In the C4E context, voice means access and representation in the media. It also extends to mean organizing and forming institutions to voice and articulate demands of excluded groups. The outcomes of voice, influence and agency are the extent to which poor and excluded people engage, influence and hold institutions that affect them accountable

Executive Summary

Ethnic peoples represent approximately 44 percent of the total population in Lao PDR. They remain marginalized and vulnerable as a group, excluded by and large from mainstream development processes and continuing to suffer from issues related to poverty, social exclusion and lack of access to basic social services.

The Communication for Empowerment (C4E) study encompasses both a national overview and a field study. The national overview includes a section on the situation of ethnic peoples and the status of their development, as well as an overview of the current media and information and communication technology (ICT) landscape. The field study includes findings and results of media research conducted in three different locations in Lao PDR inhabited by ethnic peoples. Through analysis of the national and field level assessments, the C4E study identifies both development challenges and opportunities and gives recommendations on how to enhance communication for empowerment of ethnic peoples.

This study emphasizes the need for inclusive communication channels and access to information as integral parts of democratic governance and sustainable development for ethnic peoples of Lao PDR. With limited formal and informal representation, and limited ability to express their views and let their voices be heard in society, ethnic peoples will continue to be further marginalized. This results in widening disparities and inequalities in Lao PDR, especially if the existing information and communication divide between urban and rural areas is not bridged in a meaningful way.

Challenges in Communication for Empowerment

Language barriers and literacy skills

Problems of poor communication identified in this study exacerbate the difficulties involved in addressing ethnic development to the extent that such development must take place within the framework of the languages and cultures of the ethnic groups concerned. Given the variety of languages and cultures in Lao PDR, this requirement alone places a huge burden on the development process. With the low literacy rates found among ethnic peoples, written media is not appropriate to assist in this process of communication. Oral communication is more appropriate, as it reaches everyone when it is conducted in the language with which the audience is familiar and it is clearly preferred by the ethnic people themselves over other forms of communication.

Ethnic groups largely un-organized and isolated

Based on the experiences and data of the field research, it can be said that ethnic people in Lao PDR are isolated along several dimensions. They are socially isolated as a result of illiteracy, even in their own language. This tends to cut them off from interaction among their own people living in neighbouring villages as well as from other ethnic peoples who live farther away but who may share a set of common ideals and goals. Many ethnic peoples are also physically isolated, living in remote locations with poor or non-existent communications and transportation. Many of the people who participated in this study rarely leave their villages.

Integration of community radio and other forms of media to overcome isolation and distance

The single most important form of contact with the world outside is the radio, which can be found in more than half the households and which has become a trusted and preferred source of information. Perceptions of radio are not conditioned by ownership; it is rated almost equally high by householders who own a radio as it is by those who do not. However, as a two-way form of communication, radio in Lao PDR has yet to achieve its full potential. Word-of-mouth remains the principal form of communication from villagers to authorities.

Scarce relevant information and media content

There are some serious gaps in the provision of information and media content for ethnic groups based on their needs and interests. Efforts to raise public awareness about how to use new media and ICT to improve quality of life are constrained by the lack of content in ethnic languages via suitable communication means. Much of the 'information poverty' in the study areas could be alleviated if the requirements for information and communication requirements identified in this study could be met. Principal among these requirements is the need for information in support of better education, health care, sanitation, agriculture, natural resource management, pest control, animal husbandry, enterprise development (especially for women), family planning and irrigation. In addition, local news would be welcomed as well as ethnically-specific cultural entertainment.

Limited representation and voices of ethnic peoples in the mainstream media

Beyond radio, other types of media have little presence (around 10 percent of households or less) in the villages studied, although access outside the household is much higher, which indicates a community-based approach to technology access. Nearly all sources of information are trusted and are useful, but the representation of ethnic issues is infrequent, except on radio. Again, with the exception of radio, the quality of media treatment of ethnic issues is rather moderate, and more would be welcomed, especially on radio. Ethnic peoples lack voices as they feel that they are generally unable to respond to anything they see or hear in all types of media. All types of media could serve ethnic issues better but, given the varying levels of access to different media, radio is regarded as the most promising. Ethnic people perceive radio as a crucial communication channels for development opportunities within their communities.

Opportunities for Communities for Empowerment

The study identifies emerging opportunities to overcome some of the challenges in improving access to information and communications for ethnic communities.

Improving an enabling legal environment for civil society and media

A new law and legal framework for registration of civil society organizations, a new media law enhancing the role of the mass media, and an increasing number of participatory communication initiatives (e.g. community radio pilot projects) have contributed to an enabling situation for progress. They set a course for continuing a positive trajectory toward inclusive participation for ethnic peoples with better access to information and inclusive media as an entry point.

Infrastructure and opportunities for new media and ICT in the remote rural areas

Currently, Lao PDR has a relatively advanced backbone infrastructure for ICT, which provides opportunities for expanding communication outreach in the remote rural areas. However, local content, application and usage of ICT still has little relevance for marginalized and vulnerable groups, including ethnic peoples.

An emerging new media and networked communication environment tapping into modern means of communications via the Internet, wireless technologies and mobile telephony will increasingly influence the space for communicative participation and inclusion of ethnic peoples. Research findings indicate that remote and rural areas will significantly benefit from improved communication channels through the convergence of traditional and new communication technologies. Simultaneously, emergent media and communications technology has great potential to enhance provision of services and empower the local communities to participate in development and address their key concerns.

Mobile phones: the promise of the future

In Lao PDR, as in most other developing countries, mobile telephony has experienced a dramatic increase in its penetration among all levels of society due to liberalization in the telecom sector,

cheaper hand-sets and the introduction of pre-paid services. Further cost reductions in the coming years, and telecommunications industry innovations in service and application development, might prove this trend to be the single most important development in terms of expanding communicative space for ethnic development and mitigating societal and economic isolation.

Recommendations on Communication for Empowerment

The C4E assessment yielded a number of recommendations generated through analysis of the findings and following inputs obtained at a national stakeholder meeting in Vientiane in March 2009. The recommendations encompass the following key areas:

- Improving the enabling policy environment on C4E for ethnic peoples;
- Proposing C4E programme interventions aimed at increasing ethnic peoples access to information, communication channels, voice and participation in governance processes.

Improving an enabling policy environment on C4E for ethnic peoples

An enabling policy and legal environment is an essential precursor for media to increase access to information and communication channels among ethnic peoples in Lao PDR, thereby becoming a mechanism for inclusive democratic governance.

Both the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) and 6th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP) recognize the critical importance of access to information as a means to enhance socio-economic development in the 47 poorest districts in Lao PDR. Both plans emphasize the importance of communication tools in providing relevant information for empowerment, local development and poverty eradication.

Introduction of an access to information policy and legislative framework can further strengthen civic engagement in governance processes and help expand the role of the media in Lao PDR.

To drive this process, proposed recommendations are:

- **Access to information policy:** As part of other programmes on peoples' participation in governance, UNDP could take the lead in promoting an access to information policy in Lao PDR in collaboration with MoIC. Particular attention could be paid to access to information for ethnic peoples.
- **Media assessment:** Conditions for community radio and combinations with other new media channels are important steps toward expansion of the communicative space for ethnic peoples. The media assessment based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators Framework¹ could help to prioritize actions of the government and those of the international donor agencies. This analysis would focus on the enabling environment for the media to strengthen communication outreach and diversity. Priority actions should aim at improving the capacity and enabling legal environment of all forms of media and communications, particularly with a view to remote rural areas. This could also stimulate rural development.
- **National committee:** In order to take the C4E recommendations forward, a national multi-stakeholder committee on information, communication and media should be established with the key tasks to: 1) continue assessment of the C4E situation; 2) formulate a national strategic plan to expand inclusive communication channels; and 3) integrate new media and ICT into other forms of communications to promote inclusive participation and voices of ethnic communities.
- **Support to CSOs:** Enhance awareness and capacity of the new civil society organizations (CSOs) and associations with particular focus on how to utilize communication and media options to enhance participation in public dialogues or discussions at the national and sub-national levels.
- **CSO and media collaboration:** Establish mechanisms for collaboration between CSOs/associations, particularly those relating to ethnic peoples and mainstream media as well as community radio as a way to enhance their voices in the public discourse.

¹ UNESCO (2008), Media Development Indicators: A framework for assessing media development, The International Programme for the Development of Communication. Paris, 2008.

- **Support to national media:** Support Lao National Radio and TV to improve their reporting on ethnic issues at national and sub-national levels.

Proposed C4E Interventions

Scaling up community radio in Lao PDR

At the national level, scaling up any strategic C4E programme would entail more than merely replicating activities that already exist. A wider programme, perhaps on a national scale, would necessarily need to be institutionalized with a set of working practices and procedures capable of being followed by many employees. Accordingly, such a programme should be accompanied by mechanisms for building capacity and sharing experiences as well as generating a forum for further development of the concept.

Capacity development at the national level includes:

- Legal advice and support
- Training and planning assistance
- Financial management and resource mobilisation
- Community research and impact assessment
- Partnership of relevant stakeholders
- Local ownership

Combining community radio with internet

The introduction of additional ICTs to community radio represents an innovative opportunity in Lao PDR. The Internet can intensify radio's impact in a number of ways by offering the ability to share and disseminate knowledge and information among development agents, policy makers and the beneficiaries themselves. However, in order to have a significant impact on development programmes, ICT services must be readily accessible and meaningful to broad segments of the rural population and the information they carry must be adapted and disseminated in formats and languages that the recipients and participants can comprehend. Experience with community telecentres that provide shared access to computers and the Internet and other ICTs indicates that they are capable of effectively supporting interventions for education, health, agriculture, enterprise development and cultural and social enrichment. While telecentres deliver information to communities, radio can be used in addition to deliver it directly into households.

Mobile phones: the promise of the future

Mobile phones present a further opportunity for technology synergy. The growth and potential impact of mobile phones are phenomenal. Mobile phones are helping to deliver on every one of the Millennium Development Goals.² Further increasing mobile penetration into the poorest sections of society will require low-cost handsets and services, innovative funding schemes and, most of all, more efficient markets. Research evidence suggests that it will be possible to almost double current levels of penetration before provision of services becomes uneconomical.³ Moreover, because many developing countries such as Lao PDR are unencumbered by legacy assets, they have the opportunity to leap-frog to newly-available, affordable technologies; mobile and wireless networks will play a large role in this regard.

Development of mobile services in Lao PDR has been left largely to the private sector, but these services also can be incorporated into formal development programmes. The volume of telephone calls to the Khoun Community Radio Station is indicative of the potential of telephonic communications and bolsters the case for integrating mobile access into community radio services, even if only at the level of one phone per village.

2 Richard Heeks and Abi Jagun, "Mobile phones and development: the future in new hands?" Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex available at <http://www.id21.org/insights/insights69/art00.html> (accessed on 9 December 2009)

3 *ibid.*

Community e-Centres

ICTs and community radio can contribute to effective programmes in all areas of the MDGs. In the case of telecentres, experience indicates that they are capable of effectively supporting interventions for education, health, agriculture enterprise development and cultural and social enrichment. For sustainability, they need to be good at a minimum of two of these areas, preferably three or more. Telecentres under UNESCO are called 'multipurpose community e-centres' to emphasize this characteristic.

The Internet is already emerging as a powerful force for development and poverty alleviation. Access to the Internet is usually provided to rural communities in the form of community telecentres.⁴ Community telecentres are seen as a tool for achieving development goals, even for least developed countries (LDCs). Nepal and Bangladesh (both LDCs) have embarked on national programmes for the widespread deployment of community telecentres for delivering Internet access to poor rural populations, following some years of experimentation and in line with similar programmes in other developing countries. Although telecentres are in their infancy in Lao PDR, the experiences that have accumulated in recent years in other countries in Asia means late-comers can jump-start the piloting phase by adopting the set of recommended practices that has emerged, thereby moving directly into a national commitment to rural development underpinned by Internet-based information services.

Effective communication systems and channels can provide development agencies, and governments, with a bridge to extend democratic governance and development to the most remote corners of the country. They can also provide ethnic groups with a space to have a voice and participate in decisions that affect their livelihoods.

⁴ Roger Harris, *Information and Communication Technologies for Poverty Alleviation* (KL, UNDP-APDIP, 2004), available at <http://www.apdip.net/documents/eprimers/poverty.pdf> (accessed on 9 December 2009)





1. Introduction and Background

1. Introduction and Background

The Concept of Communication for Empowerment

The important role of communication in development processes has been acknowledged by the development community at many levels and for many years. The specific understanding and concept of communication in development is, however, ever-changing. For example, within the United Nations, communication for development has been emphasized mainly in relation to specific development challenges such as HIV/AIDS, education and agricultural development. Today, communication for development is primarily seen as a people-centred approach that can help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.⁵

Among the various definitions of ‘communication for development’ generated at the UN Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development, there seems to be a general consensus to define it as a participatory and two-way process, and distinct from external relations and public relations. This is further emphasized by the formal United Nations definition of Communication for Development, adopted in General Assembly resolution 51/172 Article 6:

“Communication for development stresses the need to support two-way communication systems that enable dialogue and that allow communities to speak out, express their aspirations and concerns, and participate in the decisions that relate to their development.”

The concept of Communication for Empowerment [C4E] has emerged to emphasize and address the specific information and communication needs of poor and vulnerable groups. Communication for Empowerment was initially introduced and conceptualized by the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) and the Communication for Social Change Consortium in 2006. The C4E approach emphasizes the role of communications as an empowering mechanism to enhance inclusive participation and governance. It is based on the fundamental belief that social inclusion and participation through access to information and effective communication channels are integral parts of democratic governance and sustainable development for poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups. Finally, the C4E approach focuses on the governance dimensions of poverty, which recognizes in essence the lack of voice, participation and choices as a result of social exclusion and discrimination.⁶

The C4E Practical Guidance Note and Project: Developing Media Strategies in Support of Vulnerable Groups

In 2006, the Oslo Governance Centre released a practical guidance note on Communication for Empowerment⁷ that explains the importance of communications to poverty reduction and outlines a range of ways that UNDP and other development practitioners can best enhance C4E based on the first step of conducting information and communication audits.⁸ At present, the opportunities for poor and vulnerable groups to voice their concerns through effective communication channels have not been sufficiently identified and documented, particularly at

5 See, United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A63/180), 63rd Session, *Communication for Development Programmes in United Nation System* 28 July 2008.

6 See, UK Department for International Development, *Reducing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion*, DFID Policy Paper (London, DFID, September 2005).

7 See, United Nations Development Programme, *Communication for Empowerment: Developing Media Strategies in Support of Vulnerable Groups*, Practice Guidance Note (Oslo, UNDP, March 2006).

8 The Practical Guidance Note aims to demonstrate that media can play a crucial role in empowering vulnerable and marginalized groups. This can best be achieved if media support and media capacity development is directed in a way that enables the media to better respond to and reflect the information and communication needs of these groups. The Note underscores the particular importance of radio in communication for empowerment strategies because of its reach, accessibility to the poor and increasingly interactive character. It further explains that the media landscape in most developing countries has undergone a revolution over the last 15 years. This has been marked by increased democratization; an ensuing liberalization of media, particularly of broadcasting; a subsequent decline in government support to former monopoly broadcasting; and greater availability of new and more cost effective information and communication technologies. Media in many of these countries have been transformed from monopolistic and government-dominated systems to increasingly diverse types.

local levels. Assessment of communication needs and opportunities in a C4E approach is seen as the first instrumental step. This critical step has largely been ignored by national development planning processes and policy makers.

The intended outcome of the information and communication audits is to identify key challenges and opportunities for interventions to empower the poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups through better access to information and enhancement of the skills necessary to engage with the media and take advantage of communication facilities. In so doing, they can exercise their voices and participate more inclusively and meaningfully in decision-making and development processes affecting them.

In 2007, with funding from the United National Democracy Fund (UNDEF), the Oslo Governance Centre initiated C4E pilot projects focusing on the information and communication needs assessment in five LDCs: Ghana, Madagascar and Mozambique in Africa and Lao PDR and Nepal in Asia. These C4E pilot projects, which were completed in January 2010, aim to identify information and communication gaps and establish a national stakeholder forum to take the key findings and recommendations forward. The key outputs from the C4E initiative include:

- A national C4E report with the key research findings;
- A national stakeholder group comprised of representative from the UN system, media, government, bilateral partners and civil society to implement the strategic C4E interventions after the completion of the national C4E report;
- A series of gap-filling projects emerging from the national needs assessment process as described in the national report. These projects will be driven forward by the national stakeholder group;
- A C4E assessment tool, which will continue to be improved based on lessons from the national studies. The tool will be made available for governments, United Nations agencies, international donor organizations and community-based organizations and institutions. This aims to ensure that the information and communication aspect of good governance will be incorporated into the strategic planning process at all levels.

The Regional Initiative on Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples

The African pilot projects were implemented directly by the Oslo Governance Centre in collaboration with the respective UNDP Country Offices. The two Asian pilot projects were implemented through UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok (RCB) under the Asia Regional Governance Programme (ARGP) in partnership with the Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme (RIPP). For this reason, the C4E studies in Asia are part of the regional initiative on "Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples"⁹ which in parallel had just commenced. Several synergies between the two initiatives were identified and it was agreed that a regional-level engagement would be worthwhile to optimize the use of scarce resources.

In addition to Lao PDR and Nepal, the Asia regional C4E initiative also aims to engage other countries in the Asia-Pacific region in collaboration with interested UNDP Country Offices. RCB and the Oslo Governance Centre share the same overall objectives. Both offices' initiatives are based on the principle that communication is a central determinant of inclusive participation, which is also a key result area of UNDP's global strategic plan in the area of democratic governance. The overall approach is predicated on inadequate social inclusion and participation of the poor and vulnerable groups in developing countries in development decisions affecting their lives.

The Asia regional C4E initiative consists of various follow-up activities at regional and national levels. In this regard, the C4E study and needs assessment is an initial preparatory step that serves as a foundation to formulate policy and programme interventions to overcome challenges and meet the needs for information and communication of indigenous and ethnic peoples at national and community level.

9 The Communication for Empowerment (C4E) study and assessment in Lao PDR is under the UNDP Regional Project called "Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples" implemented jointly by the Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme (RIPP) and the Asia Regional Governance Programme (ARGP) of UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok (RCB).

The strategic intent of the national C4E study in Lao PDR is to establish the development context of the ethnic groups in the country with particular reference to the media, information and communications. It aims to propose specific interventions that can help to alleviate some of the challenges faced by ethnic peoples in Lao PDR, including the effective media and information and communication technologies (ICTs). The proposals arising from this study help to formulate inputs for a subsequent component of the regional initiative that will then focus on the implementation of these strategic C4E interventions.

Within the Asia regional C4E initiative, a number of participating countries in the Asia-Pacific region will contribute towards greater regional endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), particularly the use of media and ICTs to promote the realization of the rights enshrined in the Declaration. Accordingly, through global and regional partnerships, the C4E initiative will leverage the knowledge and experiences from a wide range of country-level activities that will assist in advising and strengthening one another through a coordinated set of South-South cooperation, while bringing indigenous and ethnic peoples together with common concerns and fostering unity to effectively address them.

In line with these wider intentions, the regional project has four outputs:

- Output 1: Information needs and media-related legislative conditions for indigenous peoples in Asia identified, and awareness of policy makers improved
- Output 2: Increased capacity of indigenous journalists and other media professionals in reporting on indigenous peoples issues and in harnessing ICTs and new media
- Output 3: Strengthened capacity of indigenous people's organizations/communities in setting up or improving a number of indigenous community media and ICT interventions (e.g. local radio, website, multipurpose telecentre, etc.) and to test applications of common interest (e.g. land, culture, poverty, health, access to information, freedom of expression)
- Output 4: Knowledge of indigenous media and ICT for development experiences is enhanced through research initiatives and the establishment of a 'community of practice' for sharing of good practices

The Asia regional C4E initiative developed a document to describe the approach and research process being used in the country studies.¹⁰ Arising from the C4E study in Lao PDR and other participating countries, it intends to provide a procedural manual for implementing the forthcoming country-level activities under the Project for Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples.

The methodology for the C4E study and assessment represents a structured approach to promoting an understanding of the situation with regard to the ethnic groups in Lao PDR and their development context with particular reference to the media, information and communication. The approach comprises four sets of activities:

- A national overview study, which draws on existing knowledge and data to formulate the overview of the ethnic groups in Lao PDR;
- More specific analyses of the relationships between the ethnic groups, the media and ICTs;
- Focused grassroots research involving selected ethnic communities;
- Presentation of the findings to relevant stakeholders and the formulation of proposals for specific programme interventions to enhance flows of information and communication to and from ethnic groups, especially concerning their development prospects and well-being.

In Asia, the C4E approach has been adapted to focus more closely on indigenous peoples. Therefore, in conducting the C4E study, special attention has been paid to the involvement of indigenous communities as well as their equal and informed participation, to have legitimate representation of the indigenous peoples. Indigenous participation is also vital for the process that will lead to greater inclusion.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Research and Activity Guideline for National C4E Study: Information and Communication Needs and Opportunities Appraisals* (Draft), January 2009. Unpublished Document.

In Asia, development of the C4E methodology has been guided by the following principles:

- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has been largely welcomed by indigenous peoples around the world, enhances legitimacy, importance and urgency to strengthen efforts to realise these rights. Particularly Article 16 on media and communication has guided the methodology;¹¹
- The flow of information among and between indigenous peoples and the rest of society is one of the most significant factors contributing towards the realisation of these rights, especially when the means for generating such information flows — ICTs and the media — are under the ownership and control of the indigenous peoples themselves;
- The efforts to ensure robust and continued improvement in the use of information and communication should be based on the ownership and management arrangements of indigenous peoples, which will empower their communities to achieve legitimate rights and desired communication outcomes.

In accordance with these principles, the methodology adopted by the Asia regional C4E initiative presents an initial step for empowerment of the ethnic groups participating in the study.

Through field research, the methodology endeavours to combine the national-level perspective of the situation related to all ethnic groups in Lao PDR with a more focused and in-depth analysis of the realities facing ethnic groups in three selected locations. This ‘T-shaped’ research approach is characterized by: 1) a broad investigation at the national level; and 2) a narrow but deep analysis at the local level. This serves as a reality check for researchers while providing the opportunity to draw conclusions and propose interventions that are based on first-hand evidence and direct experience at the local level.

The research and activity guideline, which has been designed for carrying out 1 of the regional C4E initiative, includes information and communication audits in selected countries and locations. It is based on the following key steps:

Country Level Activity	Description
1. Formation of partnerships	An initial scoping mission conducted by the UNDP Regional Centre Bangkok in conjunction with the UNDP Country Office to identify relevant stakeholders and to assemble a team of project partners from appropriate government, private, civil society and indigenous and ethnic peoples organizations.
2. National overview	National level research that outlines the development context and situation of the country's indigenous and ethnic peoples.
3. ICTs, media and indigenous peoples	Overview analysis of the involvement of indigenous peoples with ICTs and the media, their representation and treatment in mainstream media and the extent to which they have ownership of their own media.
4. Field research	Grass-roots examinations of the situation within particular representative indigenous communities, taking the form of Indigenous Communities' Information and Communication Needs and Opportunities Appraisals. These comprise village-level assessments based on ethnographic tools that include group discussions, household surveys and informant interviews. The focus is on the present and potential use of information and communication.
5. National workshop — internal	Feedback to stakeholders on the findings and proposals of activities 1-4. Consensus-building on proposals for Output 2 and 3.
6. National C4E report	Based on the stakeholder feedback, formal documentation of the findings and proposals.

Source: Indigenous Voices: Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples, Concept Note, Democratic Governance Team, Regional Centre in Bangkok.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/295, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 13 September 2007. See, Article 16: 1 "Indigenous Peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination; 2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity."

The C4E Approach and Process in Lao PDR

The national C4E study and assessment benefitted from the commitment of the UNDP Country Office management and the democratic governance practice team unit. UNDP CO in Lao PDR took a leading role in identifying a local research team that included researchers from various ethnic backgrounds and languages.

The entire C4E exercise in Lao PDR was large in scope due to the amount of information and data collected — more than any other C4E pilot. This was possible due to the CO's funding contribution for the local research efforts and for the national stakeholder meeting, including participation of district-level stakeholders. In this process, UNDP Country Office in Lao PDR played a critical role in fostering synergies among other national development programmes and initiatives as well as managing the programmatic support to maximize gains from the national consultation process.

Through close collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Culture, the UNDP CO gained government support to conduct research and ensure ownership of the C4E study at the national level. The Ministry of Information together with government representatives facilitated field research at the district level. It also took a leading role in hosting and organizing the national stakeholder consultation.

In addition, a Democratic Governance Fellowship was granted on C4E by Oslo Governance Centre.¹² The fellowship paper that resulted from this has contributed substantially to the analysis and findings presented in the C4E study.

The C4E research was closely linked to the “Khoun Radio Support Project: Bringing local news to local people in Xieng Khouang,” which was initiated by the UNDP Country Office in Lao PDR. This project aims to increase access to information, especially for ethnic peoples and vulnerable groups in the country. The C4E study and process in Lao PDR sought to identify some potential options for Khoun Radio, including its future prospects, which were debated and discussed at the national stakeholder meeting in Vientiane in March 2009.

Finally, the Asia regional C4E initiative hopes that the C4E pilot project in Lao PDR will continue to evolve along with the regional C4E initiative and provide lessons learned for other participating countries. Experiences from Khoun Radio in Lao PDR will be useful for countries facing similar governance and development challenges in the region. Simultaneously, the regional and global C4E initiatives will create greater synergies through the South-South cooperation and exchange of experiences between Asia and Africa.

12 Matthias Meier, *Empowering Indigenous Peoples in Asia through Communication*, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre and Regional Centre in Bangkok, Democratic Governance Fellowship Programme (UNDP, December 2008). http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs09/Matthias_Meier_ALL.pdf





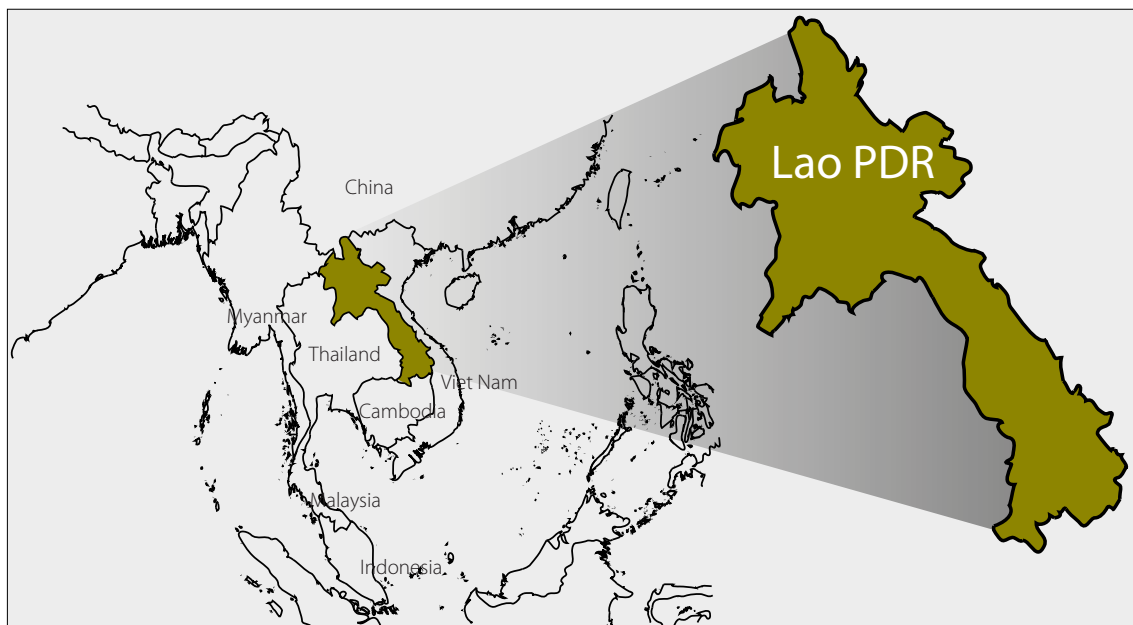
2. National Overview Study

2. National Overview Study

2.1 Inclusion and Development of the Ethnic Peoples

The following chapter provides an overview of the situation of the intended beneficiaries of the C4E initiative, the ethnic peoples of Lao PDR. It establishes the development context and conditions under which the initiative operated, Particular attention is given to their development challenges and opportunities, focusing on the participation of ethnic peoples in mainstream development and governance processes in the existing legal and policy framework in Lao PDR, particularly in national development plans and policies.

Map 1: Lao PDR



National Context

Lao PDR is a landlocked country and among the 13 so-called Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the Asia-Pacific Region. It ranks 133rd out of 179 countries in the 2008 UNDP Global Human Development Index (HDI). The country is characterized by a very high degree of diversity in geography, ethnicity and languages. It is also marked by poor physical infrastructure and a high incidence of poverty, in particular in rural areas. Public services typically do not extend to remote areas, leaving rural populations — often ethnic minority groups — with inadequate access to health care and education. Lao PDR is envisioned by some to become the 'power producer country of South-East Asia', generating hydropower from the Mekong River and distributing the electricity to neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, this remains a distant dream for Lao PDR due to its limited capacity and the conflicting interests among countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The economic growth it has experienced in recent years is largely underpinned by investments in hydro power and mining. The Government aspires for the country to shed its status as an LDC by the year 2020.¹³

Lao PDR is a one-party state. Authority is concentrated in the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, which took power in 1975 and asserts itself primarily through four institutions: government, military, bureaucracy and mass organizations. In 1986, the government initiated the New Economic Mechanism, a process of economic reform and liberalization that in essence resulted in abolishing the socialist command economy, increasing the role of market forces and encouraging foreign investment, while maintaining stability and political order.¹⁴

¹³ See *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Demographic Profile

Nearly 44 percent of the total population of Lao PDR are regarded as members of various minority ethnic groups. Around 50 percent to 60 percent of the Lao population are known as *Lao Loum* (Lowland Lao). This group has traditionally had a dominant influence in culture, politics and the economy. Lao is the official language. The Lao 2000 census designated 47 ethnic groups (later increased to 49) with more than 160 sub-branches¹⁵ (see Map 2: Ethnic Group Population Percentages by Province).

Ethnic classification in Lao PDR is highly debated and has led to lengthy discussions among scholars. The groups are very diverse in cultural and linguistic terms as well as in their adaptive responses to the natural and social environment and their livelihood systems. There are four major ethno-linguistic groups in the Lao PDR: Tai-Kadai, Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic), Hmong-Mein and Tibeto-Burmese. They are officially referred to as 'ethnic groups' or 'ethnic peoples' or by the name of the group of which they are a member, in preference to the term minority.

Concepts that have influenced the interactions of the government and ethnic peoples in Lao PDR include modernization and national security and unity. This is clearly demonstrated in the government's plan for rural development, which is based on the demographics of the country — largely ethnic groups. As a result, the national development of Lao PDR, especially relating to poverty reduction efforts, has been shaped by three factors: 1) the high degree of ethnic diversity; 2) the high proportion of the population consisting of ethnic peoples, most of whom reside in the rural areas; and 3) a predominantly rural population (around 77 percent of the entire Lao population lives in rural areas).

Development Situation of the Ethnic Peoples

Lao PDR has a low population density compared to other countries in Asia, with about 20 persons per square kilometre. Extensive natural forests allow people to live within a subsistence economy¹⁶ with little cash-flow but obtaining the basic necessities. Around 44 percent of the population of Lao PDR are estimated to live in poverty (2000 data).¹⁷ These people, comprising about 300,000 households scattered in more than 6,300 villages, are largely small farmers dependent on rural livelihoods in remote and highly diversified biophysical environments. Generally, they have undergone several forms of disruption. The vast majority of these rural poor belong to the country's many ethnic groups.

Whilst there is a general recognition that many of the ethnic groups suffer unacceptable disadvantages in areas such as health and education, the government generally favours 'non-discriminatory' approaches. This approach is partly rooted in ethnic divisions and insurgency experienced during the decades of armed conflict that continue to resonate today.

Disaggregated data is lacking. The United Nations Common Country Assessment (2006) concluded that "data disaggregation by sex, location and ethnicity is improving but does not yet support adequate analysis and policy formulation." Most official statistics in relation to poverty and development are not disaggregated by ethnic groups, thus limiting the space for targeted policy-making. Data collection typically considers the ethnic dimension but comparisons along ethnic lines are discouraged. This point is clearly illustrated in the recently produced Socio-Economic Atlas of Lao PDR, which depicts the data collected for the 2005 census.¹⁸

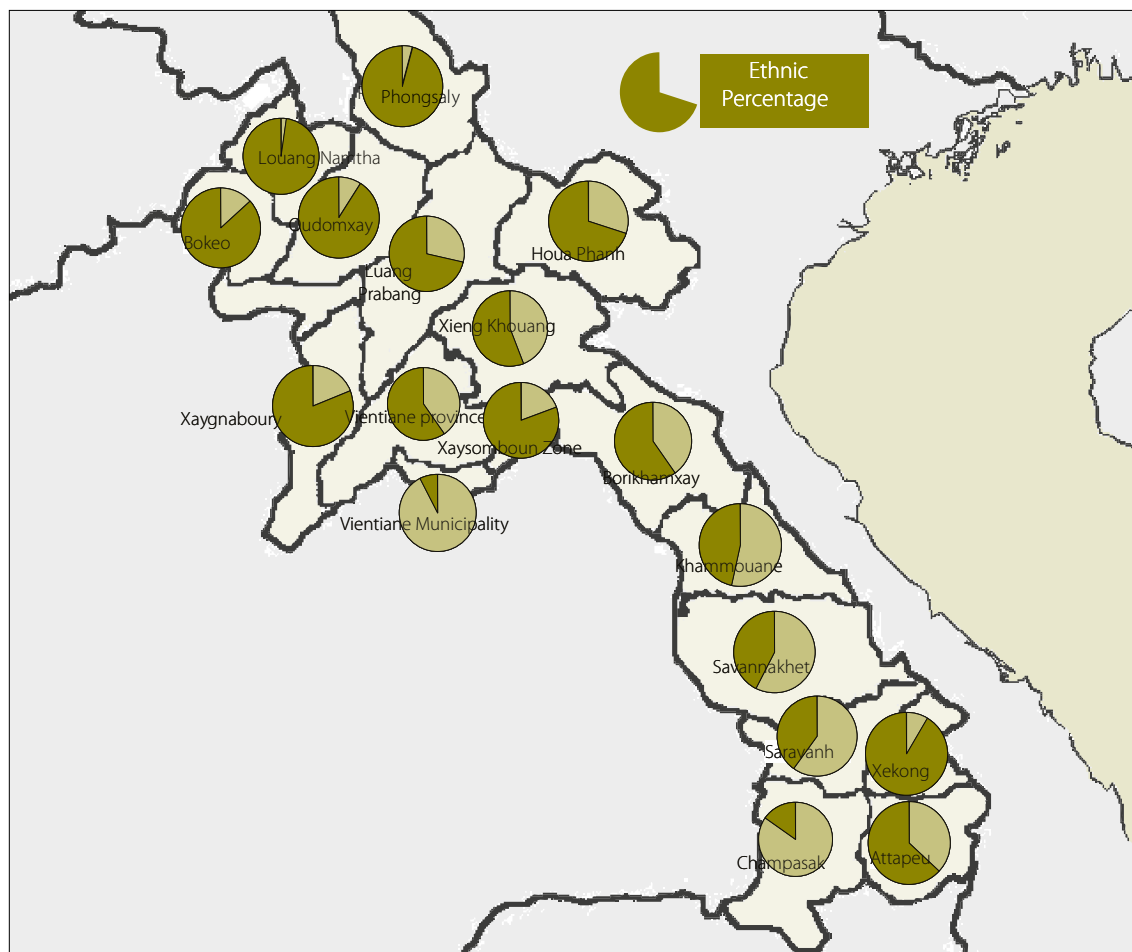
15 The International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) recognises more than 240 different ethno-linguistic groups in Lao PDR, see IWGIA website available at <http://www.iwgia.org/sw16162.asp>

16 A subsistence economy is an economy in which enough food is grown, hunted or gathered to provide for the people. A surplus is grown only if a community desires or needs to trade with neighboring communities.

17 Based on the new poverty headcount ratio at \$1.25 a day (PPP) (% of population), see World Bank, World Development Indicator (WDI) online database, 2009.

18 Peter Messerli et al, eds. *Socio-economic Atlas of the Lao PDR: An Analysis based on the 2005 Population and Housing Census* (Bern and Vientiane, Swiss National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South ed, 2008).

Map 2: Ethnic Group Population Percentages by Province



Given the demographic profile of Lao PDR, poverty alleviation is predominantly focused on the issue of ethnic and rural development, as the vast majority of the poor are ethnic peoples living in rural areas. Although human development data is generally not ethnically disaggregated, studies have shown that rates of literacy, infant mortality, immunization and HIV/AIDS awareness are worse among the smaller ethnic groups than among the *Lao Loum* people.¹⁹ The National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2006-2010 points out that wide development disparities between urban and suburban residents, provinces/territories, economic sectors and different ethnic groups are still a major concern.

Access to and quality of education services

The net enrolment rate for primary schools in Lao PDR is approximately 86 percent as of 2007.²⁰ About 15 percent of all villages have no access to primary schools and many existing village primary schools are not complete with all five grades. The development of education in isolated, ethnic and highland areas is very slow.²¹ There is a lack of qualified teachers and a deficit in access to school materials. Many girls do not attend school and many poor families cannot make the long-term investment of school enrolment for improving their lives as their immediate short-term needs are more pressing. Language is a serious barrier to school enrolment for ethnic peoples. As a result, ethnic peoples have much lower net enrolment rates and much higher dropout and repetition rates in comparison to the aggregated statistics of the entire country.

19 International Labour Organization, *Policy study on ethnic minority issues in rural development*, Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (Geneva, ILO, 2000) Unpublished document.

20 UNESCO Institute for Statistics online database available at <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>

21 Committee for Planning and Investment, *National Socio Economic Development Plan (2006-2010)* (Vientiane, Government of Lao PDR, October 2006) available at <http://www.undplao.org/official%20docs/NSDEP%20part1.pdf> (accessed on 9 December 2009)

Low access to and quality of health services

One of the main reasons for the current marginalized status of indigenous and ethnic groups in Lao PDR is limited access to health services as well as low quality of these services. Low quality health service creates limited use of these services. Only 33 percent of the population use public health services. Also, the shortage of essential medicine and health workers in rural areas contributes to further impoverishing of the already poor, as does as well heavy reliance on private health care. For many ethnic groups, living conditions are difficult and the geographical situation makes it hard to reach them with health services. According to the government, ethnic groups still uphold superstitious beliefs and mainly rely on shamans for cures.²²

From hunting and gathering to swidden farming and wet-rice farming

The ethnic peoples of Lao PDR have adopted a diverse range of adaptive responses to the natural environment in which they live. Their livelihood strategies range from hunting and gathering to various forms of wet-rice farming and swidden farming. Often, a combination of these basic patterns exists, supplemented by minor cash-crop production, the collection of non-timber forest products for trade, fishing and animal husbandry.

Resettlement

For some years, the Government of Lao PDR has pursued a policy of internally resettling ethnic communities from the highlands to the lowland areas and along roads. The reasons given are varied, but the policy of resettlement is often justified by the Government as a response to the difficulties of providing access to services as well as concern for the environment, i.e. forest conservation. However, there has been increased recognition by development communities that much of the previous resettlement has resulted in serious problems for the affected people. Nevertheless, some internal resettlement is still continuing and more is planned for the coming years.²³

Regional disparities: Spatial distribution of ethnic groups

A mapping exercise in 2000 revealed that the spatial distribution of poor districts based on income poverty tends towards an east/west divide that seems to relate to diversity in ethnic groups, farming systems and socioeconomic patterns. The mapping indicates that the poor districts are virtually all mountainous, with a high proportion of ethnic peoples and farming systems that produce little marketable surplus. They are also districts isolated from the national economy with limited social service infrastructure.²⁴

Another map of the poorest districts in Lao PDR²⁵ (Map 4 and 5) illustrates how these two measures correspond. As the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) points out, ethnicity and vulnerability are directly related, as certain ethnic groups have a limited range of assets and mechanisms to manage them.

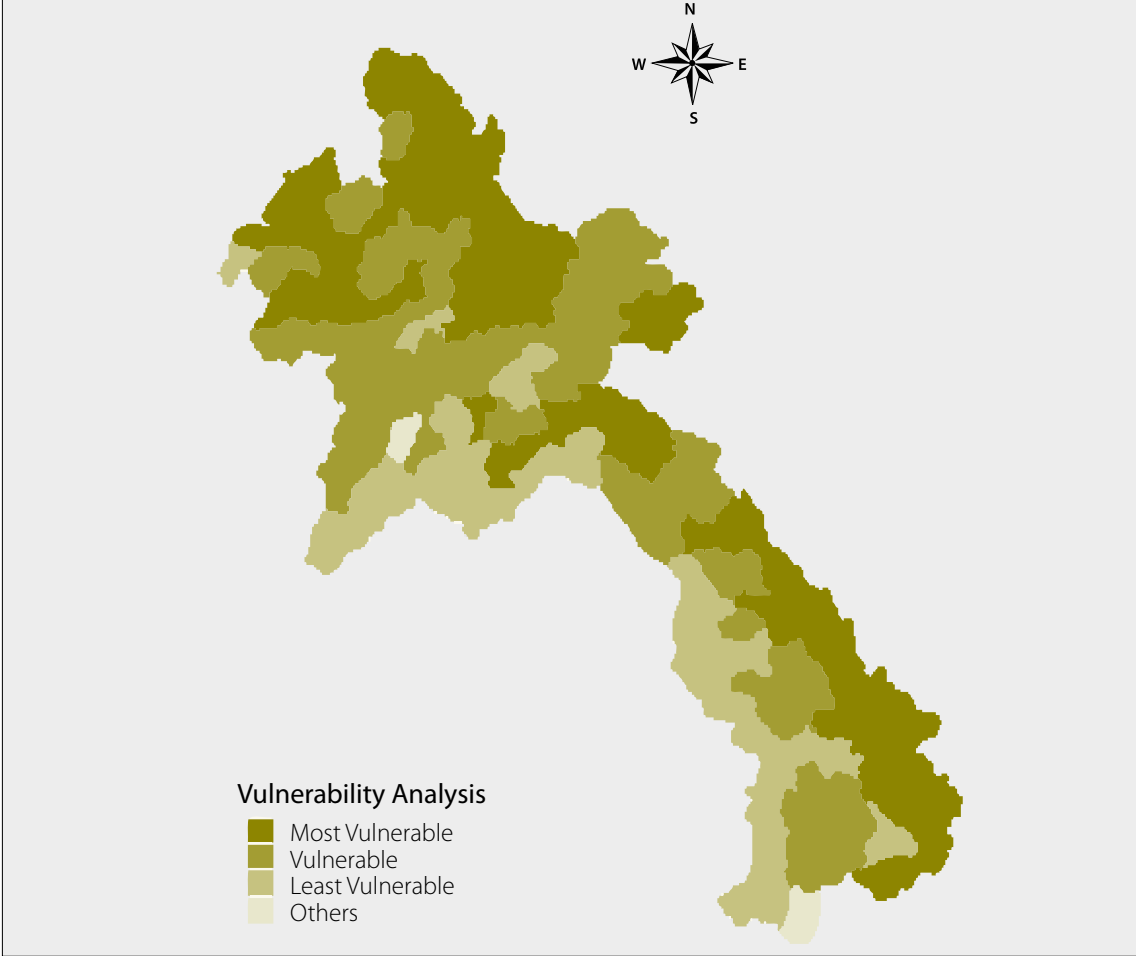
22 *Ibid.*

23 Christian Erni, ed. *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book* (IWGIA and AIPP, 2008).

24 United Nations Development Programme, *National Human Development Report International Trade and Human Development Lao PDR 2006*, available at http://www.nsc.gov.la/Products/NHDR%202006/NHDR2006_Eng.pdf

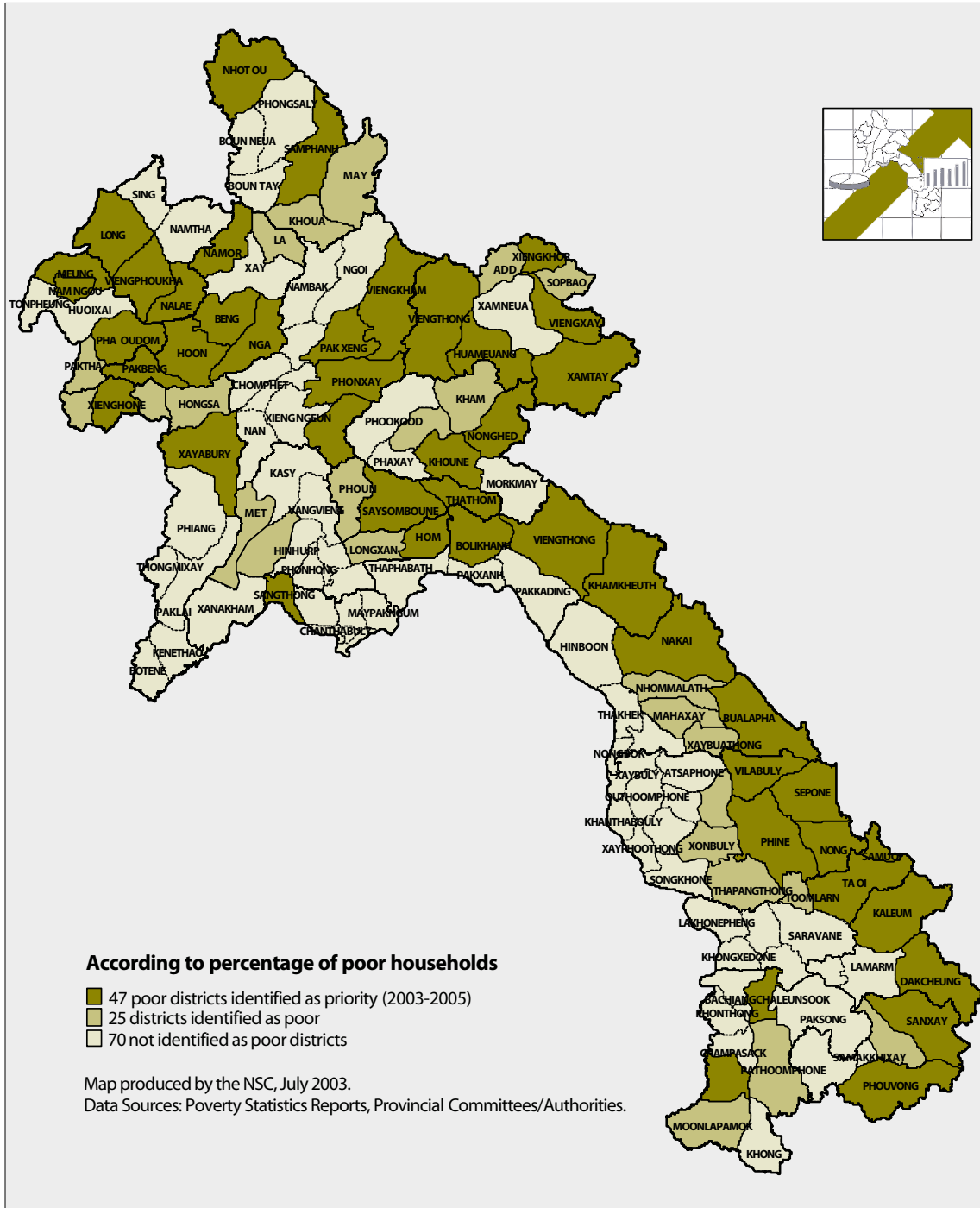
25 Committee for Planning and Investment, *National Socio Economic Development Plan (2006-2010)*, op. cit.

Map 3: Vulnerability Analysis



Despite its challenges, ethnic diversity has been increasingly recognized as a key strength of the country. Ethnic knowledge has an intrinsic value for the development of Lao PDR, particularly with regard to environmental sustainability and natural resource conservation. Different ethnic groups have specific strengths: the Tai Dam are specialized in silk farming, the Hmong have vast knowledge of cattle-raising, the Khmou have remarkably understanding of the forests and the Akha are experts in herbal medicines.

Map 4: Districts in Lao PDR



National policy and Legal Framework: Implications for Inclusion and Participation of Ethnic Peoples

The Constitution of 1991 provides the policy framework regarding ethnic peoples. Lao PDR is defined as a multi-ethnic state, with “equality among all ethnic groups”. Article 8 of the Constitution reads:

“The State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the rights to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts of creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are forbidden. The State implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the economic and social level of all ethnic groups.”

In 1992, the ethnic minority policy called *Resolution of the Party Central Organization Concerning Ethnic Minority Affairs in the New Era* became a landmark of current national ethnic minority policy. It emphasizes livelihood improvement of ethnic peoples and protection of their identity and cultural heritage.

The general policy of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party related to ethnic peoples focuses on the following areas:²⁶

- Enhance national sentiment (national identity);
- Realize equality between ethnic groups;
- Increase the level of solidarity among ethnic groups as members of the greater Lao family;
- Resolve inflexible and vengeful thinking, as well as economic and cultural inequality;
- Improve the living conditions of the ethnic peoples step by step;
- Expand, to the greatest extent possible, the good and beautiful heritage and ethnic identity of each group as well as their capacity to participate in the affairs of the nation.

Institutional mechanisms for ethnic peoples

The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC) was established in 1979 by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. It aims to bring together political organizations, social-political organizations and outstanding individuals to promote a sense of solidarity and equality among the population. The LFNC is designated as the advisor to the central committee of the party and the state with reference to ethnic peoples. At the local and district levels, the LFNC has responsibility for implementing programmes related to ethnic peoples' affairs, including health, education and basic social services. Furthermore, it is responsible for promoting cultural traditions and enhancing the administrative mechanism for greater participation of ethnic peoples. LFNC has representation at the provincial and district levels, and also at the village level in many instances. The LFNC currently recognizes 49 ethnic groups that are categorized into four larger ethno-linguistic families: Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien and Sino-Tibetan.

Responsibility for research into ethnic peoples rests with the Institute for Cultural Research under the Ministry of Information and Culture.²⁷

The Ethnic Affairs Committee under the National Assembly is charged with the responsibility to draft and evaluate proposed legislation concerning ethnic peoples, and lobby for its implementation. It also lobbies for implementation of socioeconomic development plans.

International instruments

The Lao Government voted in favour of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 September 2007. Below are listed other relevant international and regional covenants, conventions and agreements that Lao PDR is party to:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The Constitution defines Lao PDR as a multi-ethnic state that grants equal rights to all ethnic groups. A comprehensive policy review conducted in 2000 by ILO concluded that "Lao ethnic minority policy, as it now stands, is in fact adequate and in accordance with the spirit of ILO Convention

²⁶ See, IWGIA, *The Constitutional and Political System of Lao PDR* available at <http://www.iwgia.org/sw17628.asp> (accessed on 28 August 2009)

²⁷ *Ibid.*

169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.”²⁸ Its authors conceded elsewhere that the Lao ethnic minority policy is in many aspects more conducive to achieving progress for ethnic groups than that of other countries in the sub-region. At its foundation is a 1992 Party Resolution and associated plan that calls for a wide range of interventions to improve opportunities for ethnic minority groups, as well as their economic, social, cultural and political standing.²⁹

National development plan

UNDP contributes to greater social inclusion of ethnic groups in Lao PDR mainly through its work in democratic governance. The Lao PDR Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) formulated in 2003³⁰ and the United Nations Development Assistant Framework (UNDAF) for 2007-2011 both make mention of the issues of inequality and disparity, particularly among ethnic groups at the sub-national level. Nevertheless, neither document features voice and representation of ethnic peoples as a programmatic focus. In the Lao UNDAF 2007-2011, reference to ethnic groups is made most often in the context of primary education and also at the level of international law and treaties. The Democratic Governance Trust Fund (DGTTF) has proven to be an effective instrument for the UNDP Country Office, which uses the Trust Fund to help advance a people-centred and rights-based agenda for ethnic minorities and civil society at large. Through the DGTTF, the Country Office has responded to emerging opportunities and needs in this area and supported several innovative projects such as the piloting of community radio in Lao PDR (2006); the development of a legal framework for civil society organizations (2007); the (re)introduction of local elected bodies (2008); and the review of customary law practices (most recently in 2009).³¹

Space for social movements of civil society and ethnic groups

Since 2004, the government has begun a process of enabling civil society engagement. Nevertheless, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are still in the very early stages of development and few are devoted specifically to ethnic issues.

There has been a noticeable widening of space for civil society, which was traditionally restricted to the activities of selected mass organizations under the direction of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party. The public at large has remained generally disengaged from political processes but as of 2007, some 100 civil society organizations were registered, according to an estimate by the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA). The Constitution allows for the formation of non-profit associations, providing these do not contravene the law. On 29 April 2009, the Prime Minister signed the Decree on Associations, which allows local non-profit associations to register and operate as independent entities for the first time, effective November 2009. According to the Decree, a mobilization committee of three persons must be formed and a membership of at least 25 persons is required to register an association that works at the national level. Associations working at the provincial or capital level are required to have a minimum of 15 members; associations working at the district, municipality or village level are required to have minimum of 10 members. In connection to this requirement, applicants should be granted a supporting document from the government sectors concerned before submitting their application to PACSA or the provincial authorities.

Policy and legal implications: inclusion and participation of ethnic peoples

Ethnic peoples in Lao PDR are offered the opportunity to take part in the political life of the country through joining the Party, the army, the government and the mass organizations, particularly in provinces with significant ethnic minority populations. However, minority cadres represent ethnic constituencies to a varying degree. Currently one out of nine members of the Politbureau, incidentally also the only woman, is from an ethnic minority. The institutions concerned with

28 ILO, *Policy Study on Ethnic Minority Issues in Rural Development*, op. cit.

29 *Ibid*, p. 47.

30 Government of Lao PDR, *Lao PDR: National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES)*, 5 November 2004, available at <http://www.undplao.org/newsroom/publication/Ngpes/Lao%20PDR%20-%20NGPES%20-%20Main%20Document.pdf>

31 Matthias Meier, *Empowering Indigenous Peoples in Asia through Communication*, op. cit.

ethnic peoples do not necessarily have a more important role in influencing policy and legal implications in favour of the ethnic groups. This is true for the LFNC, the largest organization in the country in terms of membership and instrumental in the revolutionary struggle, which is currently re-defining its mandate.³²

Generally, policy-making in Lao PDR is highly centralized in the country's capital city, Vientiane, and thus physically and socially remote from the majority of ethnic groups, particularly in the absence of Indigenous Peoples' organizations. With the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, the country embarked on a course of re-centralization that reorganized a number of critical state functions, but also led to the dissolution of the local elected bodies, the so-called People's Councils. The National Assembly is the only representative institution in the country (apart from elected village chiefs). Citizens can appeal directly to the National Assembly, if they feel subjected to misconduct by the bureaucracy or the judiciary.³³

The national legal and policy framework has acknowledged the multi-ethnic composition of Lao PDR, yet the mainstream development process has not been as successful in promoting inclusive participation of ethnic peoples in the country. More efforts are required to promote the national development policy framework to better reflect and resonate with the views, interests and aspirations of the ethnic peoples. This includes the issues of resettlement and preservation of livelihood and local environment.

In *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: Overview* by Crawford Young, the author looks to shared values, suggesting that "one of the most durable ways to accommodate diversity is to create a sense of nation being a civic community, rooted in values that can be shared by all ethnic components of the national society."³⁴ In this regard, ethnic peoples should have a voice in planning and decisions that have an impact on their communities and rights. The fundamental recognition and respect for their land and natural resources is critical.

Key Challenges and Opportunities for the Ethnic Peoples

Inclusive participation, voice and development

Challenges

- *Disparities in development and widened inequalities:* The mainstream development process has not paid much attention to promoting inclusive participation of ethnic peoples. The majority of the rural poor in Lao PDR are ethnic peoples who have been largely marginalized and remain vulnerable. Ethnic peoples have limited access to basic social services, particularly in health and education sectors. Unequal opportunities for development and unavoidable livelihood disruptions result in the limited capacity of ethnic peoples to participate in meaningful decision-making or voice their concerns, due in part to the low level of literacy and limited command of the national languages.
- *Isolated ethnic groups in remote rural areas:* Living in remote and often isolated rural locations, ethnic groups lack basic communication services and also suffer from under-developed infrastructure. The wide dispersion of ethnic peoples throughout the country also presents obstacles to improving communications among them.
- *Lack of meaningful voices and participation in the policy decision making process:* Due to a high degree of centralization and narrow representation of the ethnic groups in governance institutions, the issues affecting ethnic communities, including their view and interests, may not be equally represented at the national level.
- *Implementation of the national policy and legal framework and international instrument:* Both national policy and legal frameworks, as well as international instruments, recognize the need

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Matthias Meier, *Empowering Indigenous Peoples in Asia through Communication*, op. cit.

³⁴ Crawford Young, *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: An Overview*, UNRISD Special Events (2000-2005), the Social Effect of Globalization Paper No. 8, p. 46.

to improve opportunities for ethnic peoples along with their economic, social, cultural and political standing. More efforts are required to translate policy and legislation into concrete development outcomes for ethnic peoples with particular attention to their participation and voice in development and governance processes.

Opportunities

- *Ethnic knowledge systems:* Despite pervasive poverty among the ethnic peoples, they possess invaluable knowledge and understanding of complex ecological structures and natural resource conservation. In this regard, different ethnic groups have distinct strengths, which provide significant opportunities to overcome development challenges. Therefore, the formulation of development programmes through inclusive participation that is based on their strengths would better respond to their specific needs.³⁵
- *Increasing space for social movements of civil society and ethnic groups:* Over the past few years, the number of civil society organizations has increased as government has continued to cautiously loosen restrictions on civil society and non-governmental organizations.
- *Recent changes in legislation:* Recent changes in the law related to the registration and operation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and associations as independent entities have created new opportunities for enhancing the voice and participation of ethnic organizations. Also, the emerging civil society may help to increase participation of ethnic groups within the processes of national development and policy-making. In this regard, enhancing information and communication channels with particular attention to the ethnic peoples of Lao PDR may help to strengthen the role of civil society and ethnic organizations in governance and development processes. Modest improvement in communications could generate benefits for ethnic people if that improvement takes into account their particular concerns.

2.2 Media and ICT Landscape in Lao PDR

Overview of the Media Landscape

In Lao PDR, all major media outlets are largely owned and managed by the government. Some recent changes in the media landscape point to a number of new opportunities for a more pluralistic and inclusive media situation in the country. More information has been made available and increasing access is now possible through the introduction of Internet cafés, mobile telephony, satellite and cable TV broadcasting networks.

These are new trends in the overall mass media landscape. Yet the new sources of information and communication channels remain concentrated in the central and urban areas, particularly in the capital of Vientiane. Except for access to national radio, the population living in the rural areas still has limited access to information due to limited media outreach in ethnic languages, infrastructure and resources (financial and human).

Print media

Print media are available in three languages: Lao, English and French. Print media has a narrow circulation with a targeted audience, predominantly the urban elite. According to the UNDP Lao Country Office Project Document on Khoum Community Radio Support, the most widely circulated daily newspaper in Lao PDR is *Pasaxon* (The People) with a circulation of about 6,000 copies a day. A number of special interest periodicals are affiliated with government organizations, mass organizations and associations, including Heng Ngaan or *Labor*, Sinxay or *Sinxay Cultural Club* and Menhing Lao or *Lao Women*.³⁶ Overall, there are some 60 publications, including daily and

35 United Nations Development Programme, *National Human Development Report Lao PDR 2001: Advancing Rural Development* (UNDP, Vientiane, 2001) available at <http://www.undplao.org/whatwedo/factsheets/humandev/nhdr%20final.pdf> (accessed on 30 November 2009)

36 Government of Lao PDR and UNDP Lao PDR, *Khoum Radio Support Project: Bringing local news to local people in Xieng Khoung*, February 2006.

weekly newspapers, monthly and quarterly magazines, and journals and news bulletins on a wide range of issues such as trade, tourism, lifestyle and entertainment. Most of them have a limited circulation, averaging 3,000 copies a day due to a relatively small market size in the country.³⁷

Radio

Radio is one of the most influential media in Lao PDR. Over 80 percent of the population of 6.3 million people has access to radio. A survey conducted in Luang Prabang and Savannakhet on the reach of radio concluded that radio is the only medium that many people have in their households and that it has also reached a number of people who are not necessarily Lao native speakers.³⁸ As radio is based on verbal communication, it thereby draws on a strong oral tradition in Lao PDR. Radio has proven to be an effective medium of communication, particularly among the poor and those who have limited literacy skills. Radio can also usefully integrate traditional media, such as folk tales and songs practiced by rural communities, into broadcasting formats.

Currently, the country has 32 radio stations. Lao National Radio is the main service provider with 70 percent coverage. The remaining 31 stations are regional and provincial stations with varied transmission power. Provincial radio stations have their own editorial and technical broadcasting that produce the local programmes, while local stations broadcast from 5 hours to 12 hours per day. Provincial radio does not reach all districts, leaving pockets of communities in mountainous terrain unreached. Most programmes are still broadcast in the national language. A number of local programmes are translated into major ethnic languages such as Hmong and Khmou. While the local language programmes are needed to ensure outreach of national broadcasting to the population at large, these programmes do not necessarily respond to the information or communication needs of people in rural areas. Radio programmes in ethnic languages that provide information, knowledge and entertainment targeted towards people living in remote areas with limited access to information are much needed.

Television

After radio, television is widely regarded as the second most popular electronic media in Lao PDR. The state-run Lao National TV and Laos Television 3, a joint venture with a Thai company, are the two main local broadcasters. The television programmes are broadcast in three languages: Lao, French and Vietnamese. According to 2001 statistics, there were 3,000 subscribers to satellite and cable televisions. Approximately 50 percent of the total Lao population has access to television, predominantly in the central and urban areas. Nevertheless, the largest percentage increases of Lao households with television over the recent years were in rural areas. These were areas in the North without all-season roads, in the districts bordering Viet Nam, in minority districts and in first and second priority poverty districts. The population living closer to Thailand's border can access Thai TV programmes.

Most viewers watch both Thai and Lao TV programmes. Lao National TV is watched mainly for news and Thai TV programmes for entertainment, particularly for Thai dramas, or 'soap operas', and also for news. For instance, farmers interviewed in Champasak reported they were learning a lot from Thai programmes on agriculture and new production techniques. Overall, 64 percent of the people interviewed in Vientiane, Pakse and rural Champasak watched mainly Thai TV, 27 percent watched both equally, and only 9 percent watched mainly Lao TV programmes. Some 68 percent watched Thai soap operas regularly, particularly women and young people.³⁹

Foreign media

Despite a growing demand for new sources of information, the mass media in Lao PDR continues to face intense competition from media of neighbouring countries such as China, Thailand and

37 Southeast Asian Press Alliance, *The State of the Press in Southeast Asia*, May 2008, p. 24.

38 Wolfgang Koch, *Most Important Results, Conclusions and Recommendations on Two Radio Audience Research Projects in Luang Prabang and Savannakhet in 2006* (Vientiane, UNICEF, 2006).

39 UNDP, *National Human Development Report International Trade and Human Development Lao PDR 2006*, available at http://www.nsc.gov.la/Products/NHDR%202006/NHDR2006_Eng.pdf

Viet Nam. Due to similarities in the language, many Laotians are able to consume Thai TV and radio programmes. While Lao PDR has limited number of radio and TV programmes in ethnic languages, certain Chinese radio programmes are able to broadcast in three languages, including Lao Loum, Hmong and Khmou.⁴⁰ The foreign media has a more competitive advantage in terms of resources, professionalism and modern entertainment and information systems that are more attractive to the larger audience than the mass media produced in Lao PDR.

Media Policy and Regulations

The role of media in Lao modern history has mainly focused on promoting public policies to the people as well as enhancing national unity in the multiethnic Lao society. However, over the past decades, as the country has been going through a transition towards more openness, increasing diversity in the media landscape has followed.

The gradual change of the political climate provides an enabling environment for Lao policy makers to redefine the role and functions of state mechanisms to strengthen accountability, transparency and integrity in the governance system. The government adopted a governance reform agenda in 2003 with the following priority areas:⁴¹

- Strengthening bureaucracy;
- Increasing people's participation;
- Adhering to the rule of law; and
- Sound management of the country's finances and resources.

The overall framework for the governance reform agenda in Lao PDR, the *Policy Paper of the Government of Lao PDR on Government Issues*, recognizes that access to information and professional media are critical for improving accountability and transparency in governance. The creation of "fora to permit a participatory debate on transparent and accountable government and the promotion of ethics in the public service, involving participants from civil society, the media and the private sector" is mentioned as a priority governance initiative.⁴²

As part of this changing political and social context, the Lao media has also gradually changed its traditional role in providing a predominant one-way flow of information. Since 2005, the Ministry of Information and Culture has adopted a strategy to bring radio to the 47 poorest districts in the country.⁴³ Increasing the available information and communication channels allows for a multi-directional flow of information and expanded media coverage in Lao PDR, which can help to address issues of poverty reduction and socio-economic development, including basic social services such as health and education.

Recent development of the media law

The 1991 constitution of Lao PDR includes a basic legal framework for development of participatory media practices. This is further elaborated in the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010, which provides a basis for collaboration with government in designing and implementing more interactive development-oriented media channels. In addition, NSEDP 2006-2010 provides a commitment to aiding access to information for ethnic peoples, in particular recognizing the need for media in applicable languages.

The Ministry of Information and Culture led the drafting process of a new mass media law. After several years of deliberation, the media law was adopted in 2008. The law, presented by MoIC, consists of ten chapters and 64 articles that determine the roles, principles, responsibilities, duties and activities of foreign as well as domestic media. Furthermore, it provides journalists with a

40 NRA, *Minutes from NRA TWG MRE Workshop, 6 June 2007* (Vientiane, NRA, June 2007).

41 Government of Lao PDR, *Public Service Reform, People's Participation, Rule of Law and Sound Financial Management: Policy Paper of the Government of Lao PDR on Governance Issues*, Vientiane, March 2003.

42 *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

43 Report on the National Community Radio Seminar 1-2 November 2007 Novotel Hotel Vientiane, Lao PDR.

formal mandate and protection to report and criticize abuses such as corruption, low morals or drug abuse.⁴⁴ It allows for the ownership of media by the private sector as well as associations. The law encourages international cooperation in media. Nonetheless, the law is ambiguous in that the MoIC retains the authority to monitor, audit and discipline journalists and media outlets for any misconduct.

Another recent development is that the National Assembly and the media have become more assertive and active in scrutinizing government activities, including implementation of the annual budget over the recent years. Former taboos, which were previously referred to as a negative social phenomenon (e.g. illegal logging, land concessions and corruption) are increasingly debated in public media.

Media capacity

Despite these positive trends, Lao media still faces serious resource and capacity constraints in delivering quality public information, particularly in the provincial and district areas. Production and broadcast equipment is largely outdated. Technical support is required to improve equipment as well as the operation of media in Lao PDR. This includes increasing demand for training of media professionals, such as writing, interviewing, editorial, media management and marketing skills. Moreover, the top-down approach among editors and media managers and limited journalism skills are major obstacles hindering the mass media from enhancing their outreach to a wider range of audiences or competing with foreign media.

Ethnic Peoples in the Media

Mainstream media reporting predominantly focuses on the events and issues related to the national capital. Though the print press has done some investigative reporting, according to Lao journalists, there is very limited coverage on issues concerning ethnic peoples. Media reporting mostly targets the information needs of government officials and urban elites, who are the main audience and subscribers of the mainstream media.⁴⁵ In this regard, the Lao National Radio both at central and provincial levels is an exception because it has ethnic language windows that enjoy considerable popularity. However, they are in essence translations of mainstream programming; resources for community based programming are still very scarce.

Examples of Participatory Communication Channels for Ethnic Peoples

Khoun Community Radio for Development⁴⁶

UNDP has supported the piloting of community radio in Lao PDR and helped to establish the first station in Khoun District. Khoun has a population of 31,000 people belonging to three ethnic groups. The district is among the country's 47 poorest and is targeted for priority support under the National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

The Khoun Community Radio for Development project was supported by UNDP in partnership with UNESCO under the auspices of MoIC. The South-South cooperation played an important part in developing a Lao model for community radio. Exposure visits to community radio stations in neighbouring Thailand provided useful points of reference and helped stakeholders acquire an understanding of key concepts as well as skills to be able to drive the project early on. It is generally maintained that there is not one model of community radio. Rather, community radio should always be an expression and a reflection of a community's culture, history and concerns and dreams. Many aspects of the Khoun Community Radio had to be adapted in light of the cultural, social and political context of Lao PDR. This was done by the stakeholders of the project in an iterative process of learning, testing, assessing and formalizing.

⁴⁴ Mass Media Law 2008, the unofficial translation of the draft that was passed to the National Assembly for consideration. The final draft was not yet available when this paper was written.

⁴⁵ Matthias Meier, *Empowering Indigenous Peoples in Asia through Communication*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

The Khoun Community Radio for Development project aims to establish a local radio station in the Khoun district.⁴⁷ The main objective of this project is to provide a platform to enhance voice and participation of the local community through discussion of issues-related development challenges and solutions. Furthermore, the project promotes training of public information officers at provincial and district levels and conducts an audience survey of information needs and demands from the local community.⁴⁸

Currently, the radio broadcasts for eight hours every day in three languages: Hmong, Khmou and Lao. The programmes cover a wide range of topics, including education, health, agriculture, women, youth, culture, law and security, community announcements and entertainment. The radio also relays national news.

Khoun Community Radio officially went on air in October 2007. Since then, it has gained an enthusiastic audience who frequently interact with programme-makers. More than 7,000 phone-ins and more than 3,000 letters from listeners have been received since its inception, containing hundreds of poems and community announcements, primarily in ethnic languages.

Establishment of pilot district radio station: Ta-Oi Radio⁴⁹

The first community radio station in Lao PDR was set up by Oxfam with the support from UNESCO in Ta Oi district, Saravane Province. Ta Oi radio went on air in November 2005. This district contains 21,000 people living in 56 villages, of which 35 are classified as the poorest villages. The languages that are used in the programme are Mon-Khmer languages such as Katang and Ta Oi. A second community radio station was established in Samouai district. The radio stations were set up to broadcast in five ethnic minority languages: Kado, Kanai, Katang, Pako and Ta Oi. The community radio aims to provide information and training in the areas of agriculture, education, health (especially HIV/AIDS awareness) and disaster preparedness. The transmission capacity of the Ta Oi radio station reached 43 out of 56 villages, accounting for nearly 77 percent of the district area and 84 percent of the local population. The transmission coverage of Samouai radio station was much broader and went beyond the district boundaries, reaching more than 10,000 people of 51 villages, representing 91 percent of the district population. Some villages in Viet Nam were also able to receive broadcasts from Samouai radio.

Each community radio station has a Board Committee of eight members presided over by the Vice District Governor to ensure the accuracy and usefulness of information delivered to the communities. The Committee is composed of representatives from mass organizations, including Lao Women's Union, Lao Revolutionary Youth Organization and LFNC.

Despite this progress, assessment of the Oxfam' initiative concludes that operation of these community radio stations is not sustainable due to limited resources and capacity, including the lack of qualified human resources and insufficient coordination at the district and provincial levels.

Overview of ICT and Telecommunication Landscape

Lao PDR has made a significant progress in developing its ICT and telecommunication sector over the past decades, including introduction of joint venture private investment, infrastructure development, and the new telecommunication law adopted in 2001. Nevertheless, the country continues to face a number of challenges in its efforts to expand the ICT and telecommunication services for the majority of its population, particularly in remote rural areas.

The use of ICT is limited both in the public and private sectors. Few Laotians have access to computers or the Internet and less than 2 percent of Laotian households have a fixed telephone.

47 Khoun is among the 47 poorest districts identified in the NGPES for priority support.

48 United Nations Development Programme, *Khoun Radio Support Project Document* (UNDP, Lao PDR, February 2006).

49 UNESCO, International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), Implementation Reports on Projects Approved and Financed in 2004-2005, 23 February 2006 and UNESCO news service available at http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21254&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

The usage of mobile phones among the Laotian population has expanded rapidly since 2000. Nevertheless, only 12.8 percent of the Lao population had a mobile phone in 2007-2008.⁵⁰ Though there are a number of internet cafés in Lao PDR, most of them are concentrated in Vientiane and major cities.⁵¹ Therefore, the majority of the population living in rural areas have less access to ICT than those living in the urban and central areas.

Telecommunication

In Lao PDR, the telecommunication sector continues to grow as a result of public and private investment in the new and existing telecommunication networks across the country. According to the *Digital Review of Asia Pacific 2007-2008*, Lao PDR has a rigorous programme to enhance the national information infrastructure based on optical fibre. At least 15 out of 17 provinces are already connected and operable. The national fibre backbone is already being used for domestic telecommunication both fixed and mobile as well as for international Internet access. Nevertheless, the domestic part of the Internet is still under-developed.⁵²

Currently, the former state monopoly, *Laotel* (LTC) and *Enterprise of Telecom Lao* (ETL) are the two leading players in providing the telecommunication network infrastructure. Other operators include *Lao Asia Telecom* (LAT) owned by the army and *Sky Telecom* (LAT). These companies provide all types of telecommunication services, including international gateway, fixed line, mobile telephone, and Internet.⁵³ Mobile telephone services, including VoIP, are provided by *Millicom Lao*, a joint venture between the Luxembourg-based company Millicom International Cellular and the government.. All of the telecom companies in Lao PDR have some share of state ownership.

The major players in the telecommunication sector plan to increase their investment to capture the potential demand in the Lao market. For instance, LTC expects to increase its base stations from 285 in May 2008 to 850 by the end of 2009. The company has also installed a 3G system, the third generation mobile network that enables customers to download video clips to phone handsets, as well as sports updates, music, news headlines, weather forecasts and movie trailers via mobile Internet. In addition, Sky Telecom or LAT expects to spend \$24 million in 2009-2010 on developing its network by increasing from 200 to 1,000 base stations to cover a larger area of the country and 70,000 subscribers.

Compared to its level of human development, Lao PDR has a relatively advanced telecommunication infrastructure. Despite the considerable potential for harnessing the existing infrastructure for rural ICTs and telecommunication, these existing services still have little relevance to the vast majority of the rural population, including ethnic groups. One of the main reasons is that the relevant applications for ethnic groups have not been developed or they are not suitable for the needs of the users in remote rural areas. In addition, low economic interest in rural telecommunication services and applications, including financial sustainability, is a key challenge that prevents these services from taking off in the remote rural areas.

ICT services and internet

Lao PDR was one the last Southeast Asian countries to adopt the Internet. Since 1996 it has enjoyed internet connectivity, but the average usage remains low. Currently, 12 companies, including five telecom operators, have been granted Internet Service Provider (ISP) licenses. Nevertheless, most of the companies run into trouble with the marketing plan and capacity to set up their own internet infrastructure. Over 50 percent of the existing 300 internet cafés are in Vientiane. The rest are located in other cities, such as Luang Prabang.⁵⁴

50 ITU, *Country Report on ICT Statistics: Lao PDR*, Capacity Building Workshop on Information Society Statistics, Bangkok 6-8 November, 2007.

51 See, UNDP Human Development Indicator 2007/8, available at http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_LAO.html (accessed on August 20, 2009).

52 Phonpasit Phissarnay, "Lao PDR Chapter", *Digital review of Asia Pacific 2007-2008*, available at www.digital-review.org

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

Recent trends demonstrate that internet usage has continued to increase steadily in Lao PDR. The usage is largely concentrated on chatting and entertainment. Currently about 25,000 people, or 0.4 percent of the total population, are regular internet users, most being students and government officers.⁵⁵ Most young Laotians and student have access to the internet at internet cafés. The internet access that is available at the country's universities and college is mostly reserved for the faculty and administration. Therefore, use of the internet for education and research, including information and communication exchange, is still limited.

Compared to the mass media, the internet is still relatively unregulated. The government monitors e-mails and requests that existing internet service providers submit quarterly reports as well as connect to governmental gateways in order to accommodate the government monitoring system. However, the government's ability to control the information and communication flows via internet is limited. At present, *Inlaonet* and *Laoupdate* are two major local online forums that are popular among students. These two websites allow the exchange of views and commentaries on current affairs and common social challenges with an occasional focus on news reports, but not on politically sensitive issues.⁵⁶ Apart from these two online social forums, *LaoFab* provides a forum for sharing information about farmers and agriculture in the country, while *Lao44* offers general knowledge-based information in Lao language.

ICT Policy and Regulations

The ICT sector in Lao PDR is still lagging behind that of its neighbouring countries. ICT is making slow progress compared to other sectors because the ICT and telecommunication sectors have not been identified as priority programmes for national development; more emphasis has been placed on the development of basic infrastructure.

The government recognizes that ICT is essential to the country's overall social and economic growth and development and that it is necessary to increase ICT service penetration to the levels that are available among Lao PDR's regional neighbours and major trading partners. Although telecommunications have second priority status to roads, water and electrical power, Lao PDR has an aggressive programme to establish a national information infrastructure based on fibre optics.

As part of the country's aspiration to enhance sustainable development and progress beyond the LDC status by 2020, the government outlines key ICT policy priorities as follows:⁵⁷

- Increasing general access to ICT through the provision of a modern telecommunications infrastructure and computer networks, by fostering enterprise and industry;
- Promoting research and development in ICT;
- Developing the necessary human resources and institutional capacities.

As for the telecommunication sector, the government's key policy objectives are to:⁵⁸

- Develop the national telecommunication infrastructure especially in regional and remote areas of the country;
- Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of telecommunication service delivery that responds to the demands of the end user;
- Promote quality services at affordable prices;
- Strengthen regulatory framework and skills among the government officials.

This includes e-delivery of government services to citizens through internet and integrated citizen service centres, which are expected to be particularly beneficial to poor communities in remote areas.

55 Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Lao Country Profile 2008*, available at www.eiu.com

56 SEAPA, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

57 Phonpasit Phissarnay, *Digital review of Asia Pacific 2007-2008*, op. cit., p191.

58 *Ibid.*

E-Government

At present, the e-Government action plan emphasizes the establishment of a communication infrastructure for rural communities. The plan will build on the existing network infrastructure of LAT, such as the LAT optic fibre transmission network and may include that of ETL and LTC. This network infrastructure will be used to deliver public services to provide connectivity to 17 provincial offices, 141 district offices and 1,200 village administration offices. Depending on the current state of this network infrastructure and the geographic areas and terrain condition, the plan is to introduce a combination of a traditional land line and wireless technologies to develop a cost-effective solution for rural communities. This way, according to one observer, "the current digital divide can be bridged and e-Government programmes and services can be brought closer to the rural communities."⁵⁹ This vision will require that other important conditions are taken into account at the same time, such as language diversity, illiteracy and lack of content in local languages.

Legal and regulatory environment for ICT

In the past, the Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA), the Lao National Internet Committee (LANIC) and the Ministry of Communication, Post and Construction (MCTPC) were the key players in the policy and legislative process for the ICT and telecommunication sector in Lao PDR. These organizations had some overlapping roles and responsibilities. Reform of the ICT sector, including structural changes, has started to take place in order to promote greater coordination among government agencies.

To promote sustainable development of the ICT and telecommunication sector in Lao PDR, the National Authority of Science and Technology (NAST) and National Authority of Post and Telecommunications (NAPT) are the two main organizations currently responsible for the legal and regulatory environment for ICT and telecommunication at the national level. NAST has a supporting and coordinating function to promote science and technology activities, including implementation and translation of policies into specific action. In 2007, NAPT was established under the Prime Minister's Office.⁶⁰ It is directly responsible for formulating long term policies, strategies and plans for the ICT and telecommunication sector in Lao PDR. This includes the following:⁶¹

- Issuing licenses for post and telecom operators;
- Overseeing and coordinating the licenses of radio and telephone;
- Monitoring investment in telecom equipment and production;
- Maintaining the standard of post and telecommunication services;
- Coordinating with international and regional organizations, e.g. ASEAN, ITU, etc.

The ICT policies focus on the following objectives to:

- Increase access to ICT particularly in the underserved regional areas and communities;
- Ensure efficient use of resources;
- Create an enabling environment for adoption of new technologies;
- Eliminate obstacles to competition and anti-competitive practices;
- Promote foreign investment;
- Develop ICT skills and competencies in government, industry and society;
- Enhance the availability of services at affordable prices.

Development of ICT and telecommunication master plan

With support from UNDP, STEA formulated a strategic framework for ICT policies that aims to maximize the potential of ICT to accelerate national development progress. The ICT Master Plan was drafted to identify areas for ICT development priorities, coordination mechanisms and

59 Phonpasit Phissamay, "Lao PDR Chapter", *Digital review of Asia Pacific 2007-2008*, available at www.digital-review.org

60 Decree of Prime Minister of Lao PDR No.375/PM on 22 October 2007 (former Department of Post and Telecommunication).

61 Chaleun Sibounheuang, *Country Report of Lao PDR*, presentation at the Workshop on Strengthening ICT Policies and Applications to Achieve the MDGs in Southeast Asia, Bangkok, 19-20 October 2009.

funding. Furthermore, it helps to strengthen the development of ICT policy in Lao as well as to enhance utilization of the Lao language in electronic communication through development of a standard Lao character set.

With support from JICA, a Telecommunication Master Plan has been drafted. It outlines priorities particularly to promote rural telecommunication and applications and ICT development, including the visions in areas of e-Commerce, e-Government, e-Health and e-Learning up until 2020.⁶²

ICT and Ethnic Peoples

Over the past decade, ICT has emerged as a tool for access to information, communication and empowerment of indigenous peoples and marginalized groups partly because of the momentum from the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) organized in 2003 and 2005. The Summit Declaration called for the use of ICT “to support and encourage cultural diversity and to preserve and promote the language, distinct identities and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes in a manner which they determine best advances towards these goals.” Infrastructure is also mentioned: “...the prerequisite for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, nations and tribes in the Information Society is the provision of adequate infrastructure for telecommunications, radio, television, the internet and ICT providers, with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples nations and tribes concerned.”⁶³

In Lao PDR, there are emerging opportunities for ICT and telecommunication to help facilitate democratic horizontal communication and enhance community empowerment strategies. In connection to this, ICT could be a tool for networking ability, which has a wide outreach across all physical barriers. Simultaneously, it can strengthen and transform existing radio initiatives, for instance the introduction of ‘radio browsing’ to the community radio in Khoun. This particular aspect of ICT can be essential particularly for the ethnic peoples. Infrastructure provides opportunities for expanding ICT services.

Rural ICTs Initiatives

Over the past decade, there have been a few ICT initiatives in remote and rural areas, including the telecentres and rural ICT projects in Lao PDR. The Jhai Foundation, for example, launched a pilot project to establish internet learning centres as well as the Remote IT Villages project, where power for a computer was generated through pedal power and internet access was achieved via satellite connection. This project primarily focused on bringing internet to the poor and on pure ICT training, as opposed to implementation of ICT as a tool for accelerating an existing developing strategy and poverty reduction. There is one exceptional case of a Jhai Foundation coffee project that utilized the internet for linking coffee farmers directly with business opportunities in California. This initiative helped villages to create 51 village coffee cooperatives.⁶⁴

ICT for basic service delivery

The use of ICT could have a significant impact on promoting efficiency and accelerating improvement of basic services delivery at the local level to meet the needs of the poorest populations in Lao PDR. Through direct involvement of communities, ICT can become a tool for relevant basic service delivery and effective poverty reduction.⁶⁵

62 Lars Bestle, *Improving basic social service delivery with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in rural areas of the Mekong Region: A preliminary assessment of needs, readiness and possibilities in Cambodia Lao PDR and Viet Nam*, Asian Development Bank, June 2004, pp. 82-83.

63 The Declaration of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society (Geneva, 11 December 2003), available at http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/indigenous-Declaration.rtf (accessed on December 2009)

64 See Jhai Foundation website available at <http://www.jhai.org>

65 Lars Bestle, *Improving basic social service delivery with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in rural areas of the Mekong Region: A preliminary assessment of needs, readiness and possibilities in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam*, op. cit.

Healthcare is one of the most promising areas to gain from ICT support for poverty reduction. Currently, health authorities in Lao PDR have not been able to benefit from ICT due to limited awareness and funding as well as the incoherent focus and objectives of the official health strategy. ICT could be incorporated as an integral part of healthcare services. Recommended areas include:⁶⁶

- *Primary health care centres*: Information access through ICT services in primary health care centres would enhance the general knowledge of health workers and enable remote consultation;
- *Prevention through campaigns*: An important component of health care is about communicating with the population, making them aware of daily measures that can prevent simple illnesses and heighten general health.

One example is the recent pilot ICT project for primary healthcare launched by ADB in partnership with the Government of Lao PDR in 2008. The project examined the potential development of e-Centres in rural health facilities with the vision to expand health services in the eight Northern provinces. Objectives of the e-centre are to provide relevant skill trainings for rural health workers and communities through e-Health services, develop practical health information, build local capacity in ICT use and sustainable operation of e-Centres in rural communities, and monitor and evaluate outcomes.⁶⁷

Similarly to the health sector, agriculture is essential for the survival of rural communities in Lao PDR, and ICT could also deliver useful and relevant information in this sector. ICT could transmit farming techniques, agricultural market information, marketing of agricultural products, weather reports and disaster prevention.

Community telecentres

Telecentre initiatives for rural areas offer the potential to support training. Such training efforts could enhance basic ICT knowledge, infrastructure and the use of ICT for social and economic development for people at the community level. Simultaneously, telecentres could potentially increase access to computer training among government officials to improve the local governance system. One of the major challenges, however, is sustainability of telecentres due to the lack of resources and continued support from the local administration and organizations.

A multi-purpose community telecentre was launched as a pilot project in Luang Prabang in March 2003. It provided ICT services that improved the basic ICT skills in the education sector for school and college students and to a certain extent in the local government sector. The services were not able to extend to the rural areas as originally envisaged. Experience showed that the project had little relevance to improve ICT access and skills of local businesses and the general public during the timeframe of the project implementation. The community telecentre provided internet services, but only for a short period of time due to financial constraints and the lack of locally-needed content in Lao language.⁶⁸ Lessons learned from the pilot telecentre include the need to focus on human resource development and develop better collaboration and partnerships among key stakeholders, including central and local governments, schools, businesses and local communities. Furthermore, there is also a need for a clear development strategy beyond ICT training and internet access in the rural areas.

Recent development of rural communication system

In September 2007, a number of Lao government officials and international experts were brought together to analyse the rural communication system in Lao PDR. Strong emphasis was placed on the need to establish information centres at all levels and to develop content in local languages.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ ADB, *Lao PDR: Piloting Community e-Centres for Better Health*, Technical Assistant Report, January 2008.

⁶⁸ Phonpasit Phissamay, *Case Study on the First Telecenter in Lao PDR*, Information Technology Centre, Science and Technology Agency, September 2007.

Another critical area, which has been identified as a key challenge in the rural communication system, is the limited number of opportunities for sharing and exchange experiences among development workers in Lao PDR. These development workers are usually isolated by geographical and institutional barriers that prevent them from learning from one another. Though the mechanisms for vertical communication are in place, there are almost no means for horizontal communication among development workers from different organizations and sectors. In order to address these problems, the concept of the Coalition for Lao Information, Communication and Knowledge (CLICK) was recently developed.

The strategy of CLICK is to make relevant information openly available in Lao languages via the internet. The internet was proposed as a tool because it is as close as possible to a free and instant distribution system that connects to immense storage capacity and transcends geographical and institutional barriers. Although the internet has not yet been able to bring the information directly to the rural and ethnic peoples in Lao PDR, it can generate information for a growing portion of the development workers who are in direct contact with rural communities and ethnic groups. These people currently use a number of communication methods, including group meetings, drama and local radio, which can have a major impact on the knowledge of rural people if relevant content is available.⁶⁹

Key Challenges and Opportunities for Ethnic Peoples in Media and ICT

Communications, voice and representation

In conclusion, the study sheds new light on a number of key challenges to effective communication channels to enhance public participation and social inclusion in governance and development processes. Based on the analysis of this chapter, key challenges and opportunities have been identified at various levels, including national policy and legal framework, infrastructure, capacity development and implementation.

Challenges

- *Policy and legislation:* Despite the positive trends of new policies and legislations for more open media environment and sustainable development of ICT, the legal environment for inclusive media and rural ICTs remains equivocal. The government still maintains the authority to monitor, audit and discipline journalists and the new media outlets for any misconduct. Furthermore, greater coordination among government agencies and organizations is required to enhance the provision of services for ethnic peoples and those living in rural areas.
- *Limited media and communication outreach in remote and rural areas:* Despite positive changes in the overall media landscape, new information and communication channels are largely concentrated in larger cities, except the Lao National Radio (LNR), which broadcasts in three main languages and reaches the majority of the population. Besides LNR, ethnic peoples have limited opportunities to access information, particularly in print media due to narrow circulation and limited coverage of issues related to ethnic peoples.
- *Resource and capacity constraints:* Outdated equipment and limited human resources are major challenges to promoting access to information and communication channels for ethnic groups. Skilled human resources at all levels are vital and needed in order for Lao PDR to expand its networked communication environment, content and ICT applications for development and inclusion, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- *Relevant information and media content:* There are some serious gaps in providing relevant information and content for ethnic groups based on their needs and interests. Similarly, limited content in ethnic languages via suitable communication means continues to be a major obstacle to raising public awareness about how to use new media and ICT to improve quality of life.

⁶⁹ See, *LaoLink* the online technical forum in Lao language which was jointly established by the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) and National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), <http://laolink.org>

- *Implementation of ICT as a means for development:* Another challenge is ability to strategically tap new opportunities for utilizing information and communication as an active resource for development through the means of technology. Currently, the ICT and telecommunication services in Lao PDR have little relevance to the vast majority of the rural population, including ethnic groups. This is because current services and applications are not suitable for needs of the users in remote rural areas.

Opportunities

- *Changes in political climate and the new legal framework:* Changes in the political climate over the past decade provide an enabling environment to enhance social inclusion and accountability through increasing participation and broadening access and utilization of information and communication channels, particularly for ethnic peoples. A new media law was adopted by the government in 2008. This provides greater opportunities for mass media to continue to enhance its role. Furthermore, the government recognizes that access to information and professional media are critical to improve governance in Lao PDR. The NSEDP 2006-2010 stated its commitment to promote access to information for ethnic peoples, with particular attention to the need for media in ethnic languages. Simultaneously, the government's recognition of the importance of ICT and telecommunication as a means for rural development has been reflected in national development plans and strategies for rural development and poverty reduction, providing a useful entry point for action at the present time within the timeframe of the current NSEDP.
- *Infrastructure for ICT and telecommunication:* Lao PDR has a rigorous programme to enhance the national information infrastructure based on fibre-optics. This fibre-optic backbone provides outstanding opportunities for the country to take advantage of this conduit for high speed data and information exchange. The outreach of broadband infrastructure to provincial and district level provides opportunities for media and ICT convergence, if appropriate media and ICT outlets targeting ethnic peoples are piloted.
- *Integration of traditional media and contemporary means of communications:* Community radio is based on a strong oral tradition in Lao PDR and could be an effective medium of communication, especially among the poor and ethnic peoples who have limited literacy skills. It could also help promote access to information for those living in remote rural areas through integration of traditional media with new media (e.g. internet, wireless and mobile telephony) into new community based and interactive radio programming formats.
- *The presence of young Laotians with ICT experience:* The young urban generation of the Lao population will drive ICT development of the country due to their experience with new ICTs as well as their increasing exposure to and connection with other countries such as Thailand and the Laotian Diaspora. By enabling youth with better ICT access and by encouraging their involvement in media (particularly ethnic youth in rural and remote areas), Lao PDR can benefit greatly from this presently underutilized human resource base.
- *Recent trends in participatory communication channels:* Pilot community radio projects are closely link to the Communication for Empowerment (C4E) agenda, which is based on a more comprehensive approach to strengthen governance and inclusive participation. Pilots such as the Ta Oi station supported by Oxfam and the Khoun Community Radio project of UNDP and UNESCO exemplify recent trends. They also demonstrate opportunities to expand media outreach to marginalized and vulnerable populations in rural areas, especially ethnic peoples. These community radio stations provide crucial sources of information and, despite the limited number of two-way formats, they also serve as communication channels for the ethnic people to raise issues related to development challenges and solutions at the local level. As the new CSO law opens up for local associations to work for ethnic development and knowledge sharing, these radio stations will serve as important vehicles for beginning a collaboration between CSO and community radio, thereby enhancing civic engagement and systematization of ethnic voices in the media.
- *New technologies for communications:* Overcoming the communication challenges highlighted above will involve utilizing new and emerging wireless and mobile technologies that are less

sensitive to distance and topography. These technologies can deliver information in a simple and logical format with particular attention to the development needs and opportunities for ethnic peoples. Mobile telephony has in Lao PDR, as in most other developing countries, experienced a dramatic increase in its penetration among all levels of society due to liberalization in the telecom sector, cheaper hand-sets and introduction of pre-paid services. Further cost reductions will appear in the coming years and telecoms will continue to become more innovative in service and application development in order to penetrate new markets. This trend might become the single most important development in terms of expanding the communicative space for ethnic development and mitigation of their isolation from societal and economic development.





3. Communication for Empowerment Field Study

3. Communication for Empowerment Field Study

The methodology for assessing information and communication needs, challenges and opportunities for ethnic peoples aims to complement the national overview study from the perspective of ethnic peoples in Lao PDR. The purpose of the field research is not to provide a representative map of information and communication needs for ethnic peoples in Lao PDR. Rather, findings from the field research in selected districts offer a means of verification to gather evidence and direct experiences of ethnic peoples through participation and involvement of ethnic communities in the research process as the ultimate end-beneficiaries of the C4E process. While data collected from field-level research are not representative for the whole country, the analysis and recommendations generated from field data from three districts are, through extrapolation, applicable to most locations within Lao PDR. In addition, community-level research will help to improve the overall research methodology for national C4E studies to be conducted in other countries.

Field Research Methodology

The national overview study generates key analysis based on national-level data and information that was collected through secondary sources and interviews with key resource people in the capital of Vientiane. The field study also generates analysis through community level research based on information and data gathered through household surveys and qualitative interviews with ethnic peoples. Site visits were required to conduct field research focusing on development challenges and aspirations of communities to overcome these challenges, particularly the current and potential role of information and communications in promoting the voices and participation of ethnic peoples.

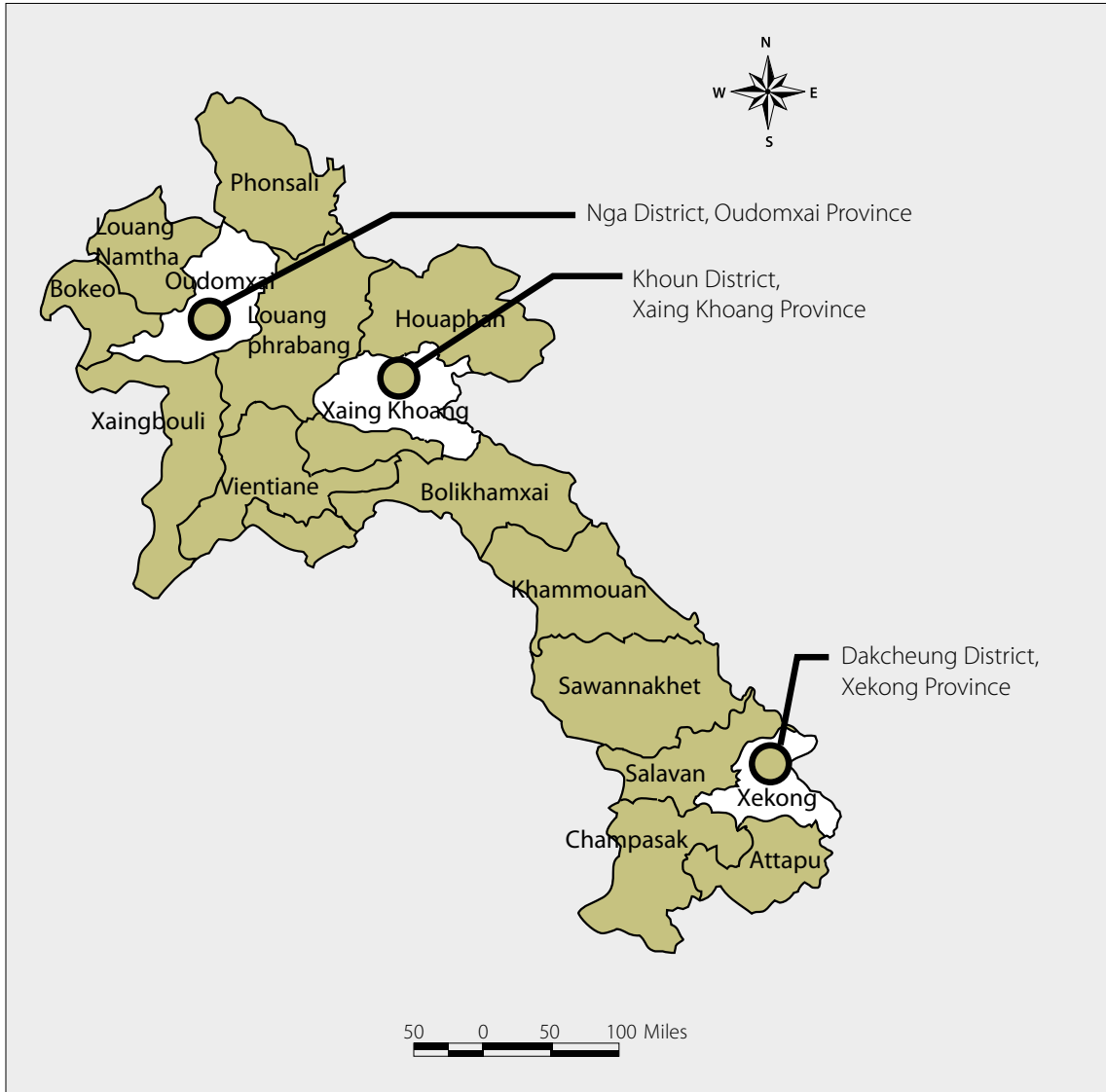
Location of districts

Field research was conducted as a complement to the findings of national-level research. Research tools consisted of household surveys, structured focus group discussions, individual and household interviews as well as interviews with local officials.

Locations for field research were identified during a scoping mission and were selected through consensus with participating stakeholders. Field research was conducted in three locations: Nga District of Oudomxai Province in northern Laos, Khoun District of Xieng Khouang Province in central Laos, and Dakcheung District in Sekong Province of Southern Laos. Map 5 indicates these locations. They were selected as a sample and are not necessarily considered as representative of the ethnic peoples of the whole of Lao PDR. Nevertheless, the selection of locations was intended to demonstrate the diversity in ethnicity, a geographical spread and differences in levels of poverty between more and less remote communities.

All locations were required to be classified among the poorest 47 districts in the country. Nga District in Oudomxai Province was chosen as it is the site of the Oudomxay Community Initiative Support Project (OCISP). The project promotes rural development in the midland and upland populations of the province, through community development, agricultural development and natural resources development, rural financial services, rural infrastructure development and institutional strengthening. The intention was for the C4E project to assess the extent to which improved access to media and communication channels might be used to reinforce the activities of OCISP and overcome development challenges faced by ethnic peoples in Lao PDR.

Map 5: Locations of Field Research for C4E Study



Khoun District of Xieng Khouang Province was chosen as it is the site of the Khoun Community Radio project. Khoun Radio is an example of the use of media for community development involving ethnic peoples – an experience from which the C4E project could usefully gain insights into the effectiveness of such an intervention. Dakcheung District in Sekong Province was selected as a particularly remote community in Southern Laos and as a balance to the research, being the least served of all the field sites in terms of communications and media.

Household survey

The purpose of household surveys was to develop a quantitative overview of the community's use of information, communications and media with relation to its development. A total of 13 villages in the three provinces were visited, yielding 251 household survey responses. The questionnaire format is shown in appendix 1. The questionnaire was translated into Lao and each one was completed during an interview with the householder that was conducted by a Lao-speaking translator assisted at times by a local language speaker. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participating households were selected based on the availability of an adult resident at the time of the research team's visit. Each village headman was notified in advance of the visit.

In-depth interviews

Open-ended and less structured interviews were conducted with individual householders and local officials. The householder interviews generated additional detailed knowledge by delving more deeply than the survey questionnaire but within a necessarily narrower context. Interviews with local officials helped to ascertain contextual information about development and infrastructural issues and activities at the district level, which helped to make sense of the household data and provide context for generating suitable proposals for potential interventions.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions generated deeper perspectives from suitably selected representative groups in each community. Separate group discussions were conducted wherever possible with different groups, e.g. women, men, farmers and officials.

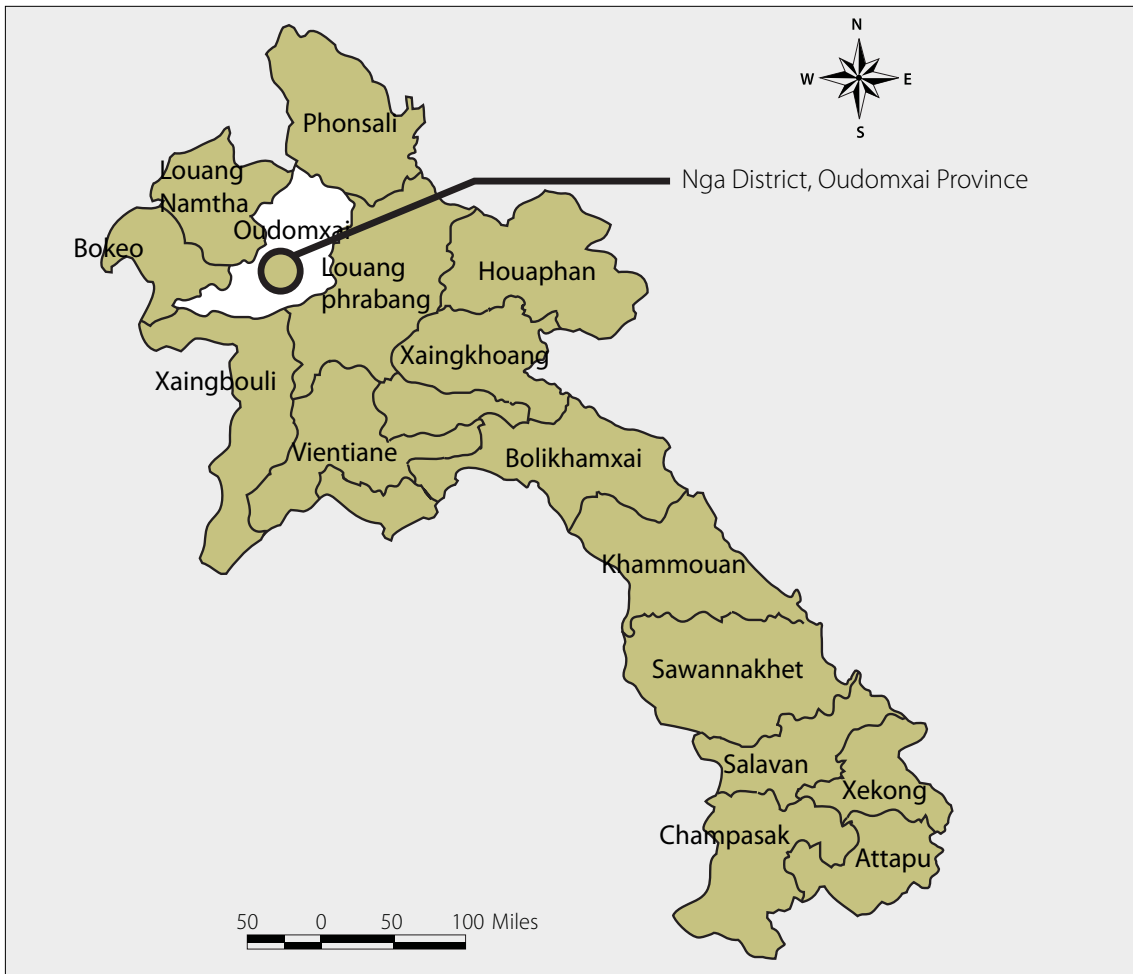
Findings in the Three Districts

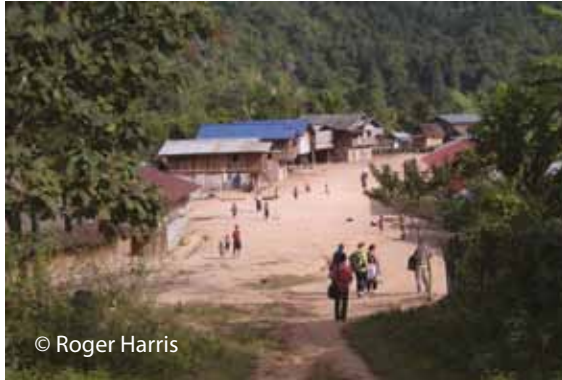
Nga District in Oudomxai Province

Introduction to the district

Oudomxay Province, in Northern Lao PDR is one of the poorest in the country. It covers an area of 15,370 km², of which about 85 percent is mountainous. There are seven districts with 584 villages, 42,400 families and 291,000 people. In Oudomxai Province, the field study was carried out in Nga district, which again is classified among the poorest in the country.

Map 6: Location of Field Study in Nga District





The area where Nga district is located is mostly mountainous and the roads are not sealed with pavement. Of the 28,000 people in Nga district, 60 percent are Khmou, 25 percent are Lao Loum and 15 percent are Hmong. There are 68 villages in the district, which is difficult to access because of the mountainous terrain and under-developed road infrastructure. Six particularly remote villages in the district are participating in the construction of a 22 kilometre food-for-work road project that will connect them to each other for the first time in their history. The road will also connect the villages to the district centres and provide them with access to markets and health services.

Swidden agriculture is the main livelihood option for the villagers. They also keep livestock and people living along the river build boats. Currently, only 10 villages have electricity. The study was conducted in four villages and the results of the research are depicted in appendix II.

In villages in Nga district, many families do not have enough rice to consume for up to half the year. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is planning a joint initiative with UNDP in Nga and Xay districts, in line with the UN reform programme “Delivering as One”. The Joint Sustainable Livelihoods Programme has the primary objective of improving the practical asset base of vulnerable target populations and their resilience to shocks by providing integrated interagency livelihoods support. This programme is expected to bring about increased income and improved food security while preserving the natural resource base, as well as increasing well-being and reduced vulnerability for the villages involved. A second objective is to strengthen the capacity of provincial and district government staff to establish and manage sustainable livelihoods programmes.

Development situation

The population of Oudomxay province is comprised of three major ethnic groups and 26 sub-groups. The largest ethnic group is the Lao Theung, representing about 55 percent of the provincial population, while the Lao Lum and Lao Sung account for 31 percent and 13 percent respectively. The villages are relatively small and mainly concentrated along the roads. The population density is quite low at 17 people per km². The province borders China and Phongsaly province to the North, Luang Namtha and Bokeo province to the West, Xayaboury province to the South and Luang Prabang to the East. Although Oudomxay has only a short international border with China, it is a transit point between China, Viet Nam and Thailand, with a large flow of products. However, only 66 percent of the households have road access in comparison to the Northern regional average of 75 percent and national average of 83 percent. Approximately 85 percent of the population in this province are Khmou. The government is promoting the concept of village clusters (Kum Ban) to facilitate delivery of public services to fewer locations serving wider populations.

The main occupations of the population are farming and livestock. Swidden cultivation remains the predominant agricultural practice. The main crop in Oudomxay is corn, especially located in Houn district. Rice is also cultivated in upland areas but the rice production cannot meet the needs of the entire province. Vegetables, fruits and tobacco are also grown. Among the Northern provinces of Lao PDR, Oudomxay has exhibited the highest population growth over the last two decades mainly due to migration from the nearby provinces of Luang Prabang and Phongsaly. Oudomxay province has also been subjected to the highest land area under slash and burn

agricultural practices in the Northern provinces of Lao PDR. The intensity of occupation and the considerable size of the agricultural plots in many parts of the province indicate high pressure on the land along with low yields per hectare, a combination likely to cause a long-term decline in the productive potential of the uplands for both agriculture and forestry.

Several development programmes are in progress in Oudomxay, mostly working in the field of agriculture and livestock farming including; Community Initiatives Support Project (CISP), German Agro Action (GAA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Helfer Project (Swedish NGO), and Livestock Farmer Support Project (LFSP). There is also a joint programme with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for social and economic rehabilitation of the former opium poppy growing farmers, the Post Opium Surpass Poverty (PSP) project, which is operating in Oudomxay.

Communication situation

More than 90 percent of the survey respondents reported illiteracy in their own language and 50 percent in the national language. Radio is the most prevalent communication channel, as reported by 65 percent of the households in the survey. Only two households reported a mobile phone. Radio and the loudspeaker are the most trusted channels and also regarded as the most useful, along with word-of-mouth, but all channels are deemed useful. Radio also rates the highest in terms of frequency and quality of coverage of ethnic issues, whereas newspapers were ranked lowest by respondents. More coverage would be welcomed in all channels, but mostly with radio. Opportunities to respond to what is heard and seen are low for all media channels, although highest for loudspeakers. Respondents felt that all channels could better serve their ethnic group, but they favoured radio and loudspeakers above the others. They also felt that both their current development opportunities and potential opportunities were served best by radio and loudspeakers. In these rankings, print media rated the lowest among the various channels of communication. Overwhelmingly, for almost 94 percent of respondents, word-of-mouth is the predominant means of expressing concerns to authorities..



Information and communication needs and challenges

During the focus group discussions, the villagers voiced the problems and challenges they faced for developing their communities. Among them, the following issues emerged that have relevance for the improvement of communications and delivery of more and better information; insufficient schooling, poor sanitation, unstable agriculture and loss of forests, poor agricultural skills, and pest damage to crops. Villagers also expressed their desires and priorities for development activities, e.g. a radio station in Khmou language, education and training, improved transportation and irrigation, a health centre, electricity, more animal husbandry, better housing, family planning, enterprise development (especially for women), cultural entertainment, loudspeakers and mobile phones and a wider variety of crops and fruits. Sources of ideas include international organizations and the government, and also national and provincial radio, television, word-of-mouth and village meetings.

The villagers acknowledged a range of challenges facing the achievement of their development desires and priorities, including: low skills and literacy levels, lack of information, poor health and sanitation, bad roads, limited land availability, difficulties in marketing their products, degraded environment, low incomes and poor quality of their agricultural products. They would welcome more and better information in overcoming these challenges in support of their development

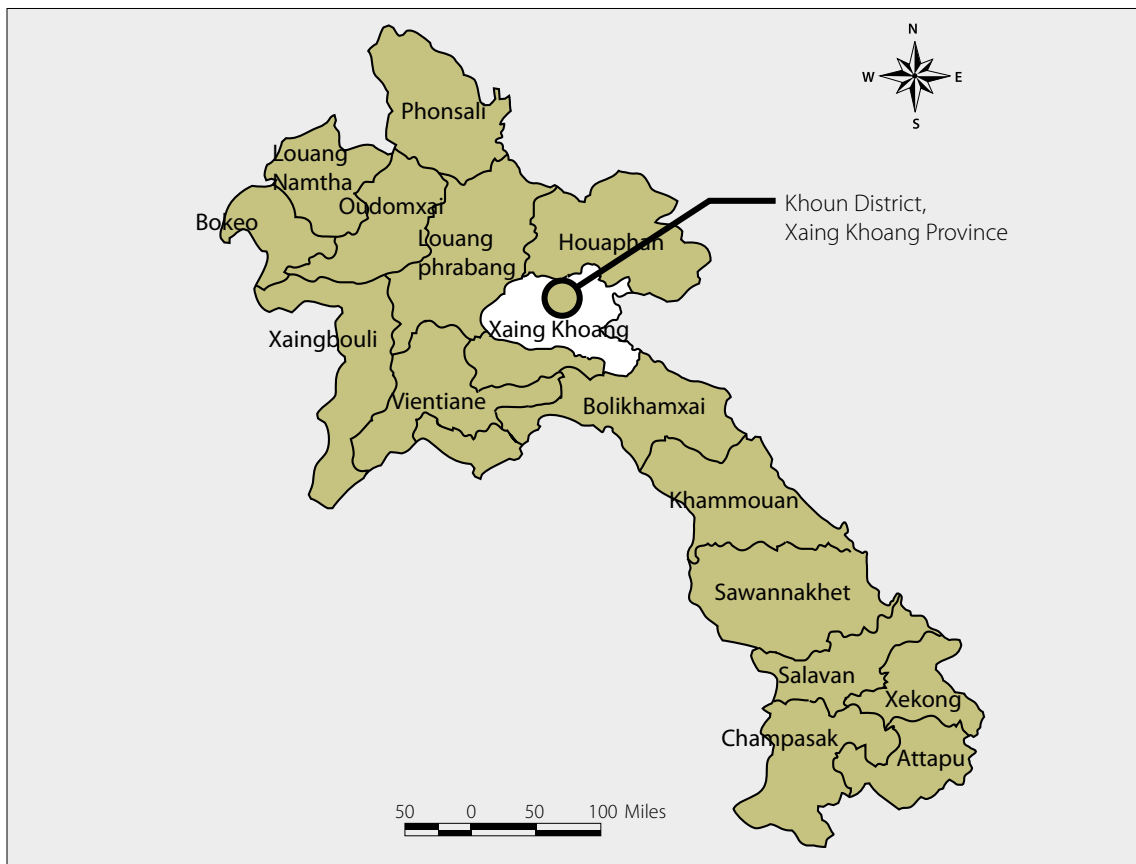
aspirations. In particular they would like to receive radio broadcasts in the Khmou language, better access to national television, a better signal for mobile phones, and more technical information for agriculture, health, sanitation and natural resources management. Communications with authorities are arranged by talking with the village head and through village meetings.

Khoun District in Xieng Khouang Province

Introduction to the district

Xieng Khouang Province lies in the North-East of Lao PDR. It has a population of around 220,000. The study was conducted in five villages of Khoun District: Houay Yes, Phia Wath, Phon Nheng, Phoumungmuong and Sam Nhong. Results of the research in these villages are depicted in appendix III.

Map 7: Location of the Khoun District



The findings were drawn from two ethnic groups, Hmong and Khmou, with almost 80 percent of respondents from the Hmong ethnic group. Respondents were mostly middle-aged, with more than half between the ages of 21 and 40 years, and roughly equal numbers of men and women. Educational achievement is low; the education level did not extend beyond primary for 42 percent of respondents, while a quarter reported no formal education at all. Farming is the predominant occupation, according to more than 90 percent of respondents. Literacy levels are also worrying; almost 50 percent reported no literacy in either their local language or the national language.

According to the District Governor, communication in Khoun is rather limited. There are no newspapers or magazines in the more remote rural areas. Lao television is restricted to one channel broadcast from Vientiane so residents mostly watch TV from Thailand. They use their own generators for electricity. Most villages receive Khoun Radio but the reception for the provincial radio is poor. The Governor attributes the success of Khoun radio to the agricultural information and the health information that it broadcasts. Previously, the local administration had to send officials to the villages to disseminate this type of information, but with the radio, this has become

easier for them. The District Governor noted that traditional customs make it difficult to change behaviour, although this is less true for the younger generation who, for example, have learned to boil water before drinking it. Due to the radio station, it has also become possible for the technical staff of the Agriculture Department to distribute more agricultural information and more projects are coming to this district. Generally, the Governor said, information is provided by the government and then distributed to the villages.

Development situation

The past decade has been a period of economic liberalization, and Xieng Khouang Province has begun to rehabilitate its road infrastructure, shifting away from a subsistence economy towards a monetary economy and opening up to increased trade. While livestock is a household activity throughout the province, Xieng Khouang is still not self-sufficient in rice production. Xieng Khouang is rated by the Lao Government as one of the areas with the highest rate of poverty and is therefore prioritized by the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) for improvements in agriculture, forestry, education, health and infrastructure, especially rural roads.



Most of its territory consists of a plateau with peaks rising to between 2,000 and 3,000 metres above sea level. The plateau is best known as the location of the Plain of Jars, which contains a number of unusual archaeological sites that attract tourists and which are under consideration by UNESCO for World Heritage status. The Xieng Khouang plateau is also renowned for its inventory of unexploded ordinance (UXO) left over from the United States' bombardment during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Clearing UXO is an ongoing endeavour as it continues to cause injuries and remains an impediment to development, including tourism, as visitors are only safe at a few cleared locations on the Plain of Jars. The UXO problem prevents development of much-needed agricultural land and land needed for vital infrastructure.

UNDP's Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) programme is working in the Province to help parts of the Lao civil service become more efficient and better able to deliver services to the poor. Khoun Community Radio for Development, implemented by the Ministry of Information and Culture and the Xieng Khouang Province Department of Information and Culture, supports Lao's first community radio station. The station has been on air since October 2007, and is community-led, operated by volunteers, and responsive to local Khoun District information needs. The station broadcasts in three local languages (Hmong, Khmu and Lao Loum), and gives communities a voice through direct participation in the radio and community news-making.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has initiated a project in Xieng Khouang to improve the health status of the poorest populations living in target villages located in priority development zones, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, women and children), and to adopt and scale up the model healthy village approach nationally. ADB is also providing technical assistance to develop 'e-centres' in Xieng Khouang to bring the internet and online services to district hospitals and health centres. The Agricultural Development Project of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been working to improve agriculture in the province through targeting poor people from all ethnic groups in order to reduce poverty

among men and women, increase household food and income security and improve nutrition, and increase alternatives to opium poppy cultivation.

Communication situation

The survey revealed that among all media channels, radio and mobile phones are the most popular, with ownership in 61 percent and 40 percent of households respectively, with both delivering the most trusted information, and radio perceived as being the most useful. The impact of the Khoun community radio station is clearly indicated in these results. Radio is seen as the media that most often represents ethnic issues and does so better than other channels. Such coverage would be welcomed from most channels, but mostly from radio and television. Despite relatively high access to these popular forms of media, opportunities to respond to what is conveyed on them are not rated highly. Again, radio rates the highest, followed closely by mobile phones, and this bears out the experience of the high volume of phone-ins by listeners to Khoun community radio. Radio is also the most highly rated media in terms of its potential to better serve the ethnic groups and to support their development. In all aspects of the survey relating to use and effectiveness of various media channels, loudspeakers were rated the lowest. Despite the popularity of radio, when respondents asked how they express their concerns to authorities, the majority, 65 percent, indicated word-of-mouth as their preferred means, with radio coming second at 45 percent.



Information and communication needs and challenges

The focus group discussions with villagers revealed the development activities they desire. Those that carry a component of information provision were dominated by their stated needs for education for the children and for improved skills in weaving, agriculture, enterprise development, health, hygiene, family planning, sanitation and forestry.

Given the study findings related to literacy, the short term needs for information can only be satisfied if it is expressed verbally or graphically in the local language. The experience with Khoun community radio is largely positive in this respect and listeners expressed their appreciation of its agricultural and health information broadcasts, as well as the fact that information is local, local messages are free, and information is not dominated by official messages. Listeners would also welcome more local news, more programme variety, agricultural information related to their own area, and increased range of the broadcasts. The radio station has clearly demonstrated its ability to give voice to the communities it serves, leveraging off the spread of mobile phones that are used by listeners to call in messages, comments and queries. Nevertheless, with word-of-mouth remaining as the principal means of expressing concerns to authorities, it seems that the radio station has further potential for acting as the voice of its listeners.

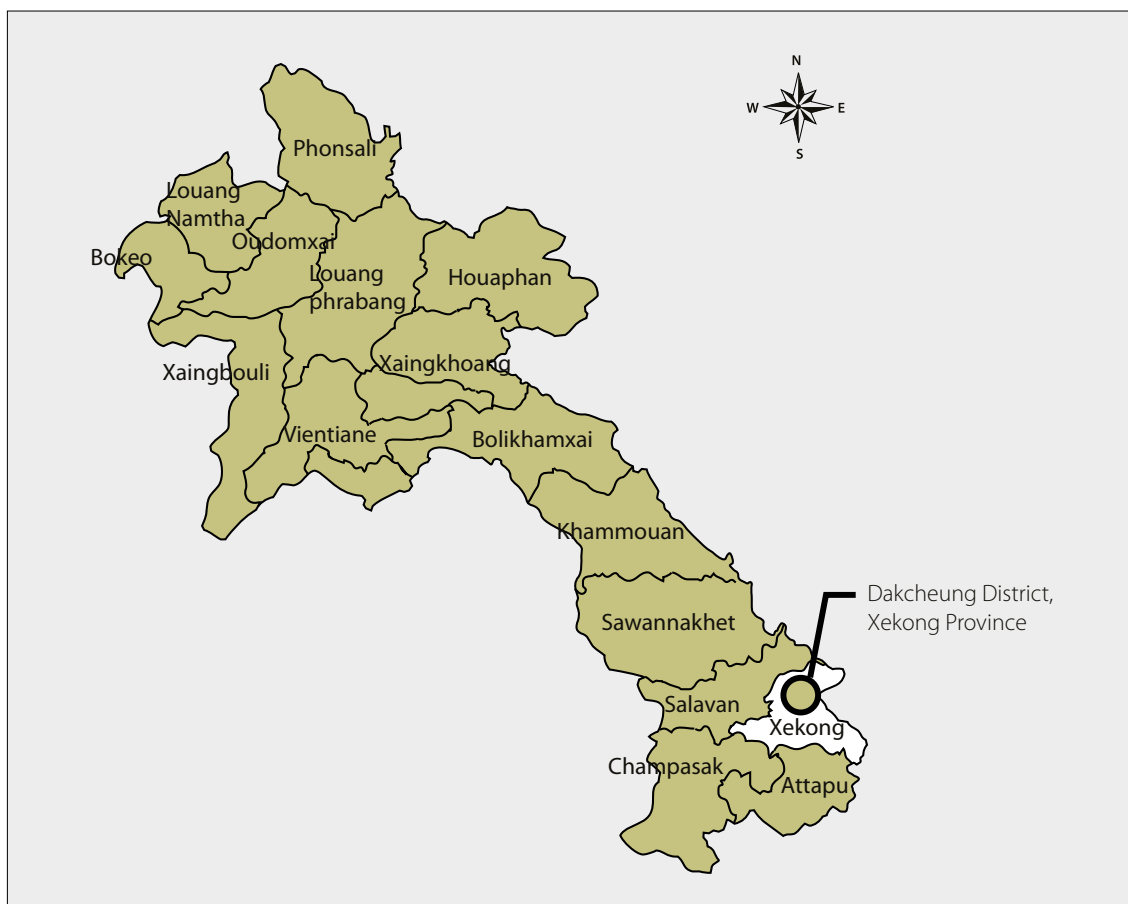
Challenges to further use of information and communication in Khoun District include low levels of literacy and education, lack of electricity, lack of skills, poverty and difficult transportation. There seems to be a limited role for mainstream national media, which with the exception of the provincial radio does not reach the villages studied.

Dakcheung District in Sekong Province

Introduction to the district

The third field study was carried out in Dakcheung District in Sekong Province which is located in the South-East of the country. It was created in 1984, when it was split off from Salavan Province. It is bordered by Viet Nam to the East, Attapeu Province to the South, Salavan Province to the North, and Champasak Province to the West. Sekong is the second smallest province in Laos (7,665 km²); it also has the lowest population (about 83,000) and the lowest population density of any province. Sekong is split administratively into four districts: Thateng on the Bolaven Plateau, Lamam in the lowland plain, and Dakchung and Kaleum in the mountainous areas bordering Viet Nam.

Map 8: Location of Dakcheung District



The study was conducted in four villages in Dakcheung District: Dack Pam, Dack Vang, Dak Mouan and Dak Souang. Results of the research in these villages are depicted in appendix IV. The findings were drawn from two ethnic groups, Yay and Trieng, with 72 percent of respondents from the Trieng ethnic group. Respondents were mostly middle-aged, with around 60 percent between the ages of 21 and 50 years, and roughly equal numbers of men and women. Educational achievement is low; only 2 percent of respondents advanced beyond primary level and 30 percent reported no formal education at all. Farming is the predominant occupation, reported by 87 percent of respondents. Literacy levels are very low; around 95 percent reported no literacy in their local language with around half reporting moderate or better literacy in the national language.

The Head of the Department of Information informed the study that the GPAR project is implementing Village Information Systems and has provided 10 villages with loudspeaker systems and information boards. They have recruited volunteer teams in 20 villages in Tateng District. Village information needs include health and sanitation. They are implementing two community radio stations, in Tateng and Dakcheung districts. The objective of GPAR in Sekong is to improve access to information for the ethnic peoples. The project schedule is from 2007–2011.

Development situation

Sekong is among the most remote areas of Lao PDR; even some of its largest villages are virtually inaccessible by road for at least six months of the year. The Eastern districts of Dakchung and Kaleum, in particular, are characterized by mostly mountainous terrain that is rugged and difficult to access. This isolation has meant that forest cover, biodiversity and ethnic traditions have changed less in recent years than in other areas in Laos. However, the province has become much less isolated in recent years, with the upgrading of a major road from Pakse, plus two major road projects connecting Sekong to Viet Nam to the East.

Remaining forest cover in Sekong Province is high. Government figures classify over 50 percent of the province's land area as forest. Much of the natural forest in Sekong has never been subject to commercial logging, but this is changing fast. Commercial timber extraction has been expanding rapidly over the past decade.



Sekong is ethnically diverse. Only about 3 percent of the population is ethnic Lao. The majority (97 percent) come from one of at least 14 distinct ethnic minority groups. Among the total Sekong provincial population of 83,000 people, the main ethnic groups are the Alak (21 percent), Katu (20 percent), Trieng (19 percent) and Nge/Krieng (11 percent). Dakcheung district has 86 villages and four ethnic groups: Trieng (46 percent), Yea (35 percent), Trew (20 percent) and Lakang. The local population is predominantly Trieng, of which there are 73,000 in Lao PDR and more than 100,000 in Viet Nam. The Vice District Chief and Co-ordinator of GPAR said that Dakcheung is one of Sekong's poorest districts and one of the 47 poorest in the country. Before the revolution there were no roads. Incomes are principally obtained from rice and animal husbandry. The predominant local language is Trieng, with Lao being the second most widely spoken.

During the dry season, most of 86 villages are easily accessible but not in the wet season when travel is very difficult. The local rice supply of 1.5 tonnes to 2 tonnes annually is sufficient for only about eight months consumption. There are three schools but more are needed. Cultural festivals around traditional spirits are now rare owing to the recent economic downturn. Government funds for agriculture loans are generally insufficient to meet the needs. There are 27 government offices in the district but this number is planned to be reduced. Mining surveys have been conducted in the district by Chinese investors. Coffee is grown as a cash crop in Dakcheung District.

Communication situation

The household survey revealed that radio is by far the most popular household communication channel, with over 30 percent of households reporting ownership. No households regularly receive newspapers and only one reported a mobile phone. However, despite low ownership, most media channels are well trusted and their information deemed useful. The frequency of coverage of ethnic issues is perceived to be low for all channels, although when it occurs, it is regarded as representing ethnic groups quite well. There is a strong demand for more such coverage. Respondents reported low levels of opportunity to respond to what is seen or heard in the media. They also reported varying opinions on which media could better serve their ethnic group, with telephones and loudspeakers emerging as those with the most potential. Loudspeakers are also rated highly, along with television and radio, as the media that are currently

serving their development interests the best, and with loudspeakers rated as having the most potential for serving future development. Overwhelmingly, for 76 percent of households, word-of-mouth is the predominant form of expressing concerns to authorities, with letters coming next, for 25 percent.

Information and communication needs and challenges

During focus group discussions, residents raised a wide range of development challenges and opportunities. There are many shortages: of land, electricity, education, literacy, health care, clothing, information, transportation, water and money. Villagers also recognized a range of opportunities that would help them overcome these shortages: a primary school, more land for pasture, better exploitation of non-timber forest products, better marketing of their coffee crops, more insecticides, and investment in post-harvest processing of their coffee crops. Villages would appreciate improved road access, a health centre, more latrines, a school agricultural training and a village loudspeaker. Interests in improved flows of information included agricultural, health, natural resources management, family planning, community development and coffee growing. Although the District Office provides limited information assistance, for example on health education, poor communications between villages and the district centre was acknowledged as a serious impediment to further development. Radio and television appear to be used mainly for entertainment purposes.

Comparative Analysis of the Three Districts

The following table provides a comparative summary of the findings from the three districts. There are significant variations between the districts in levels of education and literacy, but neither parameter extends much beyond 50 percent of the study population. Agriculture also varies somewhat, with Dakcheung standing out as a cash-crop producer. Other marked differences differentiate the district from the other two. Although radio is the most common household communication channel in all three, Dakcheung depicts around half the penetration rate of the others for radio sets. In contrast to the others, mobile phones are more trusted than any other media in Dakcheung and loudspeakers emerge as the most useful form of communication as well as the one with the most potential. It seems clear that Dakcheung, in its isolation, is yet to experience the benefits of radio that, for instance, have been enjoyed in Khoun. It is interesting to note the favourable response to loudspeakers in Dakcheung, which rates the technology significantly higher than the other districts. In all districts, despite the popularity of radio, the concept of two-way communication in so far as it gives a voice to the general population by furnishing them with an opportunity to express their concerns to authorities, is yet to be achieved by any of the media channels. Word-of-mouth remains by far the most predominant form of achieving this objective.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Three Districts

Comparison Parameter	Nga District, Oudomxai Province	Khoun District, Xieng Khouang Province	Dakcheung District, Sekong Province
Location	Northern	Central	Southern
Population	28,000	31,000	19,362
Dominant Ethnic Group	Khmou	Hmong	Trieng
Proportion with no education	53%	34%	31%
Proportion in farming	95%	91%	88%
Agriculture	Swidden, livestock	Livestock, rice	Coffee, rice
Literacy in local language	10%	49%	4%
Literacy in national language	50%	52%	60%
Most common communication channel	Radio – 65%	Radio – 61%	Radio – 31%
Most trusted communication channel	Radio	Radio	Mobile phone

Comparison Parameter	Nga District, Oudomxai Province	Khoun District, Xieng Khouang Province	Dakcheung District, Sekong Province
Most useful communication channel	Radio	Radio	Loudspeaker
Most frequent coverage of ethnic issues	Radio	Radio	Radio
Highest quality coverage of ethnic issues	Radio	Radio	Television
Best opportunity to respond to	Loudspeaker	Radio	Radio
Media channel with most potential	Radio	Radio	Loudspeaker
Predominant way of expressing concerns	Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth

Summary of Key Information and Communication Needs, Challenges and Opportunities Identified through Field Research

Information Needs

The study has identified a range of information and communication requirements that would be capable of alleviating much of the information poverty in the study areas if they could be made available to the residents. Principal among them is the need for information in support of better education, health care, sanitation, agriculture, natural resource management, pest control, animal husbandry, enterprise development (especially for women), family planning and irrigation. In addition, local news would be welcomed as well as ethnically-specific cultural entertainment.

Challenges

The most significant challenge is the low rate of literacy, which restricts the immediate prospects of improvements in information and communications to verbal and visual means. This remains the key obstacle to both the delivery and use of information and communications. Other challenges include lack of electricity, poor health and sanitation, poor access to key infrastructure such as roads and communications⁷⁰, scarce land availability, difficulties in marketing products, degraded environment, low incomes and poor quality of the agricultural products. In addition, low levels of incomes limit purchasing power of residents contemplating the purchase of household communication devices such as televisions, computers and mobile phones; arrangements for the use of public shared facilities would be indicated in order to make effective use of these devices.

Opportunities

Given the relatively high level of radio ownership, as well as the popularity of non-Lao language broadcasts for ethnic groups that do not speak Lao, there is a ready opportunity to increase the use of this media to good effect. Additional community radio stations are indicated. Ethnic television broadcasts would also be welcomed, provided arrangements were put in place for community based shared television sets. Loudspeaker systems have emerged with a mixed review in the study; welcomed in some places but less in others. It seems possible that the medium is either popular in the absence of any other (as in Dakcheung) or that it is put to particularly good use there, or both. In any case, there does seem to be a role for this low-cost and simple technology, which can help to overcome the challenges of limited incomes and lack of electricity that impede the further diffusion of other forms of communication. Mainstream national media does not reach the villages studied, with the exception of the provincial radio. Provincial radio satisfies the demand for local language broadcasts, yet the information it provides is less locally focused and less responsive than community radio. Mobile phones demonstrate the most promise in this regard as prices continue to fall and networks extend their reach. They are also less demanding on electricity supplies.

⁷⁰ Roads are in bad condition and seasonally impassable.





4. Analysis of the Findings from the National Overview Study and Field Research

4. Analysis of the Findings from the National Overview Study and Field Research

Development Situation for Ethnic Groups

Official data point to recent improvements in human development indices for ethnic peoples. It is clear, however, that there is still much to achieve in terms of education, health, food security, the environment, gender equality, agriculture and livelihoods. These areas remain the focus of formal development processes and the study has exposed opportunities for introducing improved communications in their support that will also serve to empower communities towards development that they themselves would welcome.

Insofar as poverty is associated with the lack of access to public services, it is evident that rural development in the form of improved services becomes more of a challenge as that access becomes more difficult, as seen in the remote and isolated areas of the country where many ethnic peoples reside. These remote locations suffer most from the least access to communications and would therefore benefit the most from even small improvements.

The study identified problems of poor communications that exacerbate the difficulties involved in addressing ethnic development to the extent that it must take place within the framework of the languages and cultures of the ethnic groups concerned. Given the variety of languages and cultures in Lao PDR, this requirement alone places a huge burden on the development process. With the low literacy rates found among ethnic peoples, written media would not be indicated to assist in this process of communication. Oral communication, however, is more appropriate as it reaches everyone when it is conducted in the language with which the audience is familiar and it is clearly preferred by the ethnic people themselves over other forms of communication.

The study notes that the ethnic groups in Lao PDR are largely unorganized, as there are very few organizations representing their interests. Communication within and between the ethnic communities and between them and development officials is further hampered by a scarcity of both ethnic media and non-ethnic (mainstream) media. Moreover, mainstream media seems to pay little attention to ethnic issues and even if it did, the ethnic people have little access to it. An exception is the potential growth of community radio stations, which may be able to help overcome the isolation (both physical and social) suffered by remote communities as well as interactively engaging them in the development process.

Communication and Information Needs

Research exposed that the ethnic groups experienced problems with their agricultural livelihoods stemming from lack of knowledge and from plant and animal diseases. They could not see any opportunity for inward investment in their agricultural activities. Difficulties with transportation and access to markets as well as adverse terms of trade lessen the potential for enjoying the benefits of any improvements. Schooling for their children is also a major concern, as there are not schools in every village. Local health services are negligible and combined with poor sanitation and water supply, and health is also a major concern. The lack of electricity hinders further development. There is a demand for information on agriculture and enterprise development as well as cultural and environmental information. The people encountered in the research recognized opportunities for development from animal husbandry, handicrafts, and better exploitation of non-timber forest products.

The experiences and data of field research indicate that ethnic people in Lao PDR are isolated along several dimensions. They are socially isolated as a result of illiteracy, even in their own language. This tends to cut them off from interaction among their own people living in neighbouring villages as well as from other ethnic peoples living farther afield but who may share a set of common ideals and goals. Many are also physically isolated, living in remote locations with poor or non-existent communications and transportation. Many of the people that participated in this study rarely leave their village. However the single most important form of contact with the world outside is their radio, which can be found in more than half the households and which

has become a trusted and preferred source of information. Moreover, perceptions of radio are not conditioned by ownership; it is rated almost equally high by householders who own a radio as it is by those that do not. However, as a two-way form of communication, radio in Lao PDR has yet to achieve its full potential. Word-of-mouth remains the principal form of communication from villagers to authorities. Notwithstanding the radio as a general utility, the impression gained again is that aside from the land they own, the only assets ethnic people have are each other.

Appropriate Communication Channels for Empowerment, Inclusion and Participation of Ethnic Groups

Other than radio, the other types of media have little presence (around 10 percent of households or less) in the villages studied, although access outside the household is much higher, which indicates a community-based approach to technology access. Nearly all sources of information are well trusted and useful, but the representation of ethnic issues is infrequent, except on radio. Again, with the exception of radio, the quality of media treatment of ethnic issues is rather moderate and more would be welcomed, especially on radio. Ethnic people lack a voice insofar as they feel that they are generally unable to respond to anything they see or hear in all types of media. All types of media could serve ethnic issues better but given the varying levels of access to different media, radio is regarded as the most promising. Development opportunities for ethnic people are perceived to be very well-served by radio, but respondents were lukewarm about other forms of media. More coverage of ethnic issues would definitely be welcomed on radio and loudspeakers.

Communications for empowerment implies that communities should be able to instigate their own development initiatives and have access to their own media and communication channels according to their own agenda, aspirations and priorities. The findings of the study have highlighted national development priorities as well as revealed the aspirations of the communities themselves and there does appear to be close correspondence between the two. The study has also revealed the preferences that ethnic people have for communications in support of these development priorities, with radio being a strong favourite. Experiences to date with community radio in Lao PDR have been mostly positive, although issues of sustainability are not totally resolved. It is clear that community radio is an effective organ for transmitting information to ethnic groups who do not understand Lao very well or at all. It is less clear that the existing initiatives, of which admittedly there are very few, have yet fulfilled community radio's promise of providing a voice to the poor and allowing them to participate more fully in national debates and decision-making on issues that affect them.

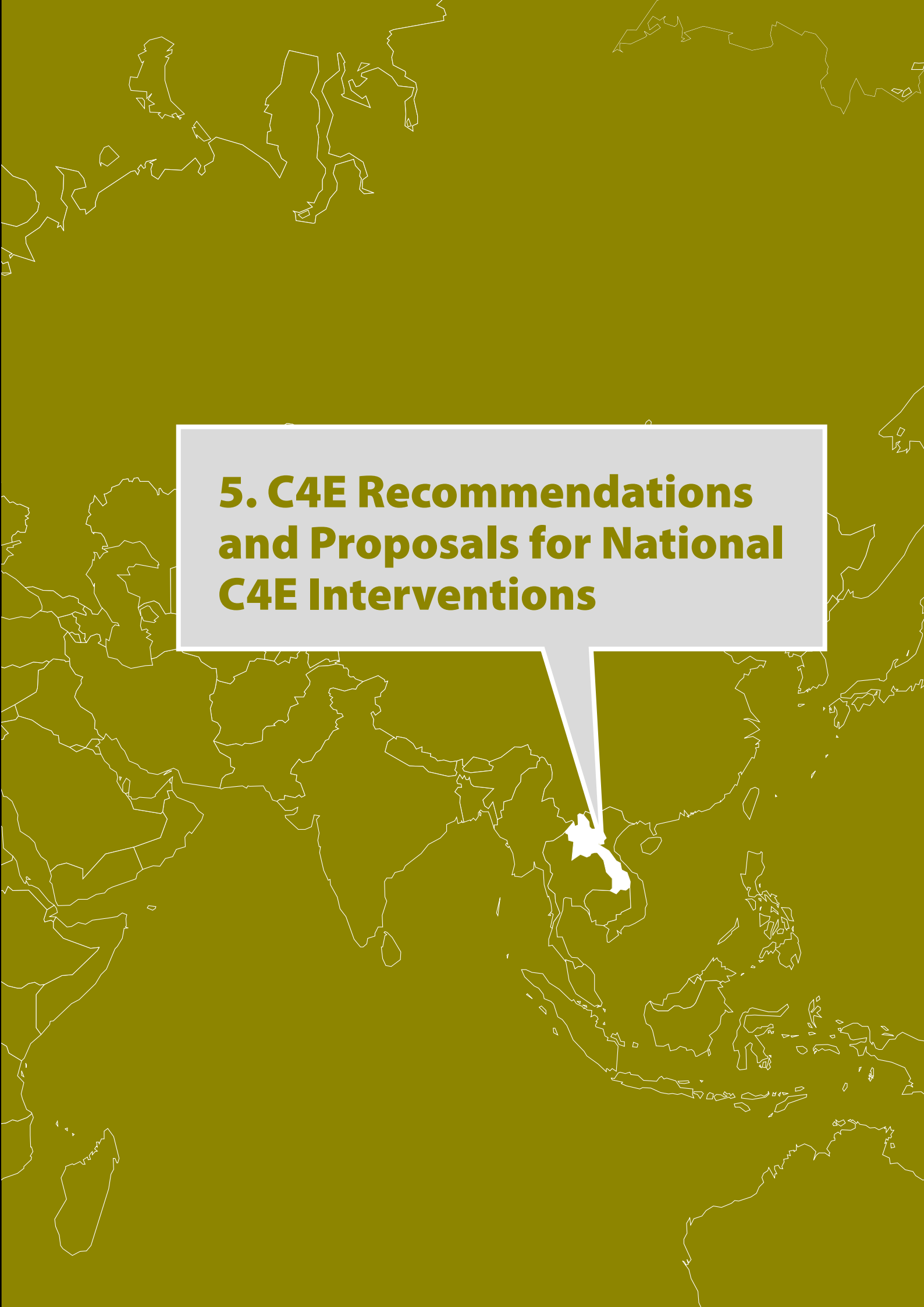
So far, community radio seems to increase access to information as well as provide a useful communication platform. Further implementation of this form of communication could pursue a more participatory approach to programming formats allowing for interaction among and between indigenous peoples and between indigenous peoples and governmental authorities. The existing messages that are being relayed via community radio imply improvements that would seem to be incremental in nature. In comparison, the introduction of new media, especially the internet, implies the discovery of new information and ways of communication that could be transformational and empowering. The results of the field research imply there is untapped potential for using radio more effectively as a medium for promoting and implementing development activities that are closely aligned with local priorities. The results also indicate that there is room for expanding its potential through more interactive and participatory radio programming formats including convergence with other communication channels such as mobile telephony and the internet. International experience with ICTs, especially the internet, shows that there is also development potential that far exceeds what the communities in the study might be capable of imagining and, under the right circumstances, these communication channels could be made available to them.

In line with the rapid expansion of telecommunications in Lao PDR for both mobile telephony and internet access, there are untapped opportunities for exploiting the synergies that exist between different technologies when used together to achieve a more desirable level of interactivity between communities, broadcasters, authorities and the outside world. The volume of phone

calls from listeners to Khoun Radio testifies to this potential. Such an arrangement would also lend itself to the need for development processes to engage more closely with local knowledge and to take greater account of traditional practices and knowledge within forthcoming development interventions. Effective management and use of traditional knowledge implies the implementation of a robust communication mechanism for continuously gathering ethnic knowledge and feeding it into ongoing development processes. Databases that are accessible to ethnic communities have a role to play here. Experiments in Lao PDR so far with ICTs, e.g. rural telecentres, have given rise to some positive outcomes so the opportunity exists to move forward towards further implementations, as is happening in other Asian countries.

The coming focus on communication for empowerment should proceed by replicating more community radio stations. It should also include additional steps towards integrating the use of other newer technologies to further infuse the promise of giving a voice to the ethnic peoples that they can use to good effect, as they themselves would wish to use it. As official policy moves the nation out of LDC status, with civil society having better access to information and affordable communication channels being one of the main drivers, the challenge and opportunity now is to identify ways to empower ethnic communities with the capacity to point change in a direction that they would choose for themselves.



The background of the page is a dark blue map of Southeast Asia, showing the outlines of countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. A white callout box with a blue border and a pointer pointing to the region of Southeast Asia is centered on the page. Inside the box, the text is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

5. C4E Recommendations and Proposals for National C4E Interventions

5. C4E Recommendations and Proposals for National C4E Interventions

Ethnic peoples represent approximately 44 percent of the total population in Lao PDR and largely remain marginalized and vulnerable. By and large, they have been excluded from mainstream development processes and continue to suffer from issues related to poverty, social exclusion and lack of access to basic social services.

The national C4E study emphasizes access to information and communication channels as essential elements of advancing democratic governance and alleviating poverty for poor and vulnerable groups, including for the majority of ethnic peoples.

With limited formal representation and participation in decision making processes, ethnic peoples will most probably be further marginalized and as a consequence existing disparities and inequalities will widen. An increasing information divide between urban and rural areas will contribute to exacerbating these inequalities.

This study has identified both development challenges and opportunities to enhance communication for empowerment of ethnic peoples. One opportunity includes Lao PDR's efforts towards creating an enabling legal environment for associations and CSOs. This will provide strong entry points in the overall policy for poverty reduction. There are potentials for using the convergence taking place in media and communications technologies not just for enhancing information exchange but also for supporting and promoting the revival of ethnic languages. Effective communication systems and channels can also provide development agencies, including government, a bridge to extend democratic governance and development to the remotest corners of the country. They can provide the ethnic groups with a space to have voice and participate in decisions that affect their livelihoods.

Broadly the recommendations of the C4E assessment encompass the following key areas:

- Improving the enabling policy environment on C4E for ethnic peoples;
- Proposing C4E programme interventions aimed at increasing ethnic peoples access to information, communication channels, voice and participation in governance processes.

The recommendations also imply the need for follow-up research in key areas as part of the process of implementing pilot projects and/or supporting innovations that already exist.

Improving the Enabling Policy Environment on C4E for Ethnic Peoples

An enabling policy and legal environment is essential for the media to become a mechanism for inclusive democratic governance through increasing access to information and communication channels among ethnic peoples in Lao PDR.

Both the NGPES and 6th NSEDP recognize the critical importance of access to information as a means to enhance socio-economic development in the 47 poorest districts in Lao PDR. The plan emphasizes the importance of communication tools in providing relevant information for empowerment, local development and poverty eradication. The 7th NSEDP (2011-2015) aims to help improve service delivery, accelerate the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, and enable the country to graduate out of the LDC status by 2020. Some pilot interventions are already underway. UNDP's Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR) programme is piloting *Village Information Systems* in Sekong Province in order to improve access to information for ethnic peoples.⁷¹

Furthermore, new legislation on CSO registration and a new media law provide greater opportunities for the mass media to continue to enhance its role. These are first steps in the right direction for associations to obtain better access to information and the media, especially

⁷¹ See United Nations Development Programme, GPAR Sekong Project, Project Fact Sheet available at http://www.undplao.org/whatwedo/Projectdocs/update%20November%202009/GPAR_Sekong_Brief_2009_07.pdf

community media that could be an effective mechanism for empowerment and development of ethnic peoples.

Introduction of an access to information policy and legislative framework can further strengthen civic engagement in governance processes and help to expand an investigative role of the media in Lao PDR. Viet Nam and other ASEAN member states have started a process towards formulating an access to information law; this is yet to be considered in Lao PDR.

To drive this process, proposed recommendations are:

- As part of other programmes on peoples' participation in governance, UNDP could take the lead in promoting an access to information policy in Lao PDR. Particular attention could be paid to access to information for ethnic peoples. The creation of an access to information policy and law will normally require a long process of consultation and consensus among the government and relevant stakeholders. In this regard, UNDP could play a facilitating role in introducing the process in collaboration with MoIC.
- The formulation of an access to information policy and eventually a law would be a step-by-step process, where the actual adoption of the bill could take years. It could be a tangible and potentially high impact output of a governance programme running four to five years. The programme could simultaneously work with the government in setting up a system for information disclosure and establish mechanisms for access to information for the public, including ethnic peoples in rural and remote areas.
- Based on the findings of the study, conditions for community radio and combinations with other new media channels seem to be an important step forward towards expansion of the communicative space for ethnic peoples.
- An analysis of the enabling environment for the media to strengthen communication outreach and diversity based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators Framework⁷² could help to prioritize actions of the government and those of the international donor agencies. Such priorities should aim at improving the capacity and enabling legal environment of all forms of media and communications particularly with a view to remote rural areas. This could also stimulate rural development.
- In order to take the C4E recommendations forward, a national multi-stakeholder committee on information, communication and media should be established with the key tasks to: 1) continue assessment of the C4E situation; 2) formulate a national strategic plan to expand inclusive communication channels; and 3) integrate new media and ICT into other forms of communications to promote inclusive participation and voices of ethnic communities.
- Enhance awareness and capacity of the new CSOs and associations with particular focus on how to utilize communication and media options to enhance their participation in public dialogues or discussions at the national and sub-national levels.
- Establish mechanisms for collaboration between CSOs and associations, particularly those relating to ethnic peoples and mainstream media as well as community radio as a way to enhance their voices in the public discourse.
- Support Lao National Radio and TV to improve their reporting on ethnic issues at the national and sub-national levels.

Proposed C4E Programme Interventions

Scaling up community radio in Lao PDR

At the national level, scaling up any strategic C4E programme would entail more than merely replicating those that already exist. Innovative and pioneering pilot projects, such as community radio stations are usually run by small teams in a flexible and adaptive manner, responding quickly to changes in local circumstances and at the same time building on small successes and working around unforeseen difficulties. However, a wider programme, perhaps on a national scale,

⁷² UNESCO (2008), Media Development Indicators: A framework for assessing media development, The International Programme for the Development of Communication. Paris, 2008.

would necessarily need to be institutionalized with a set of working practices and procedures capable of being followed by many employees. Such a programme should be accompanied by mechanisms for building capacity and sharing experiences as well as generating a forum for further development of the concept.

Capacity development at the national level includes:

- Legal advice and support
- Training and planning assistance
- Financial management and resource mobilisation
- Community research and impact assessment
- Partnership of relevant stakeholders
- Local ownership

Scaling up community radio comprises three dimensions: 1) adding more stations throughout the country; 2) infusing these stations with greater capacity for giving voice to ethnic peoples with two-way communications (both vertically between communities and authorities, and laterally between communities of the same ethnicity and differing ethnicity); and 3) bringing additional ICTs into the mix in a synergistic fashion that would strengthen the capabilities of each towards greater impact in line with nationally agreed development goals.

Community radio is an appropriate development tool because it is supported by government policies in Lao PDR. It can help overcome the difficulty in getting messages across to remote villages, as well as the low literacy rates (a common barrier to conveying information). Furthermore, it is cost effective, making it possible for long term sustainability. There is also a demonstrated interest among communities to participate.⁷³

Proposed strategic actions are as follows:

- Improve radio programming formats towards better involvement of local level issues and stakeholders;
- Provide training programmes for local level journalists or volunteers working at existing community radio stations with particular focus on content development, interviewing techniques and story telling;
- Promote more coverage and reporting of ethnic issues through the network of community radio stations that have links to mainstream media;
- Foster public debates and discussions on development issues or concerns at the local and community levels;
- Combine community radio with internet to enhance the provision of services in the remote and rural areas, particularly for ethnic peoples.

Combining community radio with internet

The introduction of additional ICTs to community radio represents an innovative opportunity in Lao PDR. The internet represents an opportunity for intensifying radio's impact in a number of ways by offering the ability to share and disseminate knowledge and information among development agents, policy makers and the beneficiaries themselves. However, in order to have a significant impact on development programmes, ICT services must be readily accessible and meaningful to broad segments of the rural population and the information they carry must be adapted and disseminated in formats and languages that they can comprehend. Experience with community telecentres that provide shared access to computers and the internet and other ICTs indicates that they are capable of effectively supporting interventions for education, health, agriculture, enterprise development and cultural and social enrichment. While telecentres deliver information to communities, radio can be used in addition to deliver it directly into households.

⁷³ See United Nations Development Programme, *Khoun Community Radio for Development: Bringing Local News to Local People in Xieng Khouang*, Fact Sheet, 2009 available at http://www.undplao.org/whatwedo/Projectdocs/Khoun_Radio_Brief_2009_07.pdf [accessed on 9 December 2009] and Thongsavanh Khammanichanh and Birgitte Jallo, "Turning Plans and Dreams Real: The Community Leads the Way," Final Evaluation Report Khoun Radio Support Project, June-July 2007, available at <http://www.undplao.org/whatwedo/Projectdocs/Khoun%20Radio%20evaluation%20report%202007.pdf> (accessed on 9 December 2009)

National community e-centre programmes

The internet is already emerging as a powerful force for development and poverty alleviation. Access to the internet is usually provided to rural communities in the form of community telecentres.⁷⁴ Community telecentres are seen as a tool for achieving development goals, even for LDCs. Nepal and Bangladesh (both LDCs) have embarked on national programmes for the widespread deployment of community telecentres for delivering internet access to their poor rural populations, following some years of experimentation and in line with similar programmes in other developing countries around the world. Although telecentres are in their infancy in Lao PDR, the experiences that have accumulated in recent years in other countries in Asia means that late-comers can jump-start the piloting phase by adopting the set of commendable practices that has emerged and move directly into a national commitment to rural development underpinned by internet-based information services.

Mobile phones: the promise of the future

A further opportunity for technology synergies exists with mobile phones. The growth and potential impact of mobiles are phenomenal. Mobiles are helping deliver on every one of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty, education, equality and health.⁷⁵ In Bangladesh, 'Mobile Ladies' (women with a mobile phone in hand) go door-to-door in their villages, listening to problems and advising on how best they can be solved. In about half the cases this involves sending a letter or email via a community-based information worker. For the rest, a mobile phone call is made directly to a helpline and an answer is provided instantly or in a few days. Research also indicates that the poorest people use mobile phones to strengthen their close social networks of immediate family and friends. They also use mobiles for 'link-up' – short calls averaging 19 seconds – to broader, more extensive social networks. Further increasing mobile penetration into the poorest sections of society will require low-cost handsets and services, innovative funding schemes and, most of all, more efficient markets. Research evidence suggests, however, that it will be possible to almost double current levels of penetration before services become uneconomic to provide.⁷⁶ Moreover, because many developing countries such as Lao PDR are unencumbered by legacy assets, they have the opportunity to leap-frog to newly available, affordable technologies and mobile and wireless networks will play a large role in this regard.

Development of mobile services has been largely left to the private sector, but this does not mean that they cannot be incorporated into formal development programmes, as in Bangladesh. The volume of telephone calls to the Khoun radio station is indicative of the potential and it makes the case for integrating mobile access into community radio services, even if only at the level of one phone per village.

ICTs and community radio support all areas of the MDGs

ICTs and community radio are capable of contributing to effective programmes in all areas of the MDGs. In the case of telecentres, experience indicates that they are capable of effectively supporting interventions for education, health, agriculture enterprise development and cultural and social enrichment. For sustainability, they need to be good at minimum two of these, preferably three or more. Telecentres under UNESCO are called "multipurpose community e-centres" to emphasize this characteristic.

The effective application of ICTs, including radio, the internet and mobile telephony, to rural development implies different approaches to development and in particular it favours a territorial approach to rural development. Territorial rural development requires a combination of sectoral approaches with area-based analyses, planning and support mechanisms. In particular, these have to be targeted towards regional economic development, with better access to efficient services

74 Roger Harris, *Information and Communication Technologies for Poverty Alleviation* (KL, UNDP-APDIP, 2004), available at <http://www.apdip.net/documents/eprimers/poverty.pdf> (accessed on 9 December 2009)

75 Richard Heeks and Abi Jagun, "Mobile phones and development: the future in new hands?," Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex available at <http://www.id21.org/insights/insights69/art00.html> (accessed on 9 December 2009)

76 *ibid.*

and adequate infrastructure as well as the establishment of suitable institutional and political conditions.⁷⁷

A territorial approach to rural development is somewhat new to formal development processes, which tend to follow sectoral lines. The Oudomxay Community Initiative Support Project is an interesting example of this approach as it incorporates community development, agriculture and natural environment, rural finance, and rural infrastructure with capacity building and therefore presents an opportunity for deploying multiple ICTs within a territorially-based approach to rural development. The GPAR initiative in Sekong already includes an information component featuring radio, loudspeakers and sign boards and therefore offers an opportunity for exploiting technology synergies that are available with the internet and mobile phones.

77 Rural21 The International Journal for Rural Development; Newsletter 1/2009; <http://www.rural21.com/543.html>

Table 2: Priority Areas for C4E Interventions

Issues/Challenges	Opportunities	Recommendations	Strategic Actions
<p>1. Equivocal policy framework for access to information and inclusive media development.</p>	<p>A media law was adopted by the government in 2008, which provides greater opportunities for mass media to continue to enhance its role.</p>	<p>Promote an access to information policy and a framework for media development with particular attention to inclusiveness of marginalized groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Access to Information as a subject matter in relation to achieving governance and poverty related outcomes. • Work gradually with MoIC on developing a draft policy and law on A2I. • Analyse the current enabling environment for media development using UNESCO's Media Development indicators. • Establish a policy on community media as well as national community radio support framework that provides technical advice and support for the emergence of new community radio stations, including legal advice, technical support, training and impact assessment.
<p>2. Limited voice and participation of ethnic peoples in decision making processes and narrow formal representation of ethnic groups.</p>	<p>Increasing space for associations to be registered as independent legal entities can help increase the participation of ethnic groups in national development processes.</p>	<p>Enhance voices and participation of ethnic peoples and their associations in governance and policy -making processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish mechanisms for collaboration between CSOs/associations particularly those relating to ethnic peoples and mainstream media as well as community radio as a way to enhance ethnic voices in public discourse. • Promote policy dialogues and discussion forums among governments, associations, NGOs and media to discuss issues related to inclusive participation of ethnic peoples. • Establish a national multi-stakeholder committee on information, communication and media to assess the current situation and formulate a national strategic plan for more inclusive communication channels.
<p>3. Resources and capacity constraints to advance access to information and inclusive communication channels for ethnic peoples, particularly those isolated in rural and remote areas.</p>	<p>Lao PDR has a rigorous programme to enhance the national information infrastructure based on fibre-optical backbone, which provides outstanding opportunities for the country to take advantage of high-speed data and information exchange</p> <p>The presence of young Laotian population with ICT experiences can drive ICT development in the country due to their exposure and access to new technologies.</p>	<p>Strengthen the capacity of ethnic communities to improve community media and ICT for ethnic peoples, including ethnic youth in Lao PDR.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a pilot intervention programme to optimize the use of media and ICT outlets targeting ethnic peoples in selected locations. • Integration of traditional media, such as community radio and new media (e.g. internet, wireless and mobile telephony) could help promote access to information for those living in the remote areas and have limited literacy skills. • Establish partnership with the private sector, civil society and ethnic communities.

Issues/Challenges	Opportunities	Recommendations	Strategic Actions
4. Limited information and media contents for ethnic groups based on their needs and interests, including language barriers and inadequate public awareness on the use of media and ICT.	Government has increasingly recognized the need to address issues related to ethnic diversity in Lao PDR. Furthermore, the 6th NSEDP recognize the critical importance of access to information as a means to enhance socio-economic development in the 47 poorest districts in Lao PDR.	Capacity building for mainstream and local media including journalism to enhance the coverage and reporting of ethnic issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness raising programmes to enhance knowledge of civil society, media on issues related to ethnic peoples. • Support Lao National Radio and TV to improve their reporting on ethnic issues at the national and sub-national levels. • Generate knowledge products on ethnic peoples in Lao PDR. • Enhance availability of information in ethnic languages. • Scale up the community radio programme that comprised of three key dimensions: 1) increasing radio stations; 2) enhancing capacity of the community radio to promote voices of ethnic peoples and two-way communications; and 3) combine community radio with ICT to enhance provision of services in remote rural areas. • Provide training programmes for local journalists and volunteers with particular focus on content development, interviewing techniques and story telling. • Foster public debates and discussion on development issues at the local and community levels through media and communications, such as community radio programmes. • Improve media programming formats, particularly community radio to reflect local issues and better engage local stakeholders.
5. Little relevance of ICT and telecommunication services to the vast majority of the rural population, including ethnic groups due to the services and applications that are not suitable for the needs of users.	Government's recognition of ICT and telecommunication as a means for rural development is reflected in the national development plans and strategy for rural development and poverty reduction.	Enhance ICT applications, including radio, internet and mobile telephony in support of development interventions in key sectors, such as health, education and agriculture and livelihoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the establishment of community telecentres to foster local development based on improved access to information. • Combine community radio and information based programme and services, such as development programmes for education, health and management of natural resources. • Explore the potential options for provision of public services through radio, internet, or mobile telephony.

Appendix I: Field Research - Household Survey Questionnaire

The purpose of the survey: to gain an understanding of the community's use of information, communications and media with relation to its development.

Question	Response
Gender	Male Female
Age Group	10-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-80 81 above
Education	None Primary Secondary Junior High Secondary Senior High Tertiary (College) Tertiary (University) Post graduate
Employment	Farmer Unskilled worker/laborer Skilled worker Business owner Government worker None - dependent (on family/charity)
Literacy: Local language reading Local language writing National language reading National language writing	Good Moderate Poor None
Household ownership (how many?)	Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet
Access outside household to	Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet

Question	Response
Reliability of information received via; Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet	Very reliable Somewhat reliable Half reliable – half unreliable Not very reliable Not reliable at all Not applicable/don't know
Usefulness of information received via; Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet	Very useful Somewhat useful Half useful – half not useful Not very useful Not useful Not applicable/don't know
Amount of Representation of Indigenous issues in: Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet	Very high High Moderate Low Very low Not applicable/don't know
Quality of Representations of Indigenous issues in: Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet	Very fair Fair Neither fair nor unfair Not fair Very unfair Not applicable/don't know
I would like to see more coverage of Indigenous issues in: Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Not applicable/don't know

Question	Response
<p>Do you feel you have an opportunity to respond to what you see or hear in the following media?</p> <p>Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet</p>	<p>A good opportunity A slight opportunity Not much opportunity No opportunity Not applicable/don't know</p>
<p>Do you feel your interests as a member of your Indigenous group could be better served by the following media?</p> <p>Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet</p>	<p>A lot better Somewhat better Not much better Not at all any better Not applicable/don't know</p>
<p>Do you feel the development prospects of your Indigenous group are currently well- served by the following media?</p> <p>Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet</p>	<p>Very well served Quite well served Not really well served Not served at all Not applicable/don't know</p>
<p>Do you feel the development prospects of your Indigenous group could be better served by the following media?</p> <p>Regular newspapers Magazines Radio Television Telephone (fixed land line) Telephone (mobile) VCR/DVD Computer Internet</p>	<p>A lot better Somewhat better Not much better Not at all any better Not applicable/don't know</p>
<p>What other sources of information are important to you?</p>	
<p>How well do these sources (each one) represent indigenous issues?</p>	<p>Very fair Fair Neither fair nor unfair Not fair Very unfair Not applicable/don't know</p>

Appendix II: Research Data Nga District Oudomxay Province

No of Villages in the survey		No of Households		
4		80		

Gender		
Female	Male	Total
38	42	80
47.5%	52.5%	100.0%

Ethnicity				
Hmong	Khmou	Trieng	Yay	Total
21	59	-	-	80
26.3%	73.8%	-	-	100.0%

Age Group								
10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81+	Total
10	14	17	24	12	2	1	-	80
12.5%	17.5%	21.3%	30.0%	15.0%	2.5%	1.3%	-	100.0%

Education						
None	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	College	University	Total
42	31	7	-	-	-	80
52.5%	38.8%	8.8%	-	-	-	100.0%

Employment						
Business	Farmer	Government	None	Other	Unskilled	Total
1	76	1	1	-	1	80
1.3%	95.0%	1.3%	1.3%	-	1.3%	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
72	1	2	4	79
91.1%	1.3%	2.5%	5.1%	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Write				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
72	1	2	4	79
91.1%	1.3%	2.5%	5.1%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
40	6	20	14	80
50.0%	7.5%	25.0%	17.5%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Write				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
41	6	21	12	80
51.3%	7.5%	26.3%	15.0%	100.0%

Households with Media and ICTs								
Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Computer	Internet
4	7	52	11	-	2	16	-	0
5.0%	8.8%	65.0%	13.8%	-	2.5%	20.0%	-	.0%

Trustworthiness of Information Received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
3.96	3.79	4.85	4.07	4.07	4.28	3.90	4.68	4.56	4.30	4.21

Usefulness of Information received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
4.13	4.06	4.92	4.38	4.22	4.34	4.17	4.65	4.75	4.43	4.20

How often are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	
3.35	2.80	4.36	3.42	2.81	2.69	3.43	

How well are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = badly to 5 = very well							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.61	3.75	4.78	4.00	4.06	4.11	3.62	4.31

I would like to see more coverage of issues related to my ethnic group in: Mean Value from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
4.34	4.18	4.93	4.77	4.38	4.38	4.74	4.78

Do you feel you have a chance to respond to what you see or hear in the following media? Mean Value from 1 = no opportunity to 4 = good opportunity							
Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker	
1.06	2.15	1.72	1.86	1.89	1.59	2.31	

Could the following media serve your group better? Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.56	3.45	3.96	3.75	3.64	3.63	3.62	3.77

Do you feel the development opportunities of your ethnic group are currently served well by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not served at all to 4 = very well served							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
2.60	2.28	3.81	3.25	3.16	3.15	3.17	3.53

Do you feel the potential development opportunities of your ethnic group could be better served by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.14	2.95	3.88	3.49	3.53	3.46	3.38	3.64

How Do you Express your Concerns To Authorities							
Newspapers	Magazine	Radio	Phone	Mobile	Word of Mouth	Letter	Other
-	-	1	-	1	75	21	7
-	-	1.3%	-	1.3%	93.8%	26.3%	8.8%

Focus Group Discussions

Discussion Topic	Khonthoy village, Nga district, Oudomxay Province. Village Authorities. Mens' group. Women's group
1. What are your development challenges and opportunities?	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of the communication of information on daily life experiences from the rest of society • Insufficient schooling for students. We want our children to study, especially the poor ones. • Care of our health, sanitation and hygiene; there are no toilets in the village. It's a long way to the nearest hospital • Support for our crops and pastures in order to compensate for the unstable farming caused by the loss of our forests • Lack of professional skills in agriculture • Need of electric in our daily lives • Lack of road access from the village to the district; there's no bridge over the river which causes problems for transportation • Environmental problems in the dry season; cause problems with crop irrigation • Insufficient land for cultivation • Rats destroy our agricultural produce; including rice and corn. • Some problems with the roles of genders <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A primary school in the village for all our village's children • Sufficient land area is allocated for animal raising; included buffalos and cows • There are rich natural resources including NTFP
2. What are your plans and priorities for development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District radio station in Khmou language for better information and communication for development and exchange of experiences with the rest of society • Better education and development of human resources for increased abilities and skills for household incomes • Improved transportation, electricity, school, dispensary and irrigation. • Irrigation system for rice cultivation • Raising buffalo and cow • A health centre • A loudspeaker system • A secondary school for children who finish their primary school • Installation of latrines for each household • Plans for cultivating corn, sesame and cassava • A bridge over the river • Electricity supply • Everybody to have a mobile phone • A village dispensary and village health volunteer

Discussion Topic	Khonthoy village, Nga district, Oudomxay Province. Village Authorities. Mens' group. Women's group
3. What would you like to have achieved in the next 10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communications to take part in international relations democratically • Economic development and good life quality so that every family has permanent work • Comfortable transportation; on a nice road to facilitate sending goods to sell in town • Access to electricity • Telephone and mobile phone used in each family • Each family has a car • Deforestation reduced • Each family has budget for raise buffalo and cows • A secondary school • A nice house for each family • A radio station in Khmou language • A plan for hygiene and toilets • A development fund for women • Create small businesses • More projects for better agriculture, e.g. to grow fruits to sell
4. Where and how do you get your idea from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International organizations and government projects for development • Consultations with government to raise development budgets • Villagers help each other • When organising villagers to contribute their labour • Radio from Vientiane and Luang Prabang province (topics such on development, the economy, pasture) • TV • Word of mouth • District officer (including training) • Village meetings
5. What information do you need to realise your plans and dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media and communication facilities for spreading local information to the city and from the city to the households • Natural resources management • Heath and sanitation • Khmou songs and culture • Community development • Agriculture, pasture, protection of animals • Health, hygiene, sanitation, birth rate planning (esp. how to stay healthy for women)

Discussion Topic	Khonthoy village, Nga district, Oudomxay Province. Village Authorities. Mens' group. Women's group
6. What obstacles prevent you from implementing your plans/dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of knowledge and ability • Insufficient information and communication to interact with the rest of society • Insufficient investment for development • Poor health, sanitation and hygiene of workers • Bad road • Limited land area for cultivation • No support system • No sustainable marketing and customers decrease the prices of our products • Rats that destroy our agricultural products • Environment problems
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harming of wild animals • Low incomes • Low quality of our products
7. What information is already available from where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From radio (Luang Prabang station) and central (national station). • From TV • From village loudspeaker • Loud speaker in the village provides information of health and sanitation, animal raising • National radio and Louang Prabang radio provides the information of health, sanitation, bird flu • District education, Village's teacher • Rural villages development • From ADB, build schools, toilet • Loud speaker spread news • Collect TV about production • Listen to radio (Khmou language) about Vientiane and Luang Prabang.
8. What information could you suggest to help you with these solutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local radio broadcasting in Khmou language • Lao TV and cable TV • Better signal for mobile phones • Technical information for raising animals, maintaining a household vegetable garden, natural resources management, health and hygiene and sanitation • Information for the protection of Khmou culture • Information to help us move households out of poverty
9. What communication facilities do you have now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio; national and Luang Prabang radio • TV with cable • Loudspeaker; to announce meetings, district and province announcements, the availability of goods in the area and news from Vientiane, also for singing songs in Khmou language • TV satellite • VCD/DVD • Post office • Word of mouth meetings

Discussion Topic	Khonthoy village, Nga district, Oudomxay Province. Village Authorities. Mens' group. Women's group
10. How and where can you raise issues that affect you and your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By sending information to the radio in the household area and in the province which provides a signal to the local community • To the head of the village • To the head of the district and related organizations • From friend to friend
11. When you have a problem, who do you go to for help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of the village, who would report to the district authority • For health problems, we go to the district hospital • Discuss with relatives in Vientiane
12. How do you share information and what are the most effective communication channels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, notices and word of mouth • Letters and messages • TV • By explaining to each other • Radio

Interviews in Oudomxay Province

Mrs. Phengsone, Ban Khonthoy, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 25 November 2008

Mrs. Phengsone lives in her brother's house. She is Khmou, and married with three children; one is working in the field at the time of the interview, another is in school and the third is in the house. She can not read or write. She grows rice on two hectares of land and considers herself better off than her neighbours with ownership of a tractor, a TV, generator and a brick house. The TV is only for playing music VCDs. She never sees newspapers. Her husband only farms. They rarely travel beyond the immediate vicinity of the village; once they went to Muang Xai for their son's wedding, and occasionally they go to Nga district centre for health problems. They travel by tractor to the river then by bus to the town. The village is better off than five years ago, mainly as a result of development projects, which she welcomes. She hasn't been involved much with the projects; mostly they bring in materials from outside, such as cement, and the villagers provide the labour for construction. As an example, there is a public shower and toilet block and a dispensary. She has no toilet for her own house. She does not have a radio, but listens to the loudspeaker, which re-broadcasts national radio and Luang Prabang radio in Khmou language. The broadcasts include useful information for overcoming poverty; growing animal fodder, raising cattle, and buffalo, and how to make a profit from these activities. She can understand Lao but doesn't like to speak it. When asked about her preferences for development, she preferred a clinic to a bridge across the river, and preferred a bridge to a better road.

Mr. Khamson, Ban Khonthoy, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 25 November 2008

He is Khmou and lives in his own house and his son lives next door. He has three children; one is studying in Nga, one is married and another lives with him. Mr. Khamson is farmer with a one-acre sesame seed garden. He does not have radio or TV, but he has a motorbike and a rice mill. He takes his sesame seed to Nga district centre to sell. He receives 6,000 Kip for each kilogram and earns around three million Kip in a year (US\$350). His income for this year has dropped significantly because rats ate his seed. He used poison to kill the rats before they destroyed his entire crop, but he knows others who were unable to do so. He doesn't know any better way of killing rats than poisoning them and he is better prepared this year. A buyer from Nga with whom he has an exclusive contract buys his sesame. He couldn't sell any sesame seeds to the interviewer as this would violate the terms of his contract and threaten his continued relationship with the buyer. All the growers in the area sell to the same buyer, who sets the price, which he doesn't consider to be a fair price. Although he was once able to negotiate an extra 1,000 Kip per kilo, the price has since come down again. He knows that in Luang Prabang, sesame is sellable at the higher price of 10,000 Kip per kilo. He does not know what happens to his sesame after he has sold it.

His son also farms. Compared to his neighbours, he considers himself to be worse off. His son next door has more land to farm, grows rice as well as sesame and owns a motorbike. He claims to be happier than where he lived before in a remote location in the mountains. He welcomes the projects that come to the village as they are good for his children – enabling them to go to school and receive food from the government. Although he has never experienced severe hunger, he is not so sure about the prospects for the current year. He wants to grow rice in the future and would welcome any assistance that would make this possible. He would need good seed and useful information, which everyone needs. Mr. Khamphone speaks Lao and listens to the loudspeaker every day. He welcomes most the information on Khmou traditions and customs. It makes him proud to hear Khmou language on the radio (via the loudspeaker) and to know that there are Khmou people living in Vientiane. Overall, he is interested in everything he hears, especially information on regulations, illegal logging and opium growing.

Mr. Phonsavanh Phanthavichith, Director, of Information and Culture, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008

Mr. Phanthavichith welcomes the project and is happy about community radio in ethnic language. There are 12 ethnic groups in Oudomxay and 24 sub-groups. The population of the province is 65 percent Kmhou and 25 percent Lao Loum; the rest being made of other groups. Of the seven districts in Oudomxay, six are included the Nation's list of the 47 poorest, and Nga district is the poorest of these. The population of the district includes Hmong, Kmhou and Lao Loum peoples. The area is mostly mountainous and the roads are unsealed. In the provincial capital, Muang Xai, there is a 10 watt FM radio station that only reaches the local population and a 100 watt TV transmitter. In the villages there are 60 loudspeaker systems, some of which are government operated, some are operated by the villages. The villages welcome information on agriculture, health, sanitation and education. The main method to deliver this is currently radio and loudspeakers, but the mountainous terrain presents a barrier to the radio transmissions. Notwithstanding the needs of Nga district, the Governor extends a request for the project to work in Houn district, which has a larger population.

Second Interview: Mr. Phonsavanh Phanthavichith, Director, of Information and Culture, Oudomxay Province, 27 November 2008

Mr. Phonsavanh expects 90 percent of the districts to have radio access by 2015 as there are plans to build a provincial radio station. It will carry programmes in Khmou and Hmong languages. Additional community radio stations would facilitate the extension of the provincial radio signal into remote villages.

Mr. Khamsau, President, Lao National Front for Construction, Oudomxay Province, 27 November 2008

Oudomxay has 14 ethnic groups; Kmhou 56 percent; Lau 13 percent; Hmong 12 percent; Lue 7 percent; Tay 2 percent; Nang 2 percent; Ko (Akha) 2 percent; Yau 0.1 percent; Phonsong 0.2 percent; Bith 0.3 percent; Ho 0.6 percent; Phoemoi 0.3 percent; Phongsa 0.3 percent; La Met 0.05 percent. The houses of the different ethnic groups are mixed together. LNFC sends officials to the villages to train people and to disseminate information; mostly on government policies and regulations. TV, radio and newspapers are rare in the more remote locations. Telephones and the internet are not available and there are no skills to use them. Activities are directed by the government based on an annual planning exercise. These have included information for raising awareness on HIV, avian flu, tuberculosis and promotion of education. They provide cassette tapes for the village loudspeakers. Interactive communication is usually by word-of-mouth. The government is promoting the concept of village clusters – Kum Ban – to facilitate the delivery of public services to fewer locations serving wider populations. The Front is concerned with training people on settlement policies and the workings of the Kum Ban. Mr. Khamsau is also concerned that the department strengthens its knowledge of the different ethnic groups. He couldn't remember the last time an official had visited Ban Khonthoy. Each district is expected to one Kum Ban as a model. This would include; an office, and a budget allocation, with one staff each for agriculture, health, education, police, Women's Union and LFNC. Kum Bans are not ethnic-specific.

Mr. Thongvanh Bounsvath, Deputy District Chief, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008

The population in Nga district of 28,000 people is 60 percent Khmou, 25 percent Lao Loum and 15 percent Hmong. There are 68 villages, mostly alongside the river. The district is 85 percent mountainous and there have been roads for about eight years. Swidden agriculture is the main livelihood option for the people, with 1,100 hectares under rice. Villagers also keep livestock, and those along the river build boats. There is an IFAD project and a joint UN Sustainable Development project working in the province and coming to Nga district. The best way to transmit information is by word-of-mouth. The population do not know the Lao language very well; officials have to be able to use the local language in order to converse with them. There is a village loudspeaker system in Ban Konthoy. The next option for communication is radio as many people listen to national radio. Sending messages by runner is another alternative for emergencies. Some areas have mobile phone access. The type of information that is most welcomed relates to agricultural livelihoods and the environment. The district office does not have a telephone, only mobile phones. There is a project for 'German Agri Action' (GAA) in the district that has satellite access to the internet. There are plans to electrify the district next year; concrete posts have already been erected along the road, but it seems the plans have been postponed. Currently, only ten villages have electricity.

Ms. Carine Pin, Community Development Advisor, DED German Development Service, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008

The GAA project is completing a three-year project that provided a revolving fund for loans to women, who can not read, write or count. They have set up village libraries with materials on agriculture. They have piloted training on nutrition and food production. Their plan is to establish nutrition centres, combined with libraries and child centres. Among problems of poor education and illiteracy, the farmers suffer from restricted access to markets and terms of trade in their produce that are monopolised by a single buyer. The paid US\$150 deposit for their satellite antenna installation and the monthly charge for internet access is US\$60. There are seven computers attached to the connection, which are used by the DED and GAA staff, with occasional use by government officials, for which they are not charged a fee.

Mr. Ton Wang, District Governor, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 26 November 2008

Mr Wang acknowledged that the villages in Nga district need information to help with problems concerning livelihoods, agriculture, health, sanitation and education. He emphasised the problems of remoteness for the district but suggested that the findings of the research may not be accurate as the villagers are not educated and they have a limited scope of knowledge. Accordingly, the survey may not provide all the information we should have and we would need to return in order to learn more. Nevertheless, he strongly believes we should cooperate together and that the project should bring in technical support to improve the provision of better information to the villages. This is because there have been problems disseminating information to villagers and this has adversely affected some development projects. National radio as well as Luang Prabang radio has been useful in spreading information and a local radio station would be very helpful.

Mr. Bounta Phetdara, Director and Permanent Secretary, Department for Planning and Investment, and Deputy Provincial Project Director, the Oudomxay Community Initiative Support Project (OCISP), Oudomxay Province, 26 November 2008

The OCISP project has five components; Community Development; Agriculture and Natural Environment; Rural Finance; Rural Infrastructure; and Capacity Building. The project is working in seven districts covering 149 villages with 1,200 households and 22,000 people. Developments include road and bridge building, water supply, school dormitory construction and irrigation. Food has been supplied to school teachers and students under the World Food programme, and basic sanitation has been improved. Capacity building projects for youth have covered income generation and nutrition. Loudspeaker systems have been installed in 36 villages with solar panels and cassette tape players. Each system is operated by Loudspeaker Management Team which has

been trained in report writing. There is a satellite internet receiving station in Xai district. Internet access was tried but was not successful; the costs are high and there were problems with the telephone network. An AM radio station was planned but the costs were prohibitive. The project instigated community based tourism in partnership with the provincial tourism office, which has generated incomes for rural people. Mr. Phetdara has seen internet projects in India and sees potential in improved access to information. He strongly supports an initiative for communication for empowerment in Oudomxay.

Appendix III: Research Data Khoum District Xieng Khouang Province

No of Villages in the survey		No of Households		
5		74		

Gender		
Female	Male	Total
42	32	74
56.8%	43.2%	100.0%

Ethnicity				
Hmong	Khamou	Trieng	Yay	Total
59	15	-	-	74
79.7%	20.3%	-	-	100.0%

Age Group								
10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81+	Total
12	19	12	13	9	5	1	2	73
16.4%	26.0%	16.4%	17.8%	12.3%	6.8%	1.4%	2.7%	100.0%

Education							
None	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	College	University	Unknown	Total
25	31	10	3	1	1	3	74
33.8%	41.9%	13.5%	4.1%	1.4%	1.4%	4.1%	100.0%

Employment						
Business	Farmer	Government	None	Other	Unskilled	Total
1	67	3	-	1	2	74
1.4%	90.5%	4.1%	-	1.4%	2.7%	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
33	4	20	16	73
45.2%	5.5%	27.4%	21.9%	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Write				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
35	4	17	16	72
48.6%	5.6%	23.6%	22.2%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
32	2	22	17	73
43.8%	2.7%	30.1%	23.3%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Write				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
32	3	22	16	73
43.8%	4.1%	30.1%	21.9%	100.0%

Households with Media and ICTs								
Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Computer	Internet
20	19	45	9	15	30	15	1	-
27.0%	25.7%	60.8%	12.2%	20.3%	40.5%	20.3%	1.4%	-

Trustworthiness of Information Received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
3.96	3.88	4.57	4.18	4.13	4.26	3.64	2.53	4.03	4.09	3.27

Usefulness of Information received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
4.24	4.34	4.87	4.48	4.29	4.26	3.97	3.05	3.97	4.00	3.70

How often are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	
3.83	3.73	4.74	4.20	3.76	3.68	3.96	

How well are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = badly to 5 = very well							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
4.11	3.91	4.58	4.18	3.93	3.86	3.85	2.05

I would like to see more coverage of issues related to my ethnic group in: Mean Value from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
4.20	4.11	4.79	4.74	4.29	4.16	4.27	2.10

Do you feel you have a chance to respond to what you see or hear in the following media? Mean Value from 1 = no opportunity to 4 = good opportunity							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
1.85	2.00	2.77	2.08	2.46	2.63	2.20	1.44

Could the following media serve your group better? Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.45	3.30	3.96	3.66	3.52	3.53	3.42	1.80

Do you feel the development opportunities of your ethnic group are currently served well by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not served at all to 4 = very well served							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.27	3.20	3.88	3.54	3.36	3.35	3.16	1.65

Do you feel the potential development opportunities of your ethnic group could be better served by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.33	3.19	3.88	3.61	3.40	3.32	3.33	1.88

How do you express your concerns to authorities?							
Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	Phone	Mobile	Word of Mouth	Letter	Other
3	2	33	9	7	48	24	3
4.1%	2.7%	44.6%	12.2%	9.5%	64.9%	32.4%	4.1%

Focus Group Discussions

Discussion Topic	Sam Nhong Village, Khoun district, Xieng Khouang Province Men's group. Women's group
1. What are your development challenges and opportunities?	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient skills, knowledge and ability to improve our living condition • Insufficient investment; e.g. no funding to develop pastures or small businesses • Environmental destruction; destroying our forest • Knowledge of productivity • Low education; parents can not support their children to continue their study in university because of lack of money • No vehicles for farming • Occupations are unstable • We are poor • Health problems; diarrhoea, sickness, coughing • There is insufficient information coming from the rest of society • We don't have electricity • Transportation in and out of our village is difficult • We have difficulty selling the produce of our village • We lack farming equipment • There's no market system support • Our animals die • There's not enough land for cultivation <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better road accesses to our village • A water supply in our village • A small irrigation system for our fields • We have sufficient land area allocated to us for animal raising esp. buffalo • More experience with Hmong traditional weaving for incomes
2. What are your plans and priorities for development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain better knowledge for processing crops • Support for children's' education • Sufficient investment for increasing farm productivity • Sufficient skills of agricultural techniques; for crops and pasture • Improve profitability of farm animals • One youth plans to study medicine • Improve farming; rice as a cash crop, potatoes, buffalo and cows • Start small businesses • Install electricity into the village • Latrine installation in the village

Discussion Topic	Sam Nhung Village, Khoun district, Xieng Khouang Province Men's group. Women's group
3. What would you like to have achieved in the next 10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing grass for fodder in a big garden with pasture • If graduate as a medicine major, to be able to create a pharmaceutical shop, leading to increasing income for family • Successful and profitable pasture land • To be able to construct a good quality house • Each family has a lot of buffalo and cows • Each family has a car, and a good business • The villagers' knowledge has been increased • The village has access to electricity for each family to use the telephone and mobile phone • Each family has access to television in their house
4. Where and how do you get your idea from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By radio (from Khoun district radio community) • Posters and magazines from the district • Word of mouth, followed by seeing evidence in neighbouring districts • The doctor • Relatives and friends • TV • Consultations with villagers
5. What information do you need to realise your plans and dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture; crops and pasture • Live evidence of development opportunities, e.g. for improved agriculture • Health; sanitation and hygiene, family planning and birth spacing, HIV • Running a business for improved livelihoods • Forest conservation • Gender equality
6. What obstacles prevent you from implementing your plans/dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment problems • Poor family health • No investment • Insufficient enough professional knowledge and experience • Problem with the marketing of our produce • No electricity • No telephone system support for the communication • Animal diseases • The government decreases the price of our agricultural products • Decreasing price of corn this year affected 2/3 of the families in the village
7. What information is already available from where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazines from the district level have some agricultural information • Government posters have information on education and health • Vientiane radio and Khoun district community radio have information such as notices relating to seasonal farming activities, agricultural productivity, UXO, compost, children's education, drugs and opium control and training • Doctors or nurses giving vaccines to children and women provide information about preventing diseases • Meetings in households explain about official documents from the district centre

Discussion Topic	Sam Nhong Village, Khoun district, Xieng Khouang Province Men's group. Women's group
8. What information could you suggest to help you with these solutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture for better crop cultivation and animal raising. • Poverty reduction • Health; sanitation, family planning, primary health, sex, HIV • How to obtain assistance from other countries • The situation of households in each area of the district • Lao culture and customs • Running a business from the household • Community economics • Marketing
9. What communication facilities do you have now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile phone • Phone • Vehicles for transport • Radio • Letters (post office, by bus) • Khoun Community Radio, Xieng Khouang province radio, Vientiane National radio, Thai radio with Hmong language from Chiang Mai • VCD/DVD
10. How and where can you raise issues that affect you and your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request to the head of the village to solve the problem • Request to the organization's office in Khoun District • With friends • By sending a letter • By word of mouth
11. When you have a problem, who do you go to for help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village authorities • INGO working in the village • Village health volunteer • Ask the radio for help to transfer a message
12. How do you share information and what are the most effective communication channels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village loudspeaker • Contacts with the leaders in each group • Meetings • Notices • Sharing by using word of mouth • Telephone • Radio • Writing a letter and sending via the post office • The most effective methods of sharing information are telephone and word of mouth

Appendix IV: Research Data Dakcheung District Sekong Province

No of Villages in the survey		No of Households	
4		97	

Gender		
Female	Male	Total
48	49	97
49.5%	50.5%	100.0%

Ethnicity				
Hmong	Khamou	Trieng	Yay	Total
-	-	70	27	97
-	-	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%

Age Group								
10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81+	Total
16	25	16	20	10	8	2	-	97
16.5%	25.8%	16.5%	20.6%	10.3%	8.2%	2.1%	-	100.0%

Education						
None	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	College	University	Total
30	59	6	2	0	0	97
30.9%	60.8%	6.2%	2.1%	.0%	.0%	100.0%

Employment						
Business	Farmer	Government	None	Other	Unskilled	Total
1	85	-	-	11	-	97
1.0%	87.6%	-	-	11.3%	-	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
93	-	1	3	97
95.9%	-	1.0%	3.1%	100.0%

Literacy Local Language Write				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
94	1	1	1	97
96.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Read				
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	Total
25	14	48	10	97
25.8%	14.4%	49.5%	10.3%	100.0%

Literacy National Language Write				Total
None	Poor	Moderate	Good	
30	13	45	9	97
30.9%	13.4%	46.4%	9.3%	100.0%

Households with Media and ICTs								
Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Computer	Internet
-	1	30	4	1	1	3	1	1
-	1.0%	30.9%	4.1%	1.0%	1.0%	3.1%	1.0%	1.0%

Trustworthiness of Information Received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
4.50	4.43	4.44	4.67	4.33	4.75	4.00	4.45	4.47	3.77	4.48

Usefulness of Information received: Mean Value from 1 = very bad to 5 = very good										
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loud speaker	Word of Mouth	Letter	Poster
4.00	4.25	4.82	4.85	4.00	4.50	4.00	4.91	4.40	4.23	4.67

How often are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	
2.33	1.86	2.43	2.20	-	-	-	

How well are issues related to your ethnic group represented in the media: Mean Value from 1 = badly to 5 = very well							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.43	3.75	3.80	4.17	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.14

I would like to see more coverage of issues related to my ethnic group in: Mean Value from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
4.90	4.57	4.84	4.84	4.50	5.00	5.00	4.95

Do you feel you have a chance to respond to what you see or hear in the following media? Mean Value from 1 = no opportunity to 4 = good opportunity							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
1.44	1.50	2.00	-	-	-	1.50	1.82

Could the following media serve your group better? Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.36	3.62	3.82	3.92	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.93

Do you feel the development opportunities of your ethnic group are currently served well by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not served at all to 4 = very well served							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
2.94	2.80	3.47	3.64	2.50	3.00	2.33	3.56

Do you feel the potential development opportunities of your ethnic group could be better served by the following media: Mean Value from 1 = not at all better to 4 = a lot better							
Newspapers	Magazines	Radio	TV	Phone	Mobile	VCR/DVD	Loudspeaker
3.35	3.38	3.61	3.38	3.50	3.50	3.00	3.83

How do you express your concerns to authorities							
Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	Phone	Mobile	Word of Mouth	Letter	Other
-	-	5	1	2	74	25	2
-	-	5.2%	1.0%	2.1%	76.3%	25.8%	2.1%

Focus Group Discussions

Discussion Topic	Dack Pam village, Dack Vang village, Dakcheung District, Sekong province, Women + Men group
1. What are your development challenges and opportunities?	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's not enough land for cultivation. • Rats destroy our agricultural produce; rice and corn. • Our coffee plants die. • Transportation and communication between our village and the district is difficult. • There's no to electricity • Women work as hard men. • Many children work hard in the fields. • Early marriages (between ages 13-14) transfer suffering to the groom's family. • There's no chance for higher education. • 50 percent of Trieng women do not speak Lao. • There are main diseases, including; dengue, fever, diarrhoea. • We work long hours, from 5 am to 7 pm • There's insufficient rice for around 6 months per year. • Family incomes are low. • Many of us lack sufficient clothing. • There's no clinic, pharmacy or villages health care facility. • We never listen to the radio or read a newspaper • We've never been to Sekong, and only go as far as Dackcheung occasionally. • The road to our village is bad. • We have to carry water from the stream. • In some families, the husband has 2 wives. • When their wife needs to buy something, they have to ask for the money from their husband. • Some families no have proper gender equality between men and women, e.g., the girl doesn't have the opportunity to study at higher level as the boy. • Can grow coffee but Government isn't comfortable, no labour • Animals tried to damaged coffee plantation • No budget to purchase instruments for producing coffee • No opportunity to see instruments of produce • No insecticide <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A primary school in our village for all the village's children. • There are an appropriated land surface for animal raising included buffalo and cow • There are a richness of natural resources including of NTFP <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing coffee • There are many clients come to buy coffee at garden. • Pasture: There is a richness of natural resources for pasture, such as: cow and buffalo.

Discussion Topic	Dack Pam village, Dack Vang village, Dakcheung District, Sekong province, Women + Men group
2. What are your plans and priorities for development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve non-formal education • Learning Lao language, both written and spoken • Better road access • Provision of technical training from the district agriculture department • Gender development training • Provision of a revolving fund for raising animals • Open up more land for raising buffalo and cow • A village health centre • A village loud speaker system • A secondary school for children who finish their primary school • Install latrines in each household • Increase coffee growing
3. What would you like to have achieved in the next 10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced poverty • Access to electricity • A nice road • Telephone and mobile phone for each family • Each family has a car • Deforestation has been reduced • Each family is raising buffalos and cows • There's a secondary school • All families have a nice house, with better family income • The village has sufficient rice and milk • There's a big coffee plantation and a big paddy field • We all have a nice car
4. Where and how do you get your idea from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations with government officials • Other villagers • Training courses from outside (e.g. technical training for coffee and paddy rice) • Self-learning from experience
5. What information do you need to realise your plans and dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Natural resources management • Health and sanitation • Trieng songs and culture • Community development • Family planning and birth spacing • Coffee planting • Information about living in another place
6. What obstacles prevent you from implementing your plans/dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor road • Limited cultivable land area • No communication system • Poor market opportunities for our produce • Poor health and sanitation • Rats that destroy our agricultural products
7. What information is already available from where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We get some information from the district office about; sanitation and hygiene, e.g. cleaning the toilet and house cleaning, also on health education, e.g. vaccines and sleeping under a mosquito net

Discussion Topic	Dack Pam village, Dack Vang village, Dakcheung District, Sekong province, Women + Men group
8. What information could you suggest to help you with these solutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical information on agricultural production system and raising animals • Technical information on maintaining household vegetable gardens • Natural resources management • Sanitation / toilets • Information for the protection of Trieng culture • Information about various ethnic groups; Yae, Trieng • More entertainment, for example songs from our own culture
9. What communication facilities do you have now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some families have radio but mostly for listening to Lao songs only • In the village have only one TV with cable, only for watching the Lao channel
10. How and where can you raise issues that affect you and your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests to the head of the village • Word of mouth between friends
11. When you have a problem, who do you go to for help?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village report to the village authority and then village authority report to district office • Village or district volunteer (but they didn't help with anything) • We help ourselves • Sometime we buy medicine and give vaccines to our animals
12. How do you share information and what are the most effective communication channels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing by word of mouth • The most effective methods of sharing information are letters and messages • Meetings with the head of the village

Interviews in Sekong Province

Mr. Khom, Ban Dak Pam, Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 26 January 2009

Mr. Khom is a 27-year old Trieng farmer cultivating rice and cassava. There are 14 members of his extended family living in his house. All the adults are farmers and they are also engaged in carpentry. He attended primary school. Seven members of his household speak Lao, including him. He has an electricity generator which he uses for his carpentry and for lighting, TV and VCR and a radio. He is married with four children. The house is quite new and was built with the assistance of the whole village. His household is not Buddhist; it follows animistic traditions and beliefs. There is no clinic in the village so he and his family either use traditional healing knowledge or they go to the district centre for treatment. There is a village midwife and his wife gives birth to their children at home. His use of language is mixed between Lao and Trieng. He says it is good to be able to use Lao, which enables him to converse with visitors and people in town. He would consider leaving the village but he says he has no experience or education. He doesn't know anyone who has ever left. He saw a computer once in a game station but has never used one. He has never heard of the internet. He could read the newspaper but he never sees one. He is not sure of his parents' ages. He has seen many foreigners coming to the village; to conduct interviews. He has seen projects being implemented from the World Food Programme, the Red Cross and others for school and well construction. There is a lot more scope for local projects; he would welcome a clinic and electricity as top priority, plus telephone. The rice he grows is only for consumption, and then there is not enough to feed the family for the whole year. He considers his household to be about as well off as his neighbours.

Mr. Souphanh, Householder, Ban Dak Vang, Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 27 January 2009

Mr. Souphanh is 48 years old, of Yeh ethnicity, and his house was built in March 2008. He is a farmer, growing coffee, cassava, sugar cane and bananas. His crops are for consumption and for selling in Dakcheung district centre. He farms three hectares with his wife. They have five children. His family were harvesting coffee, collecting in the forest or in town during the interview. There are ten people living in his house. He attended school up to grade 5 in Salavan Province, where he learned to speak Lao. He has some Yeh cousins in Viet Nam, which is four hours away by motorbike. He visited Viet Nam the last time in 1999, but his relatives have never come to Lao. He never sells his produce across the border. He considers his household to be poorer than his neighbours, mainly because they have received animals as inheritances from their parents. Problems in the village include insufficient rice, lack of a clinic and electricity, although he owns a generator from which he powers lighting and TV but not a radio. His house has a toilet. He dries his coffee before selling it to buyers from Pakxong in Champasak Province. His source of price information is word-of-mouth, there being no newspapers available locally. He believes that he receives a fair price for his coffee. He normally keeps around two kilograms per crop for his own consumption. He has seen but never used a computer and never heard of the internet. He hasn't seen any foreigners or tourists in the village before.

Mr. Khanso Bouddaphe, Vice District Chief, Head of department of Information and Culture, and Co-ordinator of Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR), Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 26 January 2009

Dakcheung district has 86 villages and four ethnic groups; Trieng (46 percent), Yea (35 percent), Trew (20 percent) and Lakang, with only two villages and 500 people. National radio, in Lao language, reaches the district as does TV via satellite antenna. There are loudspeaker systems and patchy mobile phone access. Viet Nam radio in Vietnamese and Thai radio are also receivable. Lao Telecom fixed line telephone is available. The local population is predominantly Trieng, of which there are 73,000 in Lao PDR and more than 100,000 in Viet Nam. The district has no internet or newspapers. Dakcheung is one of Sekong's poorest districts and on of the 47 poorest in the country. Before the revolution there were no roads. Livelihoods are principally obtained from rice and animal husbandry. The predominant local language is Trieng with Lao being the second most. During the dry season, most of 86 villages are easily accessible, but not in the wet season when travel is very difficult. Coffee is grown locally. The local rice supply of 1.5 to 2 tonnes annually is sufficient for only about eight months consumption. There are three schools, but more are needed. Cultural festivals around traditional beliefs about spirits are now rare owing to recent economic downturn. Government funds for agriculture loans are generally insufficient for the needs. There are 27 government offices in the district but this number is planned to be reduced. Mining surveys have been conducted by Chinese investors. The villages would welcome improved information provision.

Second Interview; Mr. Khanso Bouddaphe, 29 January 2009

Mr. Bouddaphe provided some statistics on Dakcheung District.

Population – 19,362	Families – 3,420	Triew – 3,409	Hectares – 217,950
Females – 9,540	Trieng – 8,786	Dakang – 2,631	Elevation – 1,232m
Households – 2,554	Yeh – 5,632	Other – 104	Cultivation – 17,436 hcts

Problems of the district include the scattered ethnic groups which make education difficult; the government's 10-year plan calls for re-settlement. Poverty is high and any assistance would be welcomed provided it is properly organized through government channels.

Ms. Bounpheng Bualapha, Head of Department of Information and Culture, Sekong Province, and GPAR officials, 30 January 2009

The GPAR project is implementing Village Information Systems and has provided 10 villages with loudspeaker systems and information boards. They have recruited volunteer teams in 20 villages in Tateng District. Village information needs include health and sanitation. They are implementing two community radio stations, in Tateng and Dakcheung districts.

Ms. Farida Kasuyo, UNV Community Mobilization Specialist, GPAR, Sekong Province, 30 January 2009

The objective of GPAR in Sekong is to improve access to information for the ethnic people. The project schedule is from 2007–2011. Ms. Kasuyo arrived in July 2008. GPAR has two administration staff, a National Project Coordinator, two planning specialists, an international coordinator in Salavan and a National Project Manager. The project partners with Departments of Education, Planning, Information and Culture and Agriculture, the LNFC and the Women's Union. The village information system consists of two community radio stations, 20 loudspeaker systems and 20 signboards. A survey of health and agricultures was conducted in Tateng District. Health issues include malaria, diarrhoea and malnourishment. Agricultural issues include access to market and land ownership. The building for the community radio in Tateng is under construction.

Appendix V: List of Meetings

1. Dr. Phonekeo Chanthamaly, Director, Continuing and Distance Education Centre, National University of Laos, 20 October, 2008.
2. Ms. Phannaly Thephavongsa, President, Vulnerable Lao Youth Development Association, 21 October 2008.
3. Ms. Saysana Phanalasy, Research Manager, Population Services International Laos (PSI), 23 October 2008.
4. Dr. Thongphan Chanthalanon, Ethnic Affairs Department of the National Assembly, October 21 2008.
5. Prof. Dr. Sayamang Vongsak, Vice President, Lao Front for National Construction, 9 October 2008.
6. Khoun District Governor, 20 November 2008.
7. Khoun Radio Producers (five individuals), 20 November 2008.
8. Mr. Khamlouang Keoka, Country Representative, Oxfam Australia, 23 October 2008.
9. Mr. Somsack, Vientiane Times, October 20 2008.
10. Mr. Kular Satukee, Vice Director Language Department; Director Hmong Language Department; Director Kmou Language Department, Ethnic Language Department, Lao National Radio, 22 October 2008.
11. Mr. Dy Sisombath, Deputy Director General, Mass Media Department, and Mr. Bounhap Soulingno, head of broadcasting Technology Division, Ministry of Information and Culture, October 9 2008.
12. Mr. Somsanouk Mixay, Vice President Lao Journalists Association, 22 October 2008.
13. Mr. Michael Cluzel, General manager, and Mr. Dilip Jesuthasan, Commercial Manager, Millicom Lao Co. Ltd., October 8, 2008.
14. Mr. Keonakhone Saysuliane, Deputy Director General, Department of Science and Technology, Prime Minister's Office, 22 October 2008.
15. Mr. Souphalak Mangnomek, Director of Secretarial Division, and Dr. Thavisak Manodham, Deputy Director of Telecom Development Division, Enterprise of Telecommunications Lao (ETL), 23 October 2008.
16. Mr. Chaleun Sibounheung, Deputy Director General, Department of Telecom and Internet, National Authority of Posts and Telecommunications (NAPT), 23 October 2008.
17. Mrs. Phengsone, Householder, Ban Khonthoy, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 25 November 2008.
18. Mr. Khamson, Householder, Ban Khonthoy, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 25 November 2008.
19. Mr. Khom, Householder, Ban Dak Pam, Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 26 January 2009.
20. Mr. Souphanh, Householder, Ban Dak Vang, Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 27 January 2009.
21. Mr. Phonsavanh Phanthavichith, Director of Information and Culture, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008.
22. Second meeting with Mr. Phonsavanh Phanthavichith, Director, of Information and Culture, Oudomxay Province, 27 November 2008.
23. Mr. Thongvanh Bounsvath, Deputy District Chief, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008.
24. Carine Pin, Community Development Advisor, DED German Development Service, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 24 November 2008.
25. Mr. Ton Wang, District Governor, Nga District, Oudomxay Province, 26 November 2008.
26. Mr. Bounta Phetdara, Director and Permanent Secretary, Department for Planning and Investment, and Deputy Provincial Project Director, the Oudomxay Community Initiative Support Project (OCISP), Oudomxay Province, 26 November 2008.
27. Mr. Khanso Bouddaphe, Vice District Chief, Head of department of Information and Culture, and Co-ordinator of Governance and Public Administration Reform (GPAR), Dakcheung District, Sekong Province, 26 January, 2009.
28. Second Mr. Khanso Bouddaphe, 29 January 2009.
29. Ms. Bounpheng Bualapha, Head of department of Information and Culture, Sekong Province, and GPAR officials, 30 January 2009.
30. Ms. Farida Kasuyo, UNV Community Mobilization Specialist, GPAR, Sekong Province, 30 January 2009.

The Communication for Empowerment Project

In the context of UNDP's work on Access to Information, **Communication for Empowerment** is an approach that puts the information and communication needs of disempowered and marginalized groups at the centre of media support. The approach is rooted in the knowledge that one of the challenges facing developing countries is the lack of inclusion and participation of poor and vulnerable groups in decisions that impact on their lives. Many factors hamper inclusion, one of these being the lack of available information on issues that shape their lives, and a lack of capacity to communicate their interests into public and policy debate.

In 2006, UNDP through the **Oslo Governance Centre** developed a guidance note on *Communication for Empowerment* in close cooperation with the **Communication for Social Change Consortium**. The purpose of this guidance note is to turn the above insights into mainstream planning tools. These tools will in turn facilitate an understanding of the information and communication needs of the impoverished and marginalized. It is also suggested that *Communication for Empowerment Needs Assessments* should become a permanent fixture in the national development plans and programs of governments, civil society organisations and international development partners.

In Asia, the Communication for Empowerment initiative includes Lao PDR and Nepal. It is implemented through the Asia Regional Governance Programme and the Regional Indigenous Peoples Programme of UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok under the regional initiative on *Communication for Empowerment of Asia's Indigenous Peoples*. 70 per cent of the estimated 300 million indigenous peoples in the world live in Asia, representing about 5 per cent of the total global population. As a consequence of inadequate access to information and communication channels, indigenous communities have little voice and few mechanisms to fully participate in the decision making process and media generated discussions affecting their lives.

This report is part of a series of pilot Needs Assessments in five Least Developed Countries, to be followed by a global synthesis report. The global report will also contain tools for implementing *Information and Communication Needs Assessments*, and it will develop a strategy for incorporating **Communication for Empowerment** into national planning strategies and development projects. Both the national reports and the global synthesis report are part of a project undertaken by the **UNDP Oslo Governance Centre** and the **Communication for Social Change Consortium**, with funding provided by the **UN Democracy Fund**.