

Participatory Poverty Assessment II (2006)

Lao People's Democratic Republic

**National Statistics Center
Asian Development Bank**

James R. Chamberlain



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Figure 1 - Map of the Lao PDR



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Abbreviations

Provinces

ATTP	—	Attapeu
BKEO	—	Bokeo
BKXY	—	Borikhamxay
CPSK	—	Champasak
HPNH	—	Houa Phanh
KMME	—	Khammouane
LBNG	—	Louang Prabang
LGNT	—	Louang Namtha
ODXY	—	Oudomxay
PSLY	—	Phongsaly
SRVN	—	Saravanh
SVKT	—	Savannakhet
VTEM	—	Vientiane Municipality
VTEP	—	Vientiane Province
XBRY	—	Xaynaboury
XÉKG	—	Xékong
XKNG	—	Xieng Khoang

Ethnicity

MK	—	Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic)
HM	—	Hmong-Mien (Meo-Yao)
ST	—	Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman)
LT	—	Lao-Tai (Tai-Kadai)

Other

PPA	—	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PPA1	—	the first PPA done in 2000
PPA2	—	the second PPA done in 2006
LECS	—	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey
LECS3	—	the third LECS done in 2002-2003
NTFP	—	Non-Timber Forest Product
P1, P2..	—	Primary (Pathom) Grade 1 etc...

Executive Summary

1. This participatory poverty assessment (PPA 2006) comprises one component of ADB's Technical Assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic for Institutional Strengthening for Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation. The data collection phase of the PPA 2006 was carried out in 2006, six years after the data was collected for the first PPA in 2000 (PPA 2000). The TA also included training for district and provincial level officials in the methods of participatory assessment. Under the project, training workshops in participatory data collection and analysis were held for representatives of all of the 47 priority poor districts in the country.
2. The objective of the PPA is to define, in a manner that is representative of the country as a whole, what poverty means to the poor themselves, what they experience in their own words, what causes they identify for poverty, and what their recommendations are for the alleviation of poverty. The high degree of human and biological diversity that exists in the country, however, implies a methodology that is itself diverse, and that is capable and flexible enough to respond to the needs of the subject.
3. To thoroughly address all aspects of poverty in Lao, the basic foundation should be holistic, encompassing a wide variety of approaches and indicators, with recommendations as to how this information might be used in planning and decision making by the government for the targeting of programmatic interventions in poverty alleviation. But this analysis of poverty must be, first and foremost, an analysis in which the categories for assessment are determined by the data as being of relevance for the country. That is, it is necessary to investigate poverty in Laos with appropriate categories which have arisen from the internal structures of meaning inherent in the discourse of the poor.
4. Diversity of languages and cultures is one of the main characteristics of Laos and potentially one of its greatest strengths. Unfortunately this diversity is often viewed as a hindrance rather than an asset. This is no doubt related to the fact that responses to development and modernization vary considerably between ethnic groups and that certain groups are more negatively impacted than others in the face of changes that occur.
5. When compared with the neighboring societies of China and India that are traditionally typified by male dominance and stark opposition between the sexes, Southeast Asia has been characterized as an area of complementarity as opposed to stratification. But gender complementarity may be vulnerable or threatened and even transformed into a more fixed state of gender stratification when new meanings of gender are acquired from cities or from outside influences, including development projects. When major upheavals are undergone, such as in cases of relocation of villages, or when access to natural resources is denied, women lose control of agricultural land and may cease to participate in rituals for ancestors or to preside over the agrarian rites linked to rice production, and their power to preserve culture may be lost as a result. The dialectic between bilateralism and ecological change is thus a key to the understanding of gender inequality that is detrimental to women .

6. The selection of villages in this PPA is based upon the 47 priority districts determined by the government to be the poorest in the country. The decision was made to visit two villages in each of these resulting in a total of 94 villages. (Subsequently, one additional village was included from the remote District of Dak Cheung bringing the total to 95.)
7. In Laos, the high degree of human and biological diversity that exists in the country implies a methodology that is itself diverse, and that is capable and flexible enough to respond to the needs of the subject. Therefore, Participatory Poverty Assessment, as the term is used here, is an investigatory approach where both researchers and villagers are participants in a symmetrical verbal interaction related to poverty with the onus on the researcher to understand, to the degree possible given the constraints imposed by a variety of factors, the thinking of villagers of the particular ethnic group. There is no hard and fast definition, no set of rules, the interaction is governed by clues emanating from villagers and the sensitivity and experience of the researchers who share either vicariously or with their own eyes, the experiences of villagers as they are related. (This is in fact the root meaning of *participation*, which means literally to “take + part”.) As an assessment it seeks to be representative of the poor in the country, and is also designed to be interactive and capable of providing a context for understanding.
8. As in the 2000 PPA, the primary cause of poverty identified by villagers in the study continues to be limited access to cultivation land, especially for rice production. This situation, villagers report, is due to attempts by local officials to carry out land reform, consolidate villages, and to reduce or eradicate swidden cultivation. These policies have led to population pressure and scarcity of land resources.
9. It is clear that poverty is caused by external events over which villagers have no control. Although development policies that involve relocation, such as Land Forest Allocation, village consolidation, opium eradication, and eradication of swidden agriculture may be well-intentioned, their poor implementation has contributed to adverse effects on human health, livestock disease, and shortage of land for cultivation. In the south, climatic conditions involving flooding and drought are an additional factor.
10. Governance problems as evidenced by attempts by local officials to control economies of villagers, restricting access to free markets, and sometimes inappropriate collaboration with private companies at the expense of villagers are becoming more commonplace. Social problems surrounding drug addiction are on the rise.
11. The solutions to poverty proposed by villagers all fall under the general category of agricultural solutions. This is not surprising since villagers of all ethnicities are farmers and obviously relate most strongly to agricultural activities. Many villages suggested the revoking of the restrictions imposed by land reform practices which were not properly implemented in the first place.

12. As was seen in the section on Causes of Poverty, however, commercialized agriculture presents many problems, and the majority of enterprises suggested by villagers have already been tried and failed because of a variety of factors, and it is mainly the non-poor villages that have benefited from activities that involve credit and debt. In spite of this, as may be seen here, some villages say they are prepared to borrow funds for certain kinds of activities. The risk is high for them because they usually have no back-up system in place in case an endeavor fails. Villages of upland ethnic groups that have been relocated are especially vulnerable in this respect.
13. Government services are largely focused on physical infrastructure while the needs of villagers are primarily biological and psychological. Without adjusting the focus of government assistance to address the real problems identified by villagers as presented here, it will be difficult to alleviate poverty in any meaningful way. Services provide hardware, when it is software that is in short supply.
14. Compared to the PPA of the year 2000, the original villages that were revisited in 2006 were found generally to be either about the same or worse off. The policy environment in the provinces has not changed noticeably and access to land remains the major concern of villagers who view agricultural solutions as the only way to alleviate poverty.
15. The majority of villagers in the study live in a universe where there is a delicate balance of ancestral spirits and bodily souls that control human lives, and nature spirits that control the weather and natural abundance. Buffaloes and rice grains are usually considered to have souls as well. Guardian spirits of the territory are usually earth spirits. Heavenly spirits that create life dwell in the sky. The interaction of all of these with human individuals, families and societies are governed by rites and ceremonies that maintain balance and harmony and thus regulate well-being.
16. Based on the premise of holism it may be assumed that for every physical change that occurs in the lives of villagers, other changes occur in psychological or spiritual life that are not open to direct observation and are not readily expressed to researchers. In some cases these are made manifest in behavior, as in instances where children of well-to-do households become addicted to drugs and alcohol, or chose to seek jobs in Thailand rather than stay at home.
17. Village consolidation, focal zones or *koum Ban* (village cluster) approaches create traumatic conditions where incidence of disease and mortality rates increase, and where many children do not attend schools because their labor is needed to eke out a living on poor soils in overcrowded conditions. Opium eradication, through an emphasis on relocation, has ironically resulted in high rates of drug addiction in groups unable to cope with the shock of being moved. Swidden eradication not only drastically reduces production, but negatively affects both social and ecological systems thereby reducing biodiversity.
18. It is clear that poverty in Laos has not reached the level of destitution. However, the survey shows that poor villagers increasingly experience difficulty in

providing food for their families. Natural resources were said to be seriously depleted in almost all locations and many people are casting aside traditional religious values and aesthetic appreciation of natural systems in a competition for the remaining forest products and wildlife. Cultural checks and balances are being replaced by monetarily grounded attitudes of 'first-come-first-serve,' and 'live-for-today.' Ecologically sound livelihoods are being replaced by ecologically destructive ones that involve a high degree of risk. Subsistence economies are being replaced by economies of survival.

19. There are two somewhat contradictory conclusions that can be drawn from this study. The first is that poor villagers are grateful for the improvements that have been made in infrastructure such as health clinics, school buildings, and new or improved roads that allow enhanced communications. The second is that the essential elements of livelihoods, access to good land for agriculture, livestock, and forests, have either stayed the same or have worsened. To a large degree, the second conclusion negates the potential benefits of the first.
20. It is clear from the PPA that some of the conventional solutions to poverty, especially those that involve relocation of villages, eradication of swidden farming, or land allocation, in spite of their good intentions, have caused severe hardships. This suggests a need to reassess these policies and to seek other approaches that are less socially disruptive. For example there is no scientific basis for eradicating swidden agriculture in Laos.
21. More emphasis needs to be placed on the intellectual resources and the software necessary to provide adequate services. Until shortage of cultivable land and inadequate support for breeding of livestock, two key contributors to poverty as defined by the villagers, are resolved, they will likely be reluctant to participate in development programs, such as easier access to credit, that entail risks. Likewise education for poor ethnic groups is unlikely to improve without more focus on mother tongue instruction.
22. The poor of Laos are agriculturalists, and their analyses of causes and solutions are predictably agricultural. Planning for poverty alleviation should therefore reflect this reality, and build upon farmers' inherent strengths and capabilities.
23. There is a vital need for research that examines existing systems of upland agriculture in detail, and such research needs to be interdisciplinary, involving ethnographic study as well as the mainly biophysical.
24. There is likewise a great need for upgrading of intellectual resources in the social sciences. Currently, for example, the national university falls far below international standards in the teaching of anthropology and sociology, so the government's capacity to address and analyze social problems and issues is severely limited. (This situation is symptomatic of a larger overall problem of the slow pace of university development and hence knowledge acquisition.)
25. Related to this, assuming the value of qualitative research is realized, especially as it relates to the assessment and analysis of poverty in Laos, it is recommended that

a special division within the National Statistics Center be created specifically for this purpose. This implies the hiring or retraining of staff.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

They are not prosperous, they are only rich.
— *George Bernard Shaw*

This participatory poverty assessment (PPA 2006) comprises one component of ADB's Technical Assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic for Institutional Strengthening for Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation. The data collection phase of the PPA 2006 was carried out in 2006, six years after the data was collected for the first PPA in 2000 (PPA 2000). The TA also included training for district and provincial level officials in the methods of participatory assessment. Under the project, training workshops in participatory data collection and analysis were held for representatives of all of the 47 priority poor districts in the country.

Poverty Alleviation in the Lao PDR

According to economic and social indicators, in the period beginning with the East Asian financial crisis (1997-98) until the third Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 3 (LECS 3) in 2002-2003, poverty as measured quantitatively fell from 39 percent to 33 percent for Lao PDR as a whole. This is a remarkable achievement. These figures, however, do not capture the considerable discrepancies between geographical areas and between ethnic groups. For example, the difference between urban poverty, only 20 percent, and rural poverty, 38 percent, or the gap between the Lao-Tai groups, 25 per cent, and the Mon-Khmer groups, 54 per cent.¹

Responding to these concerns, and to address the issue of poverty alleviation, the government issued Prime Ministerial Decree No. 10 and identified 72 poor districts, out of which 47 have been designated as priority poor districts. The latter represent approximately 20 percent of the total population of the country, but 55 percent of the country's poor. Large percentages of the poor districts' population are non-Lao ethnic groups living in remote areas. The sectors of Agriculture and Forestry, Education, Health and Infrastructure are identified as being the priority sectors in the implementation of poverty reduction activities.

A number of specific poverty reduction projects have been implemented by the government and were supported by external sources. Beginning in 2003, village development funds (including from the budget) for poverty reduction were established. Under this program the government had approved 16.49 billion Kip by 2005. In addition the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Fund began operations in five provinces and 42.7 billion Kip from the Fund were expended.

¹Richter, Kaspar, Roy van der Weide, and Phonesaly Souksavath. 2005. *Lao PDR Poverty Trends: 1992/3 – 2002/3*. Draft Report. Vientiane: Committee for Planning and Investment, National Statistical Center, World Bank.

Poverty reduction policies are specifically set forth in the National Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy or NGPES (2004) and the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2006-2010 which now subsumes the NGPES.² Constraints on development are recognized in the plan, but these are cited mostly as deficiencies in infrastructure. Furthermore, the policies set forth in the plan entail village consolidation, land reform, eradication of swidden cultivation, and eradication of opium production. Relocation of villages has been a key element in all of these, and the most controversial, since many donors have stated policies that prevent them from supporting resettlement. The government's rationale for relocation cites the need for people to receive social services and environmental protection, as well as expansion of economic opportunities and security.

Progress in primary and secondary education is stated to be slow with increasing drop-out rates, a lack of trained teachers, and a real functional literacy rate of only 30 percent. For the first time, however, tertiary education is mentioned in detail and a university development plan will be prepared during the implementation of the five-year plan.

Objectives of PPA 2006

The goal of this PPA, as with the first PPA in 2000, is to complement the statistical analyses of poverty in a meaningful way and to record the experiences and concerns of the poor in order to initiate and identify more effective forms of public and private actions to alleviate poverty. Following the first PPA in 2000:

The objective of the PPA is to define, in a manner that is representative of the country as a whole, what poverty means to the poor themselves, what they experience in their own words, what causes they identify for poverty, and what their recommendations are for the alleviation of poverty. The high degree of human and biological diversity that exists in the country, however, implies a methodology that is itself diverse, and that is capable and flexible enough to respond to the needs of the subject. (ADB 2001)

To this end, the PPA has involved four main elements: (1) the combining of different forms of knowledge on poverty (cultural, anthropological, institutional, economic etc.,) and understanding the views of poor people so that these may be applied towards the goal of poverty reduction; (2) promoting an institutional process which ensures that the view "from below" is incorporated in an on-going fashion into the formulation and implementation of public policies; (3) recommending specific actions and; (4) consolidating the capacity for participatory research and process management that is needed to sustain all of these.

Expected outputs are: (1) improved understanding of actions that may be expected to make positive differences to the livelihoods, well-being and quality of life of poor people; (2) involvement of poor communities, government, civil society, academia

² Committee for Planning and Investment. 2006. *National Socio-economic Development Plan (2006-2010)*. Vientiane. AND Government of Lao PDR. 2003. *National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy*. Vientiane.

and non-government organizations (NGO's) in a process that critically examines interventions, institutional arrangements and social structures in their contributions to the goal of poverty reduction; (3) identification of a range of poverty-reducing activities by potential stakeholders in light of the understandings acquired and linkages established, and; (4) enhancement of national and provincial processes to follow-up the PPA and, over the longer-term, to monitor progress of poverty reduction from the perspective of the poor themselves.

Chapter 2 – Dimensions of Poverty

Laos has a unique profile, one that makes meaningful comparison with other countries difficult. Population density is low, an average of 23.7 persons per square kilometer as of the last census, the ratio of people to forests ranks as the nineteenth best in the world,³ ethnic diversity is very high with 49 officially recognized ethnic groups,⁴ as is biophysical diversity. Therefore, using conventional means of measuring poverty is unlikely to provide a complete picture. “Subsistence affluence,” a term, often used to describe conditions in the pacific islands is not out of place in Laos. Even the term “subsistence,” often misconstrued as ‘backward’ or ‘lacking surplus,’ can be seen in a positive light, especially where traditional livelihood systems are still in place. That is to say, so-called subsistence agriculture is not equated with poverty in the minds of villagers, because their economies are carefully designed to preserve what they regard as ‘quality of life.’

Aspects of Poverty

The illusion that poverty is reducible to a single measurable concept has of necessity long since been abandoned. The endless array of seemingly disorderly and irregular varieties of anthropological situations throughout the world (and within Laos) have, if anything, stimulated an equally multitudinous diversity of approaches to the analysis of poverty and to its assessment in any given environment or set of circumstances. That the results of such endeavors have themselves been of somewhat desultory consistency and practicality is not surprising in light of a lack of fixed methodology in planning and implementation. However, we should perhaps seek to view this lack of symmetry in poverty assessment as a strength rather than a weakness, especially at this point in time when the field itself is anything but standardized, continually changing, and all too frequently subject to the Western constructs.

The meanings of terms in the various languages spoken by villagers in the assessment which are translated here as ‘poor’ or ‘poverty’ signify subjective conditions resulting from ill-fate, misfortune, or acts of God. An individual is ‘poor’ if he or she has been widowed or orphaned, sick, or fallen on hard times for karmic or various other reasons. In the Buddhist sense, the source of the term in Lao, it is the condition or state of mind of all sentient beings who have not reached enlightenment. The philological conclusion for Laos is that ‘poverty’ in the prototypical Western sense of ‘unproductive’ was not originally a condition that was endemic to any of the peoples of Laos. And furthermore, such terms as livelihood or technology, the causes of and

³ This is out of 197 countries surveyed. Laos has a ratio of 2.55 ha of forest per person, or 3.21 ha if only rural areas are considered. The world average is 0.61 hectares per person, and the total average for Asia is 0.15, which may be disaggregated into 0.37 for mainland Southeast Asia, 0.46 for insular Southeast Asia, 0.06 for South Asia, and 0.13 for East Asia. The total for tropical Asia is 0.16. Thus the Lao ratio is far higher than its neighbors. In Vietnam, for example, the ratio is 0.12 ha per person. (Marcoux 2000)

⁴ The definition of ethnic group in Laos differs somewhat from international practice, that is, an ‘ethnic group’ or *xon phau* may consist of a number of subgroups *seng*. It is the *seng* that is equivalent to what most ethnolinguists would call an ethnic group, that is, possessing a separate ethnic identity and language. Thus in the Lao official system the 49 *xon phau* comprise over 160 *seng*. The World Bank’s *Indigenous Peoples Profile* for Laos lists over 200 ethnic groups.

solutions to ‘poverty’ have metaphysical components that cannot be ignored without distorting the analysis.

It is worth pointing out here that in Buddhist philosophy the first of the four noble truths taught by Gautama Buddha, *Dukkha* the truth of ‘suffering’, is the etymological root of the Lao word for ‘poor’. Whatever is subject to the law of causality that is non-eternal is characterized by *dukkha*. There are furthermore three types of *dukkha*, that is, (1) ‘torment’ old age, sickness, and death; (2) the absence of pleasure; and (3) the necessity of giving up what one loves because of the transitory quality of all phenomena.

The second noble truth is *Samudaya* “the truth of the origin or cause of suffering” which is caused by craving based on ignorance. The third, *Nirodha* is the truth of the goal or the alleviation of suffering, accomplished by mental processes, not physical ones, namely ‘non-striving’ and awareness of the origin of *dukkha*, that is, *Nibbana* [Nirvana]. The fourth truth is *Magga* the truth of the way to the alleviation of suffering which is meditation, what Trungpa (1987) refers to as finding the right path. Since the origins of poverty in Laos (what we call “new poverty”) reside in what the Buddhists would call confused states of mind, or erroneous thinking relating to development, it is doubtful, from this perspective, that continued manipulation of the physical world will serve to correct the problem. The four noble truths, however, serve as an appropriate allegory to the purposes of the PPA, (1) to recognize poverty; (2) to identify and understand the cause; (3) with a goal to alleviation; and (4) finding the right path to alleviation.

In recent years, ‘poverty’ has been applied in a number of interesting ways to connote a other relevant aspects of the term, apart from the purely monetary, for example:

Cultural poverty – where poor people themselves define poverty as loss of culture;

Intellectual poverty – where poverty refers to a lack of analytical capability leading to an inability to design programs that will alleviate poverty;

Moral poverty – where incompetence is defined as immorality.

To thoroughly address all aspects of poverty in Lao, the basic foundation should be holistic, encompassing a wide variety of approaches and indicators, with recommendations as to how this information might be used in planning and decision making by the government for the targeting of programmatic interventions in poverty alleviation. But this analysis of poverty must be, first and foremost, an analysis in which the categories for assessment are determined by the data as being of relevance for the country. That is, it is necessary to investigate poverty in Laos with appropriate categories which have arisen from the internal structures of meaning inherent in the discourse of the poor. With this in mind, a number of Lao-specific points are addressed here.



Akha Girl in Meuang Long (Tibeto-Burman)

Ethnicity and Poverty – the reality and importance of group differences

The Ethnic Groups of Laos

Diversity of languages and cultures is one of the main characteristics of Laos and potentially one of its greatest strengths. Unfortunately this diversity is often viewed by officials and planners as a hindrance rather than an asset. This is no doubt related to the fact that responses to development and modernization vary considerably between ethnic groups and that certain groups are more negatively impacted than others in the face of changes that occur.



Jru Man in Champasak (Mon-Khmer)

The ethnic groups of Laos are classified ethnolinguistically into four families:

Lao-Tai	(also known as Tai-Kadai)
Mon-Khmer	(usually classed as the main branch of Austroasiatic)
Hmong-Mien	(also known as Miao-Yao, especially in China)
Sino-Tibetan	(represented mainly by the Tibeto-Burman branch)

Looking at the ethnolinguistic map (Figure 3 below), the ethnic Lao, shown in orange, reside primarily along the Mekong River from the far south to Louang Prabang, and then follow the Nam Ou River to northern Phongsaly Province. Other Tai-Thai groups of the Lao-Tai family are shown in yellow, the Hmong-Mien are the smaller brown areas, the Mon-Khmer are mauve, and the cross-hatching represents Sino-Tibetan. In reality, however, several ethnic groups are usually found at different elevations on any given mountain. The Lao-Tai traditionally inhabit the valleys and practice paddy rice cultivation.

Figure 2 - Carte Ethnolinguistique (Carte de l'Indochine)



(Source: École Française d'Extrême Orient 1949)

Ethnicity and the Priority Poor Districts – Statistical Aspects

The recent LECS 3 household survey analysis has highlighted broad areas of focus in terms of the relationship between poverty and geography, ethnicity, and gender that warrant additional explication in a qualitative mode (Table 4).

Table 1 - Some Statistical Patterns of Poverty

	% of National Population	<i>Incidence of Poverty Headcount Index (% of pop.)</i>
Total Lao PDR	100.0	33.5
Geographic Area		
Urban	23.0	19.7
Rural	77.0	37.6
Ethnolinguistic Family		
Lao-Tai	66.6	25.0
Mon-Khmer	20.6	54.3
Hmong-lu Mien	8.4	40.3
Chine-Tibet	3.3	45.8
Other	1.1	48.4
Gender of Household Head		
Male	94.9	31.0
Female	5.1	28.0

*Source: World Bank 2005 (based on LECS 3)*⁵

Geographically, of the 57.5 percent of the population in the lowland, , 28.2 percent are estimated to be poor (Table 5). Of the 17.7 percent and 25 percent respectively of the population living in mid-land and upland areas, the poverty rates are 36.5 percent and 43.9 percent. Thus of the 33.5 percent poverty headcount for the country as a whole, approximately 75 percent reside in non-lowland areas, or in other words, they would be classed as non-Lao-Tai speakers or ethnic minorities.⁶

Table 2 - Distribution of poverty by relative altitude

Geographical area	Pop share %	Poverty headcount %
Lowland	57.5	28.2
Midland	17.5	36.5
Upland	25.0	43.9

*Source: Richter 2005 (from LECS 3)*⁷

About 93 percent of non-Lao-Tai people live in rural areas compared to 69 percent for Lao-Tai. Approximately 50 percent of all the non-Lao-Tai population

⁵ World Bank. 2005. Unpublished draft poverty analysis by World Bank.

⁶ In some parlance, the term “ethnic minority” in Laos is defined as non-Lao-Tai. As this usage has ethnolinguistic repercussions, the term non-Lao-Tai is used here which is more accurate though admittedly awkward. The term “indigenous people” which would be the most convenient term has been rejected by the Lao Government.

⁷ Richter, Kaspar, Roy van der Weide, and Phonesaly Souksavath. 2005. Lao PDR Poverty Trends: 1992/3 – 2002/3. Draft Report. World Bank.

versus 25 percent of the Lao-Tai lives in the government's priority poor districts. Furthermore, 24 percent of the country's population lives in first priority districts of which 57 percent are non-Lao-Tai or, stated another way, 41 percent of all non-Lao-Tai people live in first priority districts compared to only 16 percent of the total Lao-Tai group. Non priority areas contain 74 percent of the Lao-Tai population (50 percent of the country's total), compared to only 45 percent of the non-Lao-Tai (or 15 percent of the population).⁸



Hmong children playing in an abandoned house at Ban Phon Si, Meuang Beng

Gender

When compared with the neighboring societies of China and India that are traditionally typified by male dominance and stark opposition between the sexes, Southeast Asia has been characterized as an area of complementarity as opposed to stratification. But gender complementarity may be vulnerable or threatened and even transformed into a more fixed state of gender stratification when new meanings of gender are acquired from cities or from outside influences, including development projects. When major upheavals are undergone, such as in cases of relocation of

⁸ World Bank (2005).

villages, or when access to natural resources is denied, women lose control of agricultural land and may cease to participate in rituals for ancestors or to preside over the agrarian rites linked to rice production, and their power to preserve culture may be lost as a result. The dialectic between bilateralism and ecological change is thus a key to the understanding of gender inequality that is detrimental to women.⁹

For upland societies in Southeast Asia Klein-Hutheesing (1995) notes that with reference to customary rights and property, fair treatment of the sexes is inferred. But with changes brought on that affect niches and the environmental settings these rights are in danger of being lost to more patriarchal forces in the name of economic development. It is necessary, she suggests, to identify and distinguish what are the forms and degrees of penetration by these forces into the ecology.

The breaking point of sexual equality is when female and male prestige systems undergo a mutation of meaning. It is when males have access to consumer goods, markets, and class associated symbols, that male honor becomes a more pervasive symbol of power than female honor. The power of possession may make men more powerful than females who become seemingly more illiterate as they fail to acquire the language and symbols of industrialized modernity.¹⁰

The differences in male-female roles by ethnicity is considerable however, for example, Hmong society in particular stands out as distinct from the Mon-Khmer pattern with respect to attachment to ancestral land and the ecological system.

Regionalization

Apart from its internal physical and biological diversity, Laos has had a long and complex history, its territory and influence waxing and waning with the exigencies of overland trade which began to develop in the 12th century with Louang Prabang as the crossroads and reached its zenith in the 16th century. But following the rise of the maritime kingdoms and the opening of stable sea routes in the 17th century the central position of Lane Xang was no longer strategically advantageous and eventually its borders shrunk to approximately their present locations.

Laos was not a united entity during this time however, and has at various periods in its history consisted of four kingdoms, Xieng Dong Xieng Thong (Louang Prabang); Xieng Khoang (Meuang Phouan); Vientiane (Sikhottabong); and Champasak. The peoples of the former kingdoms retain much of their social and cultural characteristics today as well as their physical geographical areas. Furthermore, there remain strong cultural and linguistic affinities between Laos and its former areas of influence now located in neighboring countries, and the old overland trade routes are beginning to re-emerge with the increasing importance of land transport. Laos is unique in that every province shares at least one international border.

⁹ Karim, Wazir Jahan. 1995a. Bilateralism and gender in Southeast Asia. In *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia*, ed. Wazir Jahan (ed.) Karim. Oxford: Berg.

¹⁰ Klein-Hutheesing, Otome. 1995. Gender at the margins of Southeast Asia. In *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia*, ed. Wazir Jahan Karim. Oxford: Berg.

Therefore, for detailed social planning purposes the regions of the Lao PDR are best defined according to these physical, historical and cultural principles with the modern provinces falling into one of the four regions as shown in the following table.

Regionalization in Laos

Geographical Area	Lao Region	Historical Lao Kingdom & External Contacts	Provinces	Predominant Ethnic Categories
Upper Mekong	North	LOUANG PRABANG (Lanna, Sip Song Panna)	LBNG, PSLY, LGNT, BKEO, ODXY, XBRY	Lue, Lao, Mien, Hmong, Tibeto-Burman, Khmuic, Palaungic
Upper Annamite	East	XIENG KHOANG (Sip Song Chou Tai, Thanh Hoa, Nghê An, Quang Binh)	HPNH, XKNG, BKXY, KMME	Tai, Neua-Phouan, Phou Thay, Nyo, Hmong, Khmuic, Vietic, W. Katuic
Central Plaines	Central	VIENTIANE (Upper NE Thailand)	VTEP, VTEM	Lao, Hmong, Khmou, and mixed internal migrants
Lower Mekong Basin	South	CHAMPASAK (Khmer, Lower NE Thailand)	SVKT, SRVN, CPSK, XEKG, ATTP	Katuic, Bahnaric, Lao, Phou Thay



Data Collection in Ban Chom Pho, Phongsaly

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Site Selection

Methodology

Qualitative Research and the PPA

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research rests in the implied methodology. Distinguishing between the two approaches in their definitions of poverty and the methods used for measurement is useful. Of the quantitative measures, definitions of poverty may be multi-dimensional (material deprivation, risk, social exclusion, etc), while others are based more narrowly on income. And, if poverty is defined on the basis of an absolute income level (i.e., a poverty line), it is then necessary to decide how income is to be measured. In Laos and other developing countries where it is difficult to measure household income, household consumption is commonly used as the measure. Whatever the case, quantitative indicators must be selected in advance by “outsiders” and data collected by means of a questionnaire with responses typically limited to yes-no or a number. Poverty is then defined by a poverty line based on the level of per capita household consumption considered necessary to meet minimum consumption needs, for example, the level of per capita food consumption necessary to purchase a typical “basket” of food that provides a biochemical determination of the minimal average number of calories necessary to adequately sustain life. It is possible through regression analysis to show correlations

of various segments of the population living below the poverty line with the pre-selected indicators (health, education, roads, etc.). However, these are only correlations and not demonstrations of causation.

In the qualitative research arena methods are open, naturalistic, and non-numerical, there is no pre-selection of indicators. The focus is on the meanings that people bring to various phenomena, and thus the definition of poverty is an inside one based on how local villagers view and interpret the world around them. One way of representing the difference between quantitative and qualitative research is to equate the former with prescription and the latter with description. The end result is an outsider versus insider definition of poverty. Causation here is addressed directly through discussions with villagers and open ended questions.

The research premises adopted here are essentially anthropological keeping in mind that as with any academic discipline, anthropology is not a united front. The role of the anthropologist in the context of development is to try and understand the thinking of people who reside in a country or in a particular section of the country in order to represent the ways in which the lives of those people are experienced, to identify the “differences which make a difference,” how such things as virtue or personal well-being are culturally defined.

It should be noted that, in the anthropologist’s view, reason and objectivity are not in opposition to tradition, nor do they contradict the world of custom and folk belief. And while reason may alleviate error, ignorance and confusion, these are not proper synonyms for tradition, custom, and folk belief. Furthermore, differences between cultures need not be ranked according to higher or lower orders of development (cultural evolution), but should instead be treated as niches of social and geographical space that people choose to occupy.

Anthropology therefore investigates the viewpoint of those studied, in this case the many and varied populations of the Laos. We want to be able to describe the everyday taken-for-granted understandings that members of communities share which make concerted action and social life possible. Compared with other approaches, anthropological or ethnographic analyses are more complete, and are characterized by empathy, scrupulousness, concreteness, fair-mindedness, and ultimately, it is hoped, by revelatory discovery and understanding.

In Laos, the high degree of human and biological diversity that exists in the country, however, implies a methodology that is itself diverse, and that is capable and flexible enough to respond to the needs of the subject. Therefore, Participatory Poverty Assessment, as the term is used here, is an investigatory approach where both researchers and villagers are participants in a symmetrical verbal interaction related to poverty with the onus on the researcher to understand, to the degree possible given the constraints imposed by a variety of factors, the thinking of villagers of the particular ethnic group. There is no hard and fast definition, no set of rules, the interaction is governed by clues emanating from villagers and the sensitivity and experience of the researchers who share either vicariously or with their own eyes, the experiences of villagers as they are related. (This is in fact the root meaning of *participation*, which means literally to “take + part”.) As an assessment it seeks to be representative of the

poor in the country, and is also designed to be interactive and capable of providing a context for understanding.

Methodological issues need to be kept separate from participatory claims. Thus Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) is not to be confused with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The latter is an outgrowth of Rapid Rural Appraisal and involves use of prescribed techniques (visualizing, scoring, ranking etc.) that imply certain assumptions with respect to universality and which emanate from a Western cultural tradition. As distinct from this, the PPA has no assumed set of discovery procedures and relies on the quality of interaction between researcher and villager. Although PPA is also “rapid,” and in this way akin to RRA, its content is qualitative in the ethnographic sense of the term.

This approach to the PPA in Laos is thus conceived as a method of employing villagers’ own insights and analyses to understand poverty. But this differs from a “voices of the poor” approach where more time is spent in a smaller number of villages eliciting personal biographical information and experiences. The weakness of this lies in presupposed structuring molded on Western notions of individuality. Some individual experiences were of course recorded but the main focus is to understand poverty at the village or community level based on the premise that these units of organization operate systemically as wholes, not as aggregates of separate individuals or families.

For purposes of the qualitative analysis of the PPA a criterion of naturalness has been adhered to in the framing of hypotheses and in the evaluation of findings. This is in fact the act of separating the *emic* from the *etic*, terms borrowed from the discipline of Linguistics to describe the separation of meaningful or relevant information from all the rest. Naturalness in linguistic description is a principle used to help determine that which is *emic*. In ethnology the terms have been used to differentiate what members of a cultural group hear, as opposed to the undifferentiated noises heard by the outsider. The objective of the PPA is to analyze emically the “unphotographical” aspects of poverty. And here interpretation must take precedence over observation.

Finally, qualitative is logically prior to quantitative in research terms, because the selection of what to measure is ultimately a qualitative selection. This priority is rarely recognized in the prioritizing of research results, and most decisions in development continue to be based upon quantitative measurements.

Procedural Steps in PPA Research

The sequential steps in this PPA have followed that of the first PPA. That is,

(1) a design phase where the dialogue guidelines are prepared in consultation with the National Statistics Center. To be consistent, the same instrument was used as in the first PPA of 2000 (see Appendix 3);

(2) a training phase where researchers are introduced to the interview guidelines, the general ethnolinguistic situation of Laos, the implications of cultural diversity for undertaking the research, and essential principles of ethnographic methods;

(3) a data collection phase, where teams of researchers travel to each selected district and village to engage in the PPA dialogues with representatives of the villages. Each team consisted of a team leader from the National Statistics Center, a local consultant/researcher, a member of the provincial planning office, and a member of a district mass organization, either the Lao Front for National Construction, or the Lao Women's Union. It should be reiterated that the focus of the PPA is on the village as a social entity, not upon individual households;

(4) a compilation phase, where the world of the villager is transformed from a set of representations: field notes, interviews, photographs, recordings, memos to self, etc., into a synthesized set of texts for purposes of analysis. The texts totaled approximately 1,500 pages of single spaced Lao prose and are stored at the National Statistics Center;

(5) an analysis which interprets the information in the texts into a coherent statement about the reality of the situation reflecting, as faithfully as possible, the viewpoints of villagers in the study. To accomplish this, a number of additional interviews and groups discussions were held with the research teams;

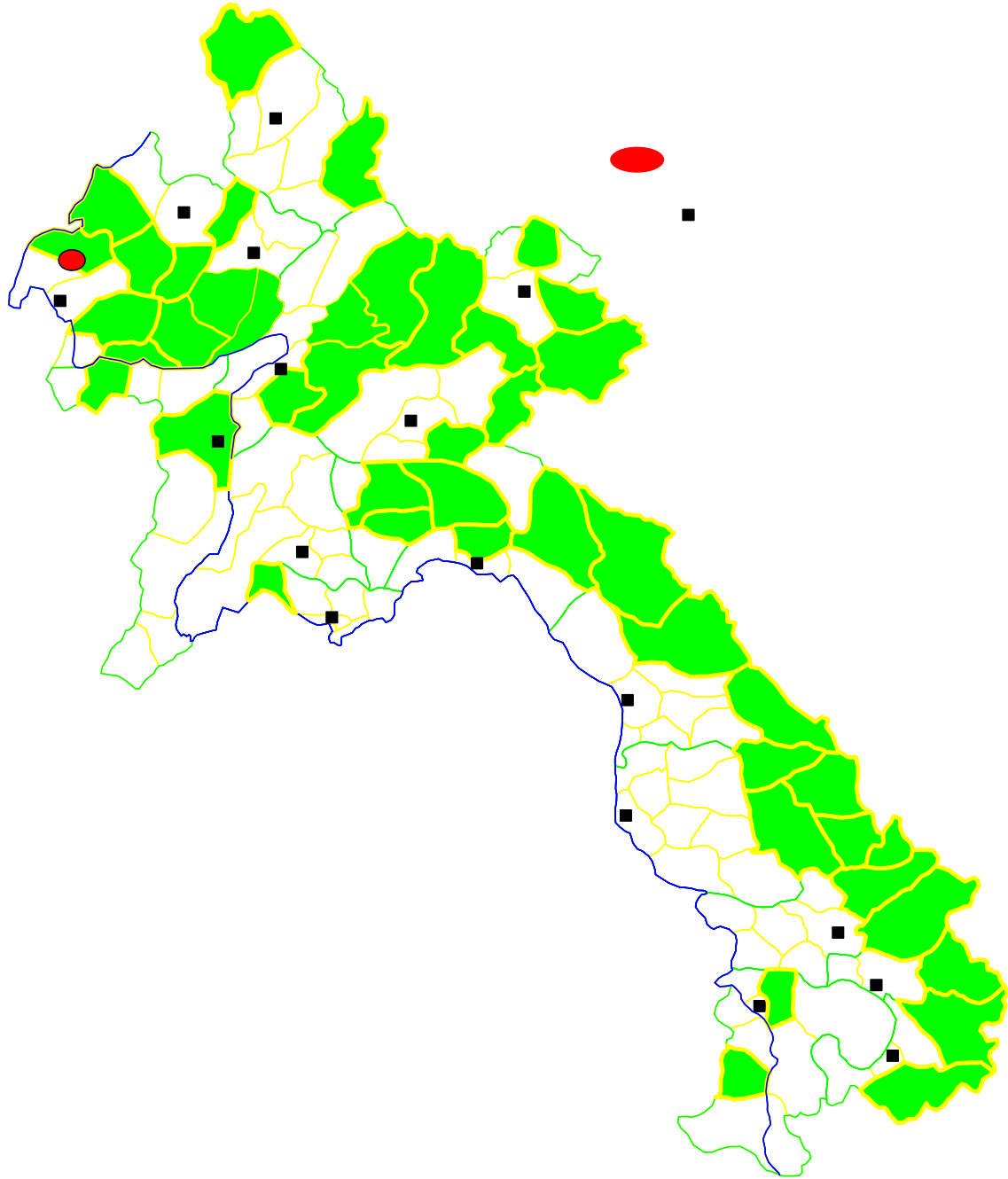
(6) a writing of the analysis (itself a form of inquiry), presented in this report, where outside and inside thinking about poverty are clearly distinguished.

These steps are not linear and discreet, and they are overlapped and linked at every turn. The final writing encompasses conclusions and recommendations that flow naturally from the analytical interpretation and reflect the real concerns of local people.

Site Selection

The selection of villages in this PPA is based upon the 47 priority districts determined by the government to be the poorest in the country (Figure 3 below). The decision was made to visit two villages in each of these resulting in a total of 94 villages. (Subsequently, one additional village was included from the remote District of Dak Cheung bringing the total to 95.)

Figure 3 – Map of Government’s 47 Priority Poor Districts



This selection procedure varies somewhat from that of the PPA 2000 where the selection resulted from overlaying districts identified as poor by a statistical analysis of LECS 2, with districts designated as poor by the provincial committees and selecting those that matched. In fact the sample size of the LECS does not permit a true disaggregation of poverty by district, but while this may be seen as a limitation to the selection process, as mentioned under the section on ethnicity below, the selection closely resembles the one done in 2000 lending credence to the procedure overall. In all, twenty of the districts visited in PPA 2006 were not included in PPA 2000, and eleven of the districts in PPA 2000 do not appear on the list of 47.

Table 3 - Breakdown of Poor Villages in PPA 2

Province	Poor Districts	Villages		
		PPA 1	PPA 2	PPA2 / LECS3
North				
LGNT	3	2	2	2
BKEO	3	3	5	-
ODXY	5	5	5	-
PSLY	2	1	3	-
LBNG	4	2	4	2
XBRY	2	4	-	-
East				
HPNH	5	2	3	5
XKNG	3	1	4	1
BKXY	3	2	3	1
KMME	2	3	-	1
South				
SVKT	4	3	5	-
SRVN	2	2	2	-
XEKG	2	2	2	1
CPSK	2	2	2	-
ATTP	2	1	3	-
Central				
VTE	1	2	2	-
VTEM	2	-	1	1
TOTAL	47	35	46	14

The villages selected in each district came from one of three categories: (1) former PPA 2000 villages included for comparative purposes in order to examine changes that may have occurred in the intervening six-year period; (2) villages determined to be poor by decision of the district administrative committees in each of the districts; (3) LECS 3 villages that happened also to be among the villages rated as poor by the district committees. Thus sample villages in categories (2) and (3) were selected during the survey teams' visits in consultation with the district committees.

The PPA 2006 survey was conducted by three teams each consisting of one NSC member from the central office in Vientiane, one experienced local consultant, one

member of the provincial office; and one member of a district mass organization, usually from either the Lao Women's Union or the Lao Front for National Construction.

Discussions with villagers were usually carried out in small groups following a set of semi-structured guidelines that were prepared in advance. All members of the team recorded the discussions in written form. Fieldwork began on 12 May and was completed by 29 August 2006.

Ethnic Groups in PPA 2006

Mon-Khmer: the Poorest Group

It is notable that of the 46 newly selected poor villages (selected by district committees) 75 percent were Mon-Khmer. The breakdown by region is as follows:

Table 4 - Number of new poor villages selected

	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	Hmong-Mien	Sino-Tibetan
North	0	10	3	5
East	3	8	5	0
Central	2	2	1	0
South	0	14	0	0

Of the 14 LECS 3 villages selected as poor,

9 (53%) were Mon-Khmer

5 (29%) were Lao-Tai

3 (19%) were Hmong-Mien

(there were no Sino-Tibetan villages selected in this group)

Incidence of Ethnicity Among Poor Villages

Of the total incidence of ethnicity in the selected villages, the breakdown shows remarkable consistency with the first PPA 2000 as shown below:

Table 5 -Incidence of ethnicity compared

Family	% Poor Sites 2000	% Poor Sites 2006	% Population
Mon-Khmer (MK)	56	55	23.5
Hmong-Mien (HM)	15	17	7.5
Sino-Tibetan (ST)	9	6	2.5
Lao-Tai (LT)	13 Tai-Thay 7 Lao	20	36.5 30

Villages of Mixed Ethnicity

Fewer mixed villages occurred in PPA 2000 and a number of the mono-ethnic villages in that study were found to have become ethnically mixed villages in PPA 2006 under village consolidations that had been carried out in the intervening period.

Villages with mixed ethnolinguistic families (25% of the total villages) show the following pattern:

Mon-Khmer + Hmong-Mien + Lao-Tai	6
Mon-Khmer + Hmong-Mien	6
Mon-Khmer + Lao-Tai	11

Thus the practice is to mix Mon-Khmer with either Lao-Tai or Hmong-Mien. There were no sample villages with mixtures of Lao-Tai + Hmong-Mien, Lao-Tai + Sino-Tibetan, or Hmong-Mien + Sino-Tibetan.



Kim Moun (Lantène) women in Louang Namtha carrying firewood (Hmong-Mien)

Diversity

In all a total of 48 ethnic groups were recorded as main populations in the villages studied under PPA 2006. These represent all four of the ethnolinguistic families and most of their main branches. In this respect it is fair to say that in addition to being representative of the poor in Laos, the PPA is likewise representative of the country's ethnic diversity which is not always captured in national surveys where ethnicity, along with other social groupings may be proscribed for reasons of convention or expediency.

The ethnic groups in the survey and their status in the ethnolinguistic classification system are illustrated in the table below.

Table 6 - Ethnic Groups in the 2006 PPA

Ethnolinguistic Family	Branch	Subgroup	Ethnic Group	
Lao-Tai (13 groups)	Southwestern	Lao	Lao Kaleung Bo	
		Tai	Lue Nyouan Tai Dam Tai Deng Tai Chang Khang	
		Neua-Phouan	Thay Neua Phouan Phou Thay	
	Northern	Pu-Yi	Yay (Nhang)	
Mon-Khmer (25 groups)	Palaungic	Lamet	Lamet	
	Khmuic	Kh mou	Kh mou (unspecified) Kh mou Ou Kh mou Lue Kh mou Rok Kh mou Kh rong Kh mou Nyouan	
			Pray-Pram	Pray Ksing Moul (Puak) Thay Thène
			Vietic	Liha Phong Ngouan
	Katuic	Western	Brou (So) Brou Tri Brou Makong	
			Central	Ta Oy, Katang
			Eastern	Pacoh Ngkrieng (Nge') Kado
		Bahnaric	Western	Brao (Lavè) Yeh Lakang ?? Alak
			Eastern	Tarieng
		Hmong-Mien (4 groups)	Hmongic	Western
Mienic			Mien-Mun	Iu Mien (Yao) Kim Moun (Lantène, Man)
Sino-Tibetan (5 groups)	Tibeto-Burman	S. Lolo	Akha Pouly	
		C. Lolo	Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu, Kui) Lahu Na (Black Lahu) Lahu Pfou (White Laho)	
		Unknown	O Nyoe [?] (Khoe)	



Newly relocated O Yoe Village in Nyot Ou, Phongsaly

Chapter 4 – Causes of Poverty and Solutions

Causes

Land Access

As in the 2000 PPA, the primary cause of poverty identified by villagers in the study continues to be limited access to cultivation land, especially for rice production. This situation, villagers report, is due to attempts by local officials to carry out land reform, consolidate villages, and to reduce or eradicate swidden cultivation. These policies have led to population pressure and scarcity of land resources.

For example, of the 65 Mon-Khmer villages in the current PPA, only 19 were cultivating more than an average of 1 hectare per household, far below the minimum usually considered necessary for rice or staple sufficiency.¹¹

¹¹ Based on his long term study of the Lamet, a Mon-Khmer ethnic group in northwestern Laos which was done in 1937, Izikowitz (1951) estimated the necessary land for swidden cultivation at 2,841 square meters per person per season, or 3.41 hectares total per person in a 12-year rotational fallow cycle. This is equivalent to approximately 1.4 hectares per season for an average household of five.

Also in the current PPA study, 28 villages, out of the total 95, were practicing predominantly paddy cultivation. Of these, only 7 had averages of more than 1 hectare per household.

In the Northern and Eastern regions, various cash crops were being grown or tested by villagers in the study, including corn, sesame, sugar cane, and of course, rubber. Successful corn cropping is being carried out in Xaynaboury Province, but with heavy use of pesticides which has contaminated water sources. In Oudomxay, villagers reported being cheated by private sector companies offering lower prices than were originally guaranteed. Similar situations were reported for sugar cane in Louang Namtha.

In the case of rubber, where villagers have opted on their own to plant rubber trees, few problems were reported. But in Louang Namtha where Chinese enterprises, with the consent of local officials, have imposed rubber tree cultivation on villagers, considerable resentment was found to exist over what they consider to be an unfair sharing of potential profits.

In comparison to the 2000 PPA, where a major constraint was said to be lack of technical knowledge of how to grow new crops, in 2006 this was found to be no longer the case, rather, the major obstacle to cash cropping was reported as marketing and how to manage financial aspects of business transactions. For poor villages with little flexibility or investment capital, such obstacles effectively serve to thwart economic growth, and frequently increase debt.

Livestock

The second most frequently identified cause of poverty was livestock disease which, even when viewed in purely economic terms, represents enormous losses to livelihoods. Furthermore the psychological loss to morale without doubt ranks equally as high since most upland ethnic groups measure wealth and status in terms of livestock. In the survey some villages were found to have abandoned livestock raising altogether.

Livestock were reported to be dying in large numbers. This was especially true of pigs and chickens, but bovines were not excepted. Veterinary assistance is usually not available and few livestock vaccinations were reported to have taken place.

Livestock remains the primary indicator of wealth and continues to play an important role in spiritual practices as well as savings and a source of funds in times of emergencies. Sale of livestock by poor villages was found to have increased since the last PPA, usually for emergencies rather than as commercial enterprises.

<p><i>When livestock die, then we become truly poor.</i> - Lao villager in Champasak</p>
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The sections which follow below cite reasons given by villagers for their impoverished conditions. But in examining these, it should be kept in mind that in

most cases these individual causes are not discrete and are in actuality symptoms of a larger complex of interrelationships from which villagers find it difficult to extract themselves. And in this complex, it is the relationship between the nodes rather than the nodes themselves that forms the essence of poverty.

For example, rice production in paddies is dependent on buffaloes, and acquisition of buffaloes is dependent on ability to produce rice surpluses in order to purchase them and on land for grazing, but this in turn is dependent on the paddy which is dependent on land and buffaloes, and so on. Livelihood systems evolve naturally, and overt purposive attempts to recreate systemic wholes are prone to ruts because the underlying order and coherence of the original system, the one which has conditioned villager thinking, is not well understood. Attempts to create an entirely new system are even less likely to succeed. In both cases what is missing is subconscious knowledge that is not visible from the outside.

The North

Access to land for rice cultivation continues to be the dominant problem for poor villages in the North. They are caught in a double bind of having to reduce swidden cultivation but with no means to compensate for losses because the amount of paddy land or potential paddy land in this mountainous region that would be required as a replacement for swiddening is physically not enough. While there is potential for cash crops and technical knowledge is not a problem, cash investment is necessary to get started and marketing is more often than not an insurmountable problem. Successful cash cropping remains dominated by those who have financial capacity and by definition they are not poor. In addition, the psychological insecurity of relinquishing control over one's livelihood to the vagaries of a fickle market with no underlying rice production as backup means that poor villagers are reluctant to take the risk, and with the well-being of children and families at stake, this is the logical path. But to make matters worse, there are traumatic upheavals in social structures implicit in "changing" livelihoods that are inseparable from the potential economic changes that are incurred. This aspect will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Thus the following causes of poverty were mentioned by villagers in the second PPA:

Table 7 - North – Causes of poverty ranked according to frequency of occurrence

Rank	Cause
1	Land for cultivation not sufficient
2	Livestock die, or not enough livestock
3	Don't know Lack of investment money Opium addiction Relocation
4	Lack access to market, or prices too low to motivate production Lack of clean water Low level of education among villagers
5	Lack of (all weather) roads Lack of knowledge of production techniques
6	Excessive taxation Lack of knowledge of buying and selling Natural disasters that affect rice yields No school in village

Villagers have had to rely on their own acumen to survive in this policy driven environment. Ethnic differences are stark and in many cases exclusionary, so survival often depends upon being able to justify one's cultural practices to officials who lack the necessary sensitivities.

In the Khmou village of Chomleng Nyay in Pak Beng District of Oudomxay, the village chief said:

Our village has not undergone the land allocation process because there is a problem with conflict over land with the neighboring villages of Phou Soung and Mok Kha' that are not resolvable so the District did not carry out land allocation. If Land Allocation is implemented here, on that day our people will die because the soils are not good, a lot of land must be cultivated for a small return. If this land were divided in to smaller portions there would be no production.

Following the implementation of Land Forest Allocation (LFA) a Khmou Nyouan village in Na Lè, Louang Namtha was forced to turn to growing corn for a Chinese company, while producing only tubers for their own consumption. In order to obtain rice they hire out their labor to nearby rubber plantations hoeing and digging, sell their remaining livestock, and borrow from relatives.

A Lamet village in Pha Oudom, Bokeo was found to have a distinct rich-poor gap between two wealthy families and the rest. It is not clear however, whether this is not just the traditional *lem* system at work as described by Izikowitz in 1937.¹² Otherwise, it was noted that community cooperation is good and the old customs, including dog sacrifice, are still practiced. Villagers farm swiddens in 5 year rotations, sell livestock, and hire out labor. They have been looking for an opportunity to convert their swiddens to cash crops, but so far have not found a way to do this without losing their innate advantages.

The old PPA village of Pong Koum is now a consolidation of six villages, all Khmou Khrong. There is no paddy land available here, so people must return to their former territories for swiddening. Poor conditions have led to an increase in opium addiction, but now a total of 60 addicts were said to have been detoxified, though the rate of recidivism was not mentioned.

A Kwène village in Louang Namtha, after having undergone LFA was found to be hiring out their labor, and had also developed a small amount of paddy. But their real income comes from selling illegal logs. Now they have constructed a new school on their own initiative and because of the strong leadership in the village have been declared a model village by an international organization that provides development assistance.

Another Lamet village established in the new economic zone of Nam Nyou in Bokeo consists mainly of ex-military personnel and their families. Though this village, based on outside indicators, should be poor, they in fact appear very well off. Amounts of swidden land and yields were concealed from the survey team, so the source of their wealth is open to speculation.

Lahu Pfou villages in Meuang Moeng District of Bokeo are poor because of lack of swidden land and non-availability of any other land. Households are uniformly poor and rely to a large extent on forest resources. They claim to have abandoned all of their old religious practices and eat only vegetarian foods at ceremonies. In a highly

¹² The *lem* is a social rank attained by men who have acquired a significant number of heirlooms and ritual prestige through redistribution of buffalo meat at annual sacrificial ceremonies for the ancestors.. They become the village elders to whom other people go for counseling and advice.

original response to the question on religion, villagers replied that they did not worship 'spirits' (*phi*) but rather 'angels' (*thevada*), that is, using an Indic term to legitimize their animism.

A Black Lahu village in Louang Namtha has little interest in development and are accused by district officials of not following the government's advice on development. Even though they were relocated some twenty years ago, villagers continue to reside primarily in the swiddens keeping a few dwellings in the official village for the sake of appearances. Teachers (who are Khmou) and children do not attend school on a regular basis. There are said to be a number of opium addicts in the village but details were not forthcoming.

Another Black Lahu village in Nam Nyou special zone was also accused by local officials of being uncooperative in development efforts. Villagers prefer to reside in the swiddens and a considerable language barrier exists. Attendance at the two grades of school in the village is poor and students do not like to continue to upper grades because they are ashamed of their poor Lao language ability.

The Lahu Shi villagers of Phon Samphanh do not sell things at the market because they are ashamed of their difficulty in speaking the Lao language. Much of their cash income is derived from hiring out labor to rubber plantations. No doubt Lao language problems account for their poor school enrollment and attendance figures. This village was severely affected by relocation, the population dwindling from 245 to 122 households because of disease. At the time of the survey, fifteen young girls from this village have left to become prostitutes in neighboring areas such as Viengphoukha.

The Khmou village of Ban May in Nga District of Oudomxay say they are poor because there has been a village consolidation and now there are too many people. After land allocation was implemented only a small amount of production land per household remains. There is no irrigation and considerable difficulties in marketing exist because of price controls set by the company to which the District has granted a monopoly. The people said:

At our village there is a District taxation check point on the road. If we want to take anything to sell outside the village the tax people demand 20-30 percent of the value, even for rice that we want to sell. And furthermore, when one of us wants to sell his or her rice to buy, say, tiles for the roof, tax must be paid and the rice must be sold only to the monopoly designated by the District, at their price. This causes poverty because the product of our own labor must be sold at a low price only to one company. And it's not just our village that suffers; all of the villages here have this problem. All the while the District exhorts us to produce more.

In their desire to enact development, district officials were found to have coerced villagers into various activities causing considerable resentment. A Lue village in Na Lè District of Oudomxay was coerced into planting rubber for a Chinese enterprise at very disadvantageous terms where the Chinese take 70 percent of the profit, and this after the village already had developed a plan to grow teak and eaglewood. When the village chief traveled to discuss the situation with the district chief, he was never allowed to meet with the district chief.

The East

Looking at the East one notable difference was the frequency of villages that identified lack of investment capital as a reason for their poverty. In other words, land problems that exist for many of the same reasons as in the North, seem to be looked upon in a more pragmatic way, that is, how to begin adopting crops and livestock commercially. To some extent this may be due to the more pragmatic and adaptive Hmong worldview, since more Hmong villages are identified as poor in the East than in the North. This does not, however, conceal the fact that problems of poverty are most often identified as problems of land access.

Table 8 - East – Causes of poverty ranked according to frequency of occurrence

Rank	Cause
1	Lack of land for cultivation
2	Lack of investment money
3	Not enough livestock
4	Lack access to market Lack of all weather roads Lack of knowledge of buying and selling Relocation
5	Labor supply not enough
6	Continuing health problems Don't know techniques of paddy cultivation Lack of education Lack of knowledge of production techniques Market value for crops less than promised Natural disasters that affect rice yields Still poor from the effects of the war Swidden cultivation is forbidden Village consolidation leading to overpopulation

A White Hmong village in Xam Tay District of Houa Phan was mobilized by the district to relocate from a mountain top to the side of the road (about three hours away) after LFA was carried out effectively crippling their swidden production. In the end only about half of the village relocated as ordered. These villagers were then convinced by the district to grow soy beans and ginger for the Vietnamese market, but the Vietnamese defaulted on the agreement to purchase. They were then advised to grow corn, but the same thing happened. Now the villagers grow cassava and sell small livestock to subsist.

A Khmou village of war refugees in Viengxay District now exists by hiring out their labor to the Hmong. They have only 4 ha of paddy land and some swiddens which were depleted after LFA, so these are not used much now. The village chief is an

alcoholic and does not provide good leadership. A buffalo project (using the system where female animals are rotated among the owners) has benefited only a few wealthy families and even here disease is a problem.

A Ksing Moul village in Xieng Kho cultivate both paddy and swidden fields, but the irrigation system which was provided doesn't work and so paddy production is limited. Villagers hire out their labor to the Tai Dam and sell bamboo shoots for their income.

A mixed Ksing Moul, and Tai Deng village in Xieng Kho grows corn and cultivates only a very small amount of paddy land. The village relies primarily on swiddens which are now less productive after LFA. To survive villagers need to hire out their labor sawing logs for lumber for which they are paid by the tree. They also sell non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

A village of Khmou war refugees in Viengthong District of Houa Phan, has only a small amount of paddy and are now restricted from swiddening by the district. A donor is now assisting them with livestock raising and a long term project to grow eaglewood.

A Khmou village in Viengthong District, Louang Prabang, cultivates limited swiddens and only a little paddy. No projects have come to assist them. What little rice they produce is used for purchasing other necessities.

A Tai Khang village in Tha Thom was relocated from Nong Het in 2002 because they were growing opium. They cultivate both paddies and swiddens and sell NTFPs. Rice production is good only for an average of eight months and so they are poor as evidenced by a lack of material possessions.

Tha Thom is a mixed village of Hmong, Khmou and Phouan that was established 10 years ago by soldiers who all served in the same battalion. They have 55 hectares of paddy, sell livestock, do blacksmithing, sell NTFPs and receive remittances from abroad. Rice production is only sufficient for 6 about months in an average year, so villagers consider that in spite of other sources of income they are still "poor."

Located just one kilometer from the Vietnamese border, a mixed village of Khmou and Tai Chang have no paddy land. They rely only on swiddens and income from the sale of livestock. Rice production is sufficient for only 5 months out of the year. They compensate by hiring out their labor at the rate of 40,000 kip per day.

The Hmong village of Ban Soum Phay in Nong Het is an old village established in 1971. They have no paddies but good swiddens and are rice sufficient for the entire year. They also sell livestock. Villagers however, say they are poor because there is no road to their village which is 26 kilometers off the main road and villagers must walk this distance.

The South

When the district asked why they didn't group their households according to poverty as instructed, villagers replied, "why should we, if we did no one would come to help anyway, should we do this just to exercise our tongues? Its like falling in the water and its over all our heads, everyone is the same, everyone is short of rice, they have come to mobilize us to grow paddy rice, but they get stuck because there is no land for this.

— Makong Villagers from Xépon

In general the South has been less dynamic than other regions with respect to poor villages, and few major changes have occurred since 2000. The main cause of poverty cited by villagers is lack of land for cultivation due to relocation and this has been exacerbated by natural disasters. This has meant heavy reliance on natural sources of food and income and these sources are reported to be dwindling. Conversion of swidden farming to paddy cultivation is heavily dependant on buffaloes for plowing and opening up new land. This was the biggest problem mentioned in the 2000 PPA and remains so in 2006.

Table 9 - South – Causes of poverty ranked according to frequency of occurrence

Rank	Cause
1	Lack of land for cultivation
2	Natural disasters that affect rice yields
3	Not enough livestock
4	Lack of investment money Relocation
6	Don't know what to do Have no cash crops Lack access to market Lack of water for cultivation, or for opening new paddies
6	Don't know techniques of paddy cultivation Lack of education Land taken by Vietnamese plantation enterprise with no compensation No electricity Still poor from the effects of the war Village consolidation leading to overpopulation

The Brao village of Houay Kout villagers blame their condition on a lack of technical knowledge and lack of ability to comprehend economic calculations. They say they work hard, all day but in the end they are the same as before with no improvement.

They are only advised by the district to cultivate more which is not possible because of land constraints and to grow more vegetables.

Another Brao village in Phouvong District was recently relocated and villagers say they do not understand the new methods of production. But even if they did, the situation would not be good because the weather has not been conducive to cultivation. As a result they have severe shortages and not enough rice to eat.

In a mixed Alak and Tarieng village in Sanxay District, villagers consider themselves to be poor even though they have many of the outside trappings of development such as a school, a rice mill, and a few tractors for plowing. They say they are poor because they have not enough rice to eat, there has been drought, and many families lack buffaloes to plow. There are no additional sources of income such as livestock. The pigs and chickens that they used to raise all died from epidemics.

Today the Ngkriang village of Ban Don in the District of Bachiengchaloensouk has become very poor. All of the village's production land was handed over by the District to a Vietnamese rubber enterprise and no compensation was provided. The villagers don't know what to do.

“Now we have no land for crops at all because all of our land has been taken by the Vietnamese rubber project. ... We can't think of what to do, when we have no land we cannot think. ... We brought this problem to the District Chief but he refused to listen and just let the Vietnamese continue to plow up our land, now they have plowed almost to the edge of the village.” — Ngkriang villager

Pacoh villagers in Samouay District of Saravanh say they are still poor from the effects of the war when the village was destroyed and no other forms of wealth were inherited from their parents. All that was left was their land. They do not want to move to another location because this is their ancestral home. If they wished, they say they could move to Vietnam and become rich. But they do not want to go. The weather has been very dry, and even if paddies were constructed there is no water source.

Makong villagers in Nong District of Savannakhet say they are poor because swidden land has been limited after Land Forest Allocation. Their production has decreased and at the same time supplies of forest products for consumption or for sale have declined. Now there is not enough rice for consumption. They could grow vegetables, but there is no place to sell them and they wouldn't know what to grow anyway. They could do basketry but there are no raw materials left. The only choice remaining for survival is to rely on wild tubers for food.

The Central Region

In the Central region, although they had been classed as poor by the district, a number of villages did not rate themselves as poor, but rather as 'average.' In the case of Vientiane Municipality, this was most likely a factor of relativity, that is, the villages were less well off than others in the district, but the district itself is not poor in relation to other poor districts around the country. (The province of Xaygnaboury in the North is a similar situation).

Table 10 - Central – Causes of poverty ranked according to frequency of occurrence

Rank	Cause
1	Access to cultivation land and forests not sufficient
2	Lack access to market, or prices too low to motivate production Lack of investment money
3	Livestock disease, livestock not sufficient Methamphetamine addition

In the ethnically mixed village of Nam Mo in Xaysomboun, villagers say they are poor because of the shortage of cultivation land and the absence of natural resources which have been largely exhausted. In addition they have no experience with other forms of food production and marketing, so at the present time conditions are not good.

Environmental problems caused by the concentration of populations, and over harvesting of natural resources for sale in order to buy food have reduced much of the flexibility that poor villagers have always used to cope with traumatic change. And while conditions have not reached the level of destitution, in most areas this has been avoided only by continuing traditional swidden practices in more remote areas or in former villages.



Young Khmou girl in the North taking corn to the market

Solutions to Poverty

Considering solutions to poverty is commonly fraught with ethnocentrism and is one of the arenas where differences between the mental and the physical are most strongly contested. Prescriptions of what outsiders think is best for villagers are often gratuitous and put forth even as discussion of ethnic differences and cultural proclivities is being proscribed. The essence of participation though, demands that the voice of the villager and all of the ethnic character that it entails be heard first and foremost. In this light, solutions to poverty suggested by villagers may be taken as an indication of what people *will* do, as opposed to what they *could* do to alleviate poverty. This has many implications for approaching development, the first and most important being that channels of communication and understanding between villagers and development practitioners should form the primary point of focus for government and donors. For in the end, having physical or biophysical solutions that villagers will not implement is tantamount to having no solutions at all.

The solutions recommended by villagers in all regions are agricultural solutions complemented by a desire for services such as water supply and health services that improve quality of life according to local definition in that they conserve or facilitate labor.

However, after having moved villages to new locations and new environments which have led to population density and land shortages, there are few viable agricultural solutions left because the potentials that existed in former villages and territories are no longer there.

The solutions that are recommended by villagers therefore fall into two categories, (1) those that are feasible if financial or other assistance were available, and (2) wishful thinking. In other words, the proposed solutions are beyond the physical and financial means of villagers to implement and must come from the government. This places the poor in a very vulnerable position from which it is difficult to escape.

The short term solution already in effect throughout all regions is hiring out labor on a daily basis, either inside or outside the village. That this is not a preferred permanent solution is evidenced by the fact that no one mentioned it as a solution during the discussions.

The village of Na Xouang in Viengthong District of Borikhamxay is a good example. The village was established over 200 years ago by an ethnic Lao-Tai group (called at that time Amphur Na Xouang using the Thai word for 'district'). In 1968 some 80 families of Khmou were moved here from Na Meuang, ostensibly because of the war. And in 1975 an epidemic broke out and the Lao-Tai original inhabitants all fled. The Khmou villagers were not affected by the epidemic because they spent most of their time in the swiddens rather than in the village itself where the disease broke out. In 1994 60 families of Hmong were moved into the village by the local authorities, and another group arrived in 1995. Just after the Hmong arrived another epidemic struck the village and many people died. A portion of the villagers moved away to other locations but the rest who survived remained in the village.

Now there are 76 households of Hmong but only 16 households of Khmou. A large portion of the Hmong are new arrivals who have replaced the original Hmong who moved away, mostly to Vientiane Province, and the majority of the Khmou have moved away because they felt the Hmong were taking over their village. The village is said to be one of the poorest in the district. The new Hmong have not adapted to the lowland environment. They do not understand paddy cultivation and they do not know how to fish. The rice they plant is not healthy and not enough for their needs. Most of their rice is purchased with the income from selling forest products. In their old village in the mountains, they say, rice was never a problem. The soils are poor and water supply is not sufficient, the yields decline each year. They have tried growing vegetables for sale, but earnings were not enough to buy rice. Most of the livestock has died. This causes the people to be depressed and now they cannot see any solution to the deteriorating livelihood conditions and income derives mainly from hiring out labor locally.

In the Lue village of Ban Vath in Lè District of Louang Namtha, there is no land for paddy and the village depends upon swiddening. But the soils are poor and the yields are steadily decreasing. To alleviate their poverty the district brought in a Chinese rubber company and this year 26 hectares of their swidden land has been cleared and planted with rubber seedlings. The terms of the investment dictated to the villagers allow for the company to receive 70 percent of all profits, while the villagers, who provide all land and labor, receive 30 percent. The Assistant Village Chief said:

The company takes too much. Twice we have submitted this unfair situation to the District Chief because this is not worth our labor. When the people go to see the District Chief in person his officials say he is not available, even as they can see him sitting there. So the villagers have to submit, they have no choice.

The villagers remain unsatisfied with this situation. It goes without saying that this is not a solution in the alleviation of poverty.

The following tables summarize the suggestions that were made by villagers during the discussions with the PPA teams.

The North

Table 11 - North: Solutions to Poverty

Rank	Solution
1	Raise / Increase large bovines, Raise livestock general Redo land allocation, open more paddy land, or increase land in general
2	Improve sanitation, health services, clean water
3	Small scale investment capital for livestock, crops (provide or raise)
4	Improve access to education, provide funds to continue education
5	Grow corn and/or cassava, soy beans, ginger, paper mulberry, sesame, etc. commercially Irrigation, weirs, water for cultivation and animals
6	Veterinary services
7	Plant commercial trees, resinous and teak, eagle wood
8	Grow rubber Grow vegetables for market Need a road to the village, or repair existing one, bridge
9	Build fishponds Fruit trees, bananas, pineapples, etc.
10	Electricity (XBRY only) Guaranteed markets for produce Opium detox
11	Collect NTFPs Don't have any solutions, all channels are blocked High yield rice varieties Hire out labor Rice bank Solar electricity

The East

Table 12 - East: Solution to Poverty

Rank	Solution
1	Raise / Increase large bovines, Raise livestock general
2	Open more paddy land, or increase land in general
3	Small scale investment capital
4	Grow vegetables for market
5	Grow corn and/or cassava, soy beans etc. commercially Plant commercial trees, resinous and teak, eagle wood
6	Fruit trees, bananas, pineapples, etc. Guaranteed markets for produce
7	Grow rubber Irrigation, weirs, water for cultivation and animals Trading and commerce
8	Clean water Don't have any solutions, all channels are blocked Increase technical assistance in agriculture Improve sanitation Improve education (grades available)

The South

Table 13 - South: Solutions to poverty

Rank	Solution
1	Open more paddy land, or increase land in general Raise / Increase large bovines, Raise livestock general
2	Irrigation, weirs, water for cultivation and animals
3	Don't have any solutions, whatever the government wants Grow corn and/or cassava Plant commercial trees, resinous and teak
4	Borrow money for small scale investments Grow vegetables for market Fruit trees, bananas, pineapples, etc. Grow coffee to sell be the roadside
5	Grow rubber Relocate to a new location where land is available Road in order to market produce

The Central Region

Table 14 - Central: Solutions to Poverty

Rank	Solution
1	Raise / Increase large bovines, Raise livestock general Small scale investment capital for livestock, crops (provide or raise)
2	Rubber Open more paddy land, or increase land in general
3	Fruit Trees Plant commercial trees, resinous and teak, eagle wood Hire out labor Fish ponds

Summary

It is clear that poverty is caused by external events over which villagers have no control. Although development policies that involve relocation, such as Land Forest Allocation, village consolidation, opium eradication, and eradication of swidden agriculture may be well-intentioned, their poor implementation has contributed to adverse effects on human health, livestock disease, and shortage of land for cultivation. In the south, climatic conditions involving flooding and drought are an additional factor.

Governance problems as evidenced by attempts by local officials to control economies of villagers, restricting access to free markets, and sometimes inappropriate collaboration with private companies at the expense of villagers are becoming more commonplace. Social problems surrounding drug addiction are on the rise.

The solutions to poverty proposed by villagers all fall under the general category of agricultural solutions. This is not surprising since villagers of all ethnicities are farmers and obviously relate most strongly to agricultural activities. Many villages suggested the revoking of the restrictions imposed by land reform practices which were not properly implemented in the first place.

As was seen in the section on Causes of Poverty, however, commercialized agriculture presents many problems, and the majority of enterprises suggested by villagers have already been tried and failed because of a variety of factors, and it is mainly the non-poor villages that have benefited from activities that involve credit and debt. In spite of this, as may be seen here, some villages say they are prepared to borrow funds for certain kinds of activities. The risk is high for them because they

usually have no back-up system in place in case an endeavor fails. Villages of upland ethnic groups that have been relocated are especially vulnerable in this respect.



Above: O Yoe girls in Phongsaly pounding rice
Below: Lao girl fetching water in Soulhouma, Champasak

Chapter 5 – Culture and Gender and Poverty

Culture

Despite the conditions of vulnerability and hardship, all of the villages visited continue to perform traditional cultural and religious practices. Rituals and ceremonies mean considerable expenditures in terms of livestock, rice, and alcohol, but these are not areas where villagers are willing to compromise. These are, of course, the very foundation of the identity which, unlike more superficial physical changes or development ideas, is not readily amenable to change.

Low productivity and conservative use of resources are frequently cited as obstacles to development. But this presents a dilemma from a socio-cultural perspective, since, on the one hand we are attempting to conserve natural resources in the form of biodiversity, and on the other we are calling for intensified productivity. In Laos a causal link between low productivity and poverty would be difficult to prove, all the more so when poverty is defined by villagers as opposed to outside biochemical definitions based upon calories per day. Paradoxically, from the point of view of socio-cultural development, the very attitudes necessary for the preservation of the environment are those which are being called upon to change in order to increase

production. Social structures militate against overproduction and so the premise that productivity may be readily increased, either by outside programs or by market forces, must be viewed with caution. Before making such causal assumptions, it is necessary to provide through critical observation some measurement of the impact of actual social systems upon domestic production, and this has not been done.



Drinking Rice Wine at a Ceremony in Dak Cheung, Southern Laos

Often the blame is placed on the cultural practices of the many and varied ethnic groups. But rather than simply saying that minority peoples are poor, in the light of both PPAs it is clearly more appropriate to focus on the *process* of impoverishment where upland peoples have been or are being impoverished through a number of processes which are out of their control and which are often irreversible. These processes have dispossessed them of their traditional lands, have restricted or prohibited their access to natural resources, have resulted in the breakdown of their communities and have led to the degradation of their environment thereby threatening their subsistence. The common stereotype that ethnic minorities are poor because their culture is backward should be rejected outright. Rather research shows clearly that they are victims of poorly implemented policies that have produced poverty.

Anthropologists describe the everyday taken-for-granted understandings that members of communities share which make concerted action and social life possible. The goal of anthropology in development has been and hopefully will continue to be that of investigation of existing systems. Whether this activity is framed in terms of ecological anthropology, farming systems, livelihood systems, or agroecosystems is dependant upon individual approaches, but in all of these what anthropology is most suited to describe is the interaction of human beliefs and social structure with the biophysical. Experience has shown that adaptation is first and foremost a matter of mental process, and that improvements in the physical side of well-being will not succeed without an understanding of the whole – call it the biocultural system.

For this reason, in the PPA much emphasis is placed upon the concept of holism and holistic thinking with respect to the analysis of poverty. This is done to balance the picture that is usually presented of a series of economic indicators. These indicators

which are brought in from the outside do not fully capture the reality of village livelihoods. Thus to view poverty in a purely physical, biophysical or Western economic frame is to miss the reality of what has happened and to obfuscate the truth from planners. The remedy will not fit the ailment.

Some Common Myths Relating to Culture and Development

- Rural people in Laos live in subsistence economies

Subsistence economy is used to designate an economy where no surplus is produced, but in fact the vast majority of farmers in Laos do produce surpluses, and these are utilized in various ways depending on the ethnic group. The problem lies in the fact that the uses of surplus are not readily measurable by Western economic methods.

- The Noble Savage

By championing the mental in the global context anthropology as an approach is vulnerable to the disdain of many developers who frequently disparage its anschauung as a sentimental return to the world of the "noble savage". And here they may employ outmoded definitions of culture, dichotomizing the scientific West against the forces of superstition and in so doing seek to define as universal and transcendent the vision they have of themselves.

- Anthropologists are against change

Among the other accusations leveled at anthropologists in the vanguard of development is that they are promoting a static view of minorities as resistant to change. In fact the opposite is true, and anthropologists from classical times onward have sought to understand and to describe the dynamics of change in the societies they study.

- Peasants are irrational

Taken out of their cultural context, and based on an assumption that Western economics is universal, villagers are frequently perceived to be making irrational decisions with respect to economic growth. But studies have shown that promotion of what in villager eyes would be interpreted as overproduction can lead to the breakdown of social systems, of the moral community, and potentially entail a negative social and psychological cost that far outweighs any increase in incomes or in the GDP. The outcome of increased production would be the creation of over-indebtedness for the uplanders, and greed in the lowlands, both of which will be destructive of the moral community.

- Ethnic diversity is a problem

Diversity of peoples and cultures is commonly conceived by developers as a problem whereas anthropology would regard it as a strength in the same way that biologists view biodiversity. Each unique ethnic group possesses a storehouse of indigenous knowledge that is irreplaceable and can add to human understanding and appreciation. Often encoded in religion and aesthetics, the value of this knowledge outweighs any notion of problem that may arise. Ethnic diversity becomes a problem only when developers fail to realize its value.

- Development as scientism

Developers often fail to make the distinction between development and modernization. Modernists believe that oppositions between reason and superstition, education and ignorance, science and religion, enlightenment and darkness, sophistication and innocence, etc provide a moral basis for dividing the world into then and now, or, them and us. True socio-cultural development on the other hand would imply changes for the betterment of a community that are generated from the inside, within the framework of its own culture.

Gender and Ethnicity

Gender Roles in Poor Villages

In this PPA it was clear that women are engaged not only in carrying out everyday household chores such as cooking and child care, but they also participate in food production and gathering. Both men and women say that women work longer hours. Men are usually responsible for work that is heavy or dangerous or carried out at night. Men say that while women work longer and more consistently, men work at

heavy tasks that require short bursts of energy and more frequent rests. In swidden farming, for example, men are responsible for cutting large trees while women attend to the weeding.

It was reported in PPA 2000 that women are the most negatively impacted when fallow cycles are shortened and consequent ecological damage is manifested in epidemic growth of weeds, which are the responsibility of women in most systems. The same was found to be true in PPA 2006 to an even greater extent since induced population pressure has led to decreases in soil fertility over larger areas with resultant weed problems. In a separate study it was found that the amount of women's labor in the swiddens has increased by 600 percent following the reduction of fallow cycles:

In the early morning, when we are cooking and feeding the chickens, the men get up and just sit there, they say they are "planning." And we say, yes, planning for what things their wives should do that day. But we are just joking.
- **Kh mou woman in Oudomxay**

Following the implementation of the government's Land Forest Allocation scheme, yields from swiddening have decreased by over 60 percent. For example, in Ban Vieng Keo (Phong) in Phoun District, one hectare of rice swidden used to produce 2 tons, whereas following land allocation which has shortened fallow cycles and destroyed the ecological balance, one hectare now produces only 700-800 kilograms. Ecological imbalances have caused an increase of grasses that need to be weeded by women. In the past the weeding of one hectare would take approximately 5 days, but now it takes two weeks. Furthermore, weeding originally needed to be carried out only twice during a growing season, but now this must be done four times prior to harvest. That means women today must spend two months or 60 days out of every year weeding one hectare of swidden compared to only ten days in the past, a 600 percent increase in labor.¹³

¹³ Chamberlain, J. R. 2006a. Study of Gender Inequality in Women's Access to Land, Forests, and Water. Draft Report. Asian Development Bank TA No. 4339, Vientiane.

Women and the Ecosystem

In a recent study (Chamberlain 2006a) relating women to the ecosystem in the Nam Ngeum watershed (Vientiane and Xiang Khoang provinces) several main conclusions emerged:

- (i) Mon-Khmer groups fit well into the general Southeast Asian pattern of bilateralism both in terms of social structure and in terms of their relations with the ecosystem which can be described as ‘a part of’ rather than ‘apart from.’
- (ii) For these groups, the rotational swidden system and accompanying religious beliefs is the key ecological notion that encompasses the source of female power and the source of biological diversity.
- (iii) Eradication of swidden cultivation has potentially adverse effects on both social structure, including women’s power, and on the ecology of any given area.
- (iv) Hmong religious and social structures are less related to the ecosystem and are more autocratic, a key to adaptive flexibility in the face of external changes.
- (v) Hmong cosmology is grounded in other-worldliness rather than in the natural surroundings of this world and hence female power resides in reproduction and not in the swidden.

Women have played a major role in coping with relocations such as those in Meuang Long district where Akha women regularly hire out their labor and Lahu Shi girls engage in prostitution. In Louang Namtha and Bokeo large numbers of Khmou girls travel to Thailand in search of jobs.¹⁴

Elsewhere, such as in Khmou villages in Houa Phan, it was noted that tasks typically associated with women such as carrying firewood are being carried out by men who use hand tractors to gather the wood. This supports the general anthropological analysis of Southeast Asia as a cultural area unique for its flexibility of gender roles and relative complementarity in contrast to the patriarchal pattern of China and India.

Among the Hmong, often classed with the Chinese style because of their exogamous patrilineal clan system, it was found that women have become more outspoken in the villages visited. In the Hmong village of Phonkham in Oudomxay, the village representative of the Lao Women’s Union said;

Currently in our village we strongly encourage girls to attend school on an equal basis with boys. This is especially important for marketing knowledge, that is, for livelihoods, and also because young men today want an educated wife. If a girl does not have a good education, no matter how beautiful she is, she will have trouble finding a husband.

¹⁴ Chamberlain, J.R. 2006b. Human Trafficking in Northwestern Laos. Asian Development Bank RETA 6190, Preventing the Trafficking of Women and Children and Promoting Safe Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, Draft Report for the Lao PDR. Vientiane.

Division of labor between the sexes

In the majority of villages there is an essentially complementary division of labor. Men perform tasks that are heavy, dangerous, solitary, done at night, and that require short bursts of energy. Women carry out most chores that are lighter, that can be done simultaneously with childcare, that require longer periods of time, that are usually done in groups of two or more. Some examples are provided here:

Type	Women's Responsibility	Men's Responsibility
Housework	Gather firewood, cook, wash dishes, clean the house, wash clothes, fetch water, pound rice, sew, care for children	Chop firewood, cut trees for construction, build house, saw lumber, repair the house, take the children to school, take children to clinic, drive the tractor, look after electrical or mechanical equipment
Paddy	Plant seedlings, transplant rice, winnow the rice, transport rice to rice barn	Adjust water levels for paddy, make paddy dykes, weed the dykes, plow, harvest, winnow, construct the rice barn
Swidden	Clear small trees and vegetation, clear remains after burning, plant the rice seed, weed the swidden, harvest, winnow, transport rice to rice barn, select rice seed for next season	Select site for swidden plot, cut large trees, burn the swidden, divot the swidden, harvest, winnow, transport rice, build rice barn.
Garden	Clear the vegetation, plant, weed, water, pick the produce for eating or sale, select the seed to be planted next time	Clear vegetation, build fences
Livestock	Pick vegetables for the pigs, feed the pigs and chickens	Watch over the cows, buffaloes, goats
Handicrafts	Weave, sew/make clothing	Forge machetes and knives, weave rice baskets, shoulder baskets, and all other baskets
Trading and selling	Sell produce, sell forest products, sell chickens, eggs, etc	Sell dammar resin, buffaloes, cows, goats, pigs, scrap metal, and other forest products
Hire out labor	Hire out labor to transplant, weed and harvest	Hire out labor to saw lumber and dig ponds
Social roles	LWU, student, teacher, fortune teller, spirit healer, health volunteer,	Study, village elder, shaman, village chief, Neo Hom, militia, teacher, driver, fortune teller, spirit healer, health volunteer



School in Ban Souan Teng, Nyot Ou

Chapter 6 – Government Services

Because of the impacts of relocation and restriction in access to agricultural land, government services in the eyes of poor villagers are considered less important than livelihoods and associated spiritual aspects of existence. Education is not perceived as relevant to village needs and children's inputs to the family labor pool become more and more valuable and important as children grow older. The major health concern is clean water, and most villagers appreciate the mother and child vaccinations. Health services were, however, not able to prevent the many deaths that occurred from epidemics experienced by villages being relocated. Agricultural extension, which should be the primary service linked to the causes and solutions to poverty, have essentially not provided much needed assistance in preventing livestock disease and have not resolved problems with marketing. Road improvement and construction have not benefited poor villages economically.

Education

Overall Education continues to be a luxury when it goes beyond the grades available in the village, that is, on the average, beyond P3. Expenses for one child attending in

the village were found to average about 250,000 kip per year. Only a very small number of students continue education in other villages or in the local district, because at this point expenses become prohibitive and only the wealthier families can afford to support their children to continue, and poor children are still excluded. Many parents do not see the value of education as the curriculum is not relevant. In most of the Tibeto-Burman and Hmong-Mien villages the teachers do not speak the language of the students and cannot readily communicate with parents. Literacy for its own sake is of dubious value for villagers when there is nothing to read since the number of books and other materials available in the Lao language is so small in the country generally, all the more so in rural areas.

Mother-tongue instruction which could go far towards alleviating the communication gaps that exist between villagers and the government is still not available despite its being specifically advocated in the 6th National Socioeconomic Development Plan (2006-2010) under “Guidelines for Village Development” where it is written (p.100):

Improve and expand the program of education, health care, culture and information for ethnic groups. Increase people’s awareness on preservation and promotion of cultural values and traditions of all ethnic groups. Sustain and develop spoken languages and written characters/alphabets. Teach ethnic dialects in schools where ethnic characters/alphabets already exist.

This is a very encouraging aspect of the plan, but one which the Ministry of Education has yet to implement.

In the South most villages have school buildings, but these are not in good condition, and even the newer buildings are not well cared for. But several villages had no schools at all. The average grade level in a village’s school is grade three (P3) and to continue to higher grades students must walk to another village or go to live in another village. Often the only secondary schools are located in the district seats. Teachers are often thinly stretched, teaching two or more grades simultaneously, and also have other things they must do for their own families and livelihoods. A small percentage of the school buildings in the sample villages in the South, 10-20 percent, were provided by donors.

The majority of the school buildings in the Central region have been provided by donors. The ones that are relatively new are still in good condition, but the older buildings have not been well maintained. Teacher attendance is not good, especially in cases where the teacher is not resident in the village. There is little gender difference in enrollment in the lower grades P1-P5, but in the secondary level there are progressively more boys than girls.

In the East most villages had functioning schools, though in a number of villages some portion of the school age children were not attending, and in other villages, teacher attendance was found to be a problem. Only one village had no school.

In the North classrooms in about 90 percent of the villages visited are provided by donor assistance, and some donors provide teacher training as well. Many villages had only P1-P2 grade levels, and there was a shortage of teachers in all of the villages.

Many parents said they would like their children to attend school, but often the children didn't want to go because they are ashamed of their poor clothing and language problems. In many instances the attendance problems were found to be severe, and in one district parents were found to be bribing the teachers to keep their children out of school at a price of 500 Baht per student.

Health

Villagers in the South rely primarily on pharmacies and on spiritual healing in times of illness. Going to the hospital is usually a last resort as it means transporting a sick person for many kilometers, often on foot. Likewise the local health clinics are not always readily accessible and have a limited number of medicines and personnel. Few villages were found to have medicine kits, and when they did these were usually empty. The Village Health Volunteer program appeared to be not functioning well, at least in the areas visited. There is little scientific understanding of health issues, and such information is not communicated well to the villagers. The language barrier is a problem, especially for the women. Unlike the other regions, most villagers in the south do not boil drinking water, and prefer instead to drink fresh water from streams and wells. Most household have impregnated bed nets but don't use them, complaining they are hot and make it difficult to breathe. The main health problems, as in the first PPA, are dysentery and malaria.

The situation in the Central region is better, with most villagers seeking medical treatment not only from pharmacies, but also from hospitals and clinics. Spiritual healing is common as well, with no particular stigma attached. Village medical kits and health volunteers are in place and are used by the village. Most all have received vaccinations, though scientific understanding of the health problems remains low. Water is boiled in the form of teas and mosquito nets are used. In spite of this, the main health problems are still malaria and dysentery, but also gastrointestinal problems, presumably the result of too much alcohol consumption.

Health services in the villages visited in the North are in place, with village health volunteers and medical kits both present and well utilized by villagers. Water is boiled with various roots and consumed as tea. Deep artesian wells that were provided by development assistance projects have broken down in many areas and cannot be readily repaired, whereas cisterns appear to be working well. Vaccination teams have visited all villages, though some question remains as to whether all people have received vaccination since villagers may be working in the swiddens during the periodic visits.

Agricultural Extension

Few of the villages surveyed reported any contact with agricultural extension services and when contact was made it usually took the form of exhortations to grow vegetables and cash crops, but without the necessary technical assistance and often with incorrect information on the market. Rather than rely on the extension services,

new agricultural knowledge is acquired by villagers themselves from a variety of sources, including other villages, Thailand, private sector, and own experimentation.



Corn is one of the cash crops being promoted in many areas of the Northern and Eastern regions. Although production may be good, marketing is often problematic, both in terms of the price and the cost of transportation. The large sack of husked corn carried on the back in the photo will sell for approximately \$2.

The greatest need expressed is for veterinary services to prevent epidemics of livestock disease that have caused problems in all parts of the country, And as mentioned earlier, a number of villages have abandoned livestock raising altogether, despite the enormous potential

In our village we were encouraged to plant cabbages to sell for cash. But when we took them to sell nearby no one would buy them. We couldn't eat all of them ourselves so we fed them to the animals and finally had to throw them away. We couldn't take them to sell in Meuang Khoa, because the boat transportation is too expensive. The soil around the village is very good for cabbages, a single head would weigh between 2-4 kilograms, but in the end we just wasted a lot of energy with nothing to show in return.

- Khmou villager in Phongsaly

Infrastructure

A greater proportion of poor villages are now found located on roads, compared with the 2000 survey, though many are not readily passable during the dry season.

Villagers express appreciation for the roads as it makes walking easier and allows them to visit relatives in neighboring villages more frequently.



Rare pheasant for sale along the Northern Economic Corridor

However, commercial use of the roads by poor villagers is not yet common since they are unable to produce enough surplus for marketing purposes. Often only wildlife and forest products are being marketed by poor villages along the roads.

It is mainly the wealthier villages or households, especially lowland Lao-Tai ethnic groups who have sufficient land and financial resources that take advantage of enhanced transportation opportunities.

Villagers also related they were happy to have roads so that visitors and potential development agencies could access their village and provide assistance.

With respect to electrification, out of 95 villages only two that happened to be near transmission lines were electrified (not including mini-hydro). Villages in Sangthong District of Vientiane Municipality are using solar panels.



Unsustainably harvested rattan waiting for shipment to China from Louang Namtha

Summary

Consideration of government services provides insights into the underlying problems faced by poor villagers. Services are largely focused on physical infrastructure while the needs of villagers are primarily biological and psychological. Without adjusting the focus of government assistance to address the real problems identified by villagers as presented here, it will be difficult to alleviate poverty in any meaningful way. Services provide hardware, when it is software that is in short supply.



Relocated Khmou village in Viengxay District, Houa Phan where paddy land is not sufficient

Chapter 7 – Comparison of PPA 2000 and 2006

Of the ninety-five villages selected for the 2006 PPA, thirty-five were villages selected under the first PPA carried out in the year 2000. This was done in order to examine changes that may have occurred in the six year interval between the two studies, and what has not changed. It will be seen that many of the same themes and trends persist.

In the first PPA it was noted that unlike English, terms for ‘poor’ or ‘poverty’ in local languages, including Lao, do not refer to economic situations, rather they are used to describe emotional states associated with personal tragedy, or, in the case of Lao, the condition of suffering common to all humans in the Buddhist sense. People did not describe their villages as ‘poor’ and were prone to take offense when such a suggestion was made, interpreting it as loss of dignity.

In the 2006 PPA this was found to have changed significantly. Most villagers readily described themselves as ‘poor’ in hopes of attracting outside assistance. In one

Khmou village in Oudomxay, during a discussion on how best to rank the village's well-being, a somewhat heated argument erupted between the village chief and his deputy. The village chief claimed they were about average, while the deputy insisted they were 'poor.' That such a radical shift in attitude has occurred in such a short time is perhaps indicative of a deeper social trauma that has spread into the rural areas of the country, an erosion of village pride.

To understand in a deeper way changes that have occurred in the interval between the two studies, these villages were examined from the perspectives of access to land and natural resources, livestock, education and health.

Access to Land

The most profound and indisputable cause of poverty in the Lao PDR was found in the 2000 PPA to be diminishing access to land and natural resources, especially for upland ethnic groups who form the majority of the poor villages studied. Poor implementation of the Land Forest Allocation policy in particular was the main reason given by villagers for their impoverishment. In general, impoverishing policies were found to be programs that involve or imply relocation of traditional villages to new areas, often to roadsides, and to lower elevations. The end result has been what Rigg (2003) referred to as a "policy induced Malthusian squeeze,"¹⁵ that is, a situation where population density is artificially created in a territory where overall the density is very low. In the case of Laos, for those farmers who were still able to practice swidden agriculture, long term rotational fallow systems were reduced to rotations of only 3 years causing severe ecosystemic deterioration and a consequent reduction of yields, with production decreasing by approximately sixty percent.¹⁶ Furthermore, the various ethnic groups respond differently to such change, with Mon-Khmer groups being the most vulnerable in that their social structures are so intimately attached to the swiddens.¹⁷ It is thus no accident that the Mon-Khmer groups are revealed as poorest regardless of whether the means of investigation is qualitative or quantitative.

In the period intervening between the two PPAs of 2000 and 2006, access to land has not improved. Relocations of populations have continued in the name of eradication of opium, eradication of swiddening, land reform, and village consolidation. The result is further impoverishment of already poor villages in terms of food production. This is damaging to the entire natural resource base as sources of wild food are decreasing at an even more rapid rate due to over utilization. Table 15 below shows the prevalence of decreases in swidden land in the six-year period between the survey dates.

Table 15 - Percentage of villages experiencing reductions of swidden land per hh 2000-2006

North	60 %
East	57 %

¹⁵ Rigg, Jonathan. 2003. Forests, marketisation, livelihoods and the poor in the Lao PDR. Department of Geography, University of Durham (UK).

¹⁶ Chamberlain, J. R. (2006a). Women's access to land, forests, and water in the Nam Ngeum watershed. ADB research report.

¹⁷ Ibid.

South	66 %
Central	100 %

Looking at decreases in utilization of wild food is tantamount to looking at decreases in natural abundance. As might be expected in tropical environments where faunal mass is low, even while faunal diversity is high, wildlife is most susceptible to over-hunting. Accordingly, vegetable availability is considerably less affected due to its proportionately higher mass. The tables 16 and 17 below indicate changes in the average consumption of wild foods (meat and vegetables) between 2000 and 2006.

Table 16 - Comparison of meat and vegetable consumption from wild sources: 2000 / 2006

	Meat 2000	Veg 2000	Meat 2006	Veg 2006	%decrease Meat	%decrease Veg
North	61	65	30	67	51	-3
East	79	75	48	68	41	10
South	93	79	65	67	30	15
Central	67	71	45	45	33	37

Table 17 -Mon-Khmer Only

	Meat 2000	Veg 2000	Meat 2006	Veg 2006	%decrease Meat	%decrease Veg
North	68	73	36	66	47	10
East	85	84	62	75	27	11
South	93	79	61	73	35	8

note: there were no mono-ethnic MK villages in Central region data

Combined decreases in swidden land holdings, decreases in production, decreases in wild food consumption and decreases in natural abundance represent a serious threat to health and nutrition as well as an increase in vulnerability. At the present time, the programs or policies in place are insufficient to compensate for the losses described.

Livestock

Livestock play multiple roles in cultural systems of villagers. For uplanders in particular livestock are first of all symbols of wealth and prestige and only secondarily do they represent a form of savings that may be sold in times of emergency or to make major purchases such as hand tractors (fittingly referred to as “iron buffaloes”). One’s own livestock may be consumed only at occasions of ritual sacrifices and feasts where wealth in the form of animal flesh is redistributed in exchange for ritual prestige. Smaller livestock may also be killed in order to feed important guests, that is, to uphold the honor of a household or village.

Only relatively recently have livestock begun to be raised for commercial purposes, and then mostly by specific ethnic groups such as the Hmong. But the mild climate of

the Lao uplands is highly suited to livestock raising and great potential is recognized for production. This was a main finding of the first PPA even though it was tempered by the realization that livestock disease had prevented any significant expansion of this activity in poor villages. The situation has not changed in the present PPA, and among villages studied large losses in livestock were recorded. In terms of holdings of large bovines at the time of the survey, it was found that in the majority of villages holdings had either decreased or remained the same as in 2000. The percentage change in holdings of large bovines per household is shown in the table below.

Table 18 – Changes in Large Bovine Holdings in Poor Villages - per household: 2000 and 2006

	North %	East %	Central %	South %
No change	25	0	0	20
Decrease	44	50	100	70
Increase	31	50	0	10

There is no pattern related to ethnicity here, indicating changes are most likely due to biological factors, including access to veterinary services.

Table 19 -Examples of Livestock Losses in the Last Twelve Months

Province	District	Village	Buffalo	Cows	Pigs	Fowl	<i>Est. Total Value million kip</i>
ODXY	Pak Beng	Chom Leng	18	2	25		46.75
		Phou Soung	22	5	50	300	70
	Beng	Phonsy	-	-	550	5000	293
LGNT	Viengphouk ha	Nong Kham	125	-	50 50 goats	220	373.4
		Nam Kap Neua	20	-	92	300	138
HPNH	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	-	2	110	100	30.6
	Xam Tay	Na Ngiu	1	1	27	-	6.3
XKNG	Khoun	Xanh Louang	5	10	100	200	29
		Nong Louang	7	4	250	450	96
LBNG	Phou Khoun	Phouvieng Noy	5	16	150 40 goats	400	72
	Phonxay	Donexay	1	-	100 70 goats	800	36.7

On the one hand this may be interpreted as a failure to provide extension and veterinary services to poor villages. But it may also be interpreted to mean that poor villages are becoming poorer by their own definition because livestock is the main indicator of wealth along with rice production in the majority of upland villages.

Education

Although there were some significant increases since 2000 in the number of grades available and the number of teachers, on closer examination most of these did not constitute meaningful changes in villagers' adoption of formal education. For example, in the Lahu Shi village of Phonsamphanh, the number of grade levels available increased from P2 to P5 between 2000 and 2006, and the number of teachers jumped from 1 to 8. Yet in this village only 80 students out of over 280 were enrolled. Furthermore, of the 80 enrolled, the average attendance rate was only 4 or 5 per day. In this case two school buildings were provided with donor assistance. Teachers are Tai Dam and Lue and do not speak the language of villagers.¹⁸

In villages which have begun formal education since the 2000 PPA, for the most part only lower grades are offered, ranging from P1 – P4, but with P3 as average. In these villages, even when attendance by both teachers and students is regular, there is little interest in continuing education, either on the part of students or by parents. This is also true in areas where continuing one's education would mean only a 3-4 km walk to a district seat. For example in Pang Sa, originally a Khmou Lue village which has since become a consolidated village with additional populations of Hmong and Yay (Nhang), many students are still not enrolled, and only the children of the wealthier families continue beyond grade five. In the nearby village of Pak Nam Tong, originally a Lantène (Man, Moun) village, it was found in 2000 that students were expected to attend school in Pang Sa, only a 1 km walk. The children refused to go, however, because they were ashamed of their clothing and their language for which the others ridiculed them. Today this village has also been consolidated with Hmong and Yay (Nhang) ethnic groups, and now, six years later they are still expected to attend in Pang Sa, and Lantène children still refuse to attend school.¹⁹

Elsewhere, in Savannakhet, in Phin, Nong, and Xépon districts, Katang and Makong villages which had no school in 2000, still had no school in 2006, although in two other villages schools were planned to begin in either 2006 or 2007. Even in the ethnic Lao villages located in the land-rich parts of southern Champasak, in Soukhouma, with such excellent natural resources and agricultural potential, available grade levels have not changed since 2000, levels of interest in formal education remains low, and school is perceived by many parents as an imposition. Parents are fined in Pak Xangbolong when students drop out mid-year, so they remain enrolled until the day of the final exam when they feign illness and do not graduate, thereby avoiding additional schooling.

¹⁸ The village of Phonsamphanh is an amalgam of at least four villages relocated beginning in 1997. There were originally 245 households. At the time of the first PPA 80 children had died from measles and dysentery. By 2006, the population had decreased to 122 households. Villagers say that they have been stricken by additional epidemics of these and other diseases and also by suicides. During the peak periods of the epidemic, they say 3-4 people would die each day.

¹⁹ Opium addiction among the Lantène which began when they was relocated prior to 2000, has remained at the same high levels in 2006. Now with the influx of Hmong, the Lantène are exploited as cheap labor by the Hmong and paid with opium. Every Lantène household has at least one opium addict, either male or female.

Failures in exams are common in the lower grades. In Pakpanang, Khammouane, 40% of the P1 students and 20% of the P2 students failed the final exam. In the Brou village of Ban Boua Ma on the Nakai Plateau, last year, 53% of P1 students, 46% of P2, and 40% of P3, failed. The teacher was ethnic Lao. Most students who fail do not repeat the grade, they simply drop out.

It may be concluded that by comparison to the North and Central regions, the South and East generally were found to be less dynamic and to have changed less in terms of educational performance, or not at all, in the intervening period between the two PPAs.

Health and Sanitation

As in the 2000 PPA, malaria and dysentery continue to be the main health problems. In the northern, eastern and central regions of the country drinking water is usually boiled with medicinal roots and consumed while still hot. However in the south people prefer to drink water from streams and wells without boiling.

Use of impregnated mosquito nets was common in all areas but the south, where, although most households possessed the nets, they were rarely used. Many villagers said they were hot or made it difficult to breathe.

Likewise in the south, village medical kits were not well-utilized and village health volunteers said they had forgotten most of what they learned in training. In other regions, however, both the kits and the volunteers were utilized more by villagers.

Traditional herbalists and spiritual healers were found in all villages and still play an important role in local health systems. Their roles have been supplemented considerably by conventional medicines from pharmacies, and in emergency visits to health care workers in local clinics and district and provincial hospitals. Hospitals, however, continue to be viewed as “last resorts.” Rural villagers whose views of existence are more holistic do not see any conflict between modern and traditional health care, rather relations between spiritual, herbal, and conventional healing are seen as entirely complementary. Usually when a person is ill medicine from the village health volunteer or from a local pharmacy will be tried, or a small spirit ceremony will be performed to determine the cause. In more serious cases the sick person will be taken to the local clinic (*souksala*) or to the district hospital. In some areas, for example in the Brou Makong village of Tako in Nong District of Savannakhet, spirit ceremonies are quite elaborate. In the year preceding the PPA visit in 2006, a total of 4 cows, 35 pigs, 20 goats and 20 chickens were sacrificed on separate healing ritual occasions, accompanied by a total of 230 bottles of alcohol and 445 kilograms of rice.

As in the 2000 PPA, for the villages in the 2006 PPA the vaccination program appears to be working well and had reached all of the villages, though it was not determined whether in fact all of the children had been vaccinated since some parents still hide their children and some families may be residing temporarily in their fields away from the village when vaccination teams visit.

Conclusion

With respect to poverty, compared to the PPA of the year 2000, the original villages that were revisited in 2006 were found generally to be either about the same or worse off. The policy environment in the provinces has not changed noticeably and access to land remains the major concern of villagers who view agricultural solutions as the only way to alleviate poverty.

Given the combined impact on livelihoods and on social structures the propensity for lack of access to land to generate not only poverty in a conventional sense, but to induce social breakdown, is high. One might suppose that the creation of breakdown is the first step to economic change, restructuring of the economic base, and rebirth as a “modern civilized society.” But the question should be asked whether the human cost justifies such thinking in a country like Laos with its innate natural abundance. This kind of change represents essentially a destruction of biocultural diversity of a type that is rare in the world today, and which could place Laos in an advantageous position as a storehouse of biological diversity and indigenous wisdom, something that its neighbors have long since lost.

Furthermore, these losses only address biophysical issues. Mental or psychological impacts should not logically become separated from the biophysical ones, although they almost are. As livelihoods become riskier, social capital diminishes. Mon-Khmer groups are especially vulnerable when swidden practices are changed or abandoned. In the end women bear the brunt of this impact because they are an inextricable part of that system, the source of their self esteem and cosmological prestige.²⁰ When that is taken away, all that remains is hard labor with no accompanying spiritual reward. In the North, opium use has not diminished in the intervening six-year period, and now villages are faced with the much more serious threat of methamphetamines and heroin injection.²¹ Self-destructive behavior such as alcoholism and suicide, accompanied by prostitution, depression, destitution, disintegration, and out migration all accompany the breakdown of mental systems. These were noted in both PPAs and were found not to have abated in the period between 2000 and 2006.

²⁰ Chamberlain 2006. Women’s Access to Land, Forests and Water in the Ngeum Watershed. Asian Development Bank Report, TA 4339. Vientiane. (Draft)

²¹ Opium use remains at the same levels as in 2000. In the 2006 survey, meths were mentioned, but heroin was only alluded to by villagers and no data was actually provided.



Land deforested for rubber planting in Louang Namtha

Chapter 8 – Conclusions and Implications

Let us endeavor, then, to think well; this is the principle of morality.
— Pascal

Poverty and its Determinants

One of the principal advantages of qualitative research, such as the PPA, is the rich detail it provides on the nature, context, and determinants of poverty. Not only do characteristics of poor villages become apparent, but causes for poverty reveal themselves as villages analyze their own situations. This PPA, and the preceding one in 2000, focuses on villages as a whole, and not individual households. The villages in this PPA were selected from the 47 priority districts identified by the Government as the poorest in the country.

In Laos, as was determined in the first PPA in the year 2000, the pattern of impoverishment was clear, beginning with the finding that by their own definition, villagers in Laos are not endemically poor. In the present PPA the causes of poverty remain essentially unchanged. Poverty in the Lao PDR has unique structural

dimensions which need to be carefully considered in light of development policy, including:

New Poverty. It is clear that poverty in Laos is ‘new poverty,’ not an endemic condition; The perception of endemic poverty appears to have been created retroactively by an external definition of poverty linked to macroeconomic growth.

External Causation. Poverty is the result of events external to the villager over which he or she has no control, especially, weather, war, resettlement, poorly implemented development programs, and livestock disease. Because of the externality of causality, poverty is thus associated with calamity, misfortune, fate, karma, etc., and hence its substance is both physical and spiritual echoing the notion of “ritual technology;²²

Lack of Hunger. Poverty in Laos is not synonymous with hunger. Abundant natural resources have provided sustenance for poor villagers but these resources are showing signs of dwindling through over-exploitation in search of food or cash with which to purchase food and to meet the new expenses associated with health, education and the market;

Living in Hope. Some poor villagers have become depressed, despondent or have turned to opium, but the overwhelming majority of the poor are trying to make the most of a bad situation, and still live in hope of finding solutions to their livelihood problems.

Following the traumas such as those described above, which have beset poor villages in the form of upheavals to agroecosystems, yields and production have declined while labor demands in the production system have remained the same or have increased. At the same time, consumption demands have increased in the areas of education, health, clothing, transportation and new material goods which have appeared in the markets.

Public investment has been concentrated on paddy cultivation, education, health, and transportation. What the poor need to survive are increased investments in upland agriculture, livestock, and agroforestry/non-timber forest products, areas where investment is currently negligible or which are not reaching the poor.

There is a relationship between the structure of opportunities in rural areas and economic growth with equity. Shockwaves emanating from the movement towards a market economy, programs such as land-forest allocation, lower rice yields, intensification of off-farm labor, increases in cash needs, and relocation all imply momentous structural changes in the societies of the poor. Opportunities which do not fit within cultural boundaries are missed or misinterpreted on the basis of prior structures. For this reason, the composition of poverty alleviation strategy should be based upon the creation of an enabling environment within which internally motivated

²² Condominas, Georges. 1987. Ritual technology in Mnong Gar swidden agriculture. in *Rice Societies: Asian Problems and Prospects*. eds. Irene Norlund, Sven Cederroth, and Ingela Gerdin. Studies on Asian Topics No. 10. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. Curzon/Riverdale: London.

development can occur to insure that such efforts fall within the cognitive universes of the poor.

The majority of villagers in the study live in a universe where there is a delicate balance of ancestral spirits and bodily souls that control human lives, and nature spirits that control the weather and natural abundance. Buffaloes and rice grains are usually considered to have souls as well. Guardian spirits of the territory are usually earth spirits. Heavenly spirits that create life dwell in the sky. The interaction of all of these with human individuals, families and societies are governed by rites and ceremonies that maintain balance and harmony and thus regulate well-being. Specific details, of course, vary greatly between ethnic groups and in the end define the relationship between humans and nature.

Based on the premise of holism it may be assumed that for every physical change that occurs in the lives of villagers, other changes occur in psychological or spiritual life that are not open to direct observation and are not readily expressed to researchers. In some cases these are made manifest in behavior, as in instances where children of well-to-do households become addicted to drugs and alcohol, or chose to seek jobs in Thailand rather than stay at home.

From this it follows that when researchers attempt to single out specific aspects of human livelihood, or even define livelihood in purely physical terms such as hectares and yields, an epistemological error is being committed. This error in turn leads to misunderstanding about the nature of livelihood and worse, to planning that more often than not accomplishes the opposite of what it sets out to achieve.

As was found in the first PPA and is now well attested in a number of reports,²³ Land Forest Allocation, which was originally intended to prevent illegal logging and preserve forests, in the end harms ecosystems. It has led to shorter swidden fallow cycles causing villagers to over-harvest forest products, and leaves unoccupied space for illegal logging or conversion of forest land into rubber plantations by unscrupulous outside interests.

Village consolidation, focal zones or *khoum Ban* (village cluster) approaches were also originally intended to increase the access of villagers to health, education, and other services. However, through relocation, they also create traumatic conditions where incidence of disease and mortality rates increase, and where many children do not attend schools because their labor is needed to eke out a living on poor soils in overcrowded conditions. Opium eradication, through an emphasis on relocation, has resulted in high rates of drug addiction in groups unable to cope with the shock of being moved. Swidden eradication not only drastically reduces production, but negatively affects both social and ecological systems thereby reducing biodiversity.

It is clear that poverty in Laos has not reached the level of destitution. However, the survey shows that poor villagers increasingly experience difficulty in providing food for their families. Natural resources were said to be seriously depleted in almost all

²³ Alton, Charles and Houmphanh Rattanavong (2004). Gonzales, Gil, Estaban Diaz-Boreal, and Paul Cottavoz (2005). Romangy, Laurent and Steven Daviau (2003). Shoemaker, Bruce P. and Ian G. Baird (2005).

locations and many people are casting aside traditional religious values and aesthetic appreciation of natural systems in a competition for the remaining forest products and wildlife. Cultural checks and balances are being replaced by monetarily grounded attitudes of 'first-come-first-serve,' and 'live-for-today.' Ecologically sound livelihoods are being replaced by ecologically destructive ones that involve a high degree of risk. Subsistence economies are being replaced by economies of survival.

In this wider sense, poor people are still caught in the same bind: as production stays the same or decreases, expenses increase. Without radical changes it is difficult for them to move beyond this bind to attain the same level of perceived quality of life which they had when still existing in a more traditional mode, that is to say, before they became "poor." Such quality of life is in fact locally defined as an optimum balance between level of production and level of effort.

There are two somewhat contradictory conclusions that can be drawn from this study. The first is that poor villagers are grateful for the improvements that have been made in infrastructure such as health clinics, school buildings, and new or improved roads that allow enhanced communications. The second is that the essential elements of livelihoods, access to good land for agriculture, livestock, and forests, have either stayed the same or have worsened. To a large degree, the second conclusion negates the potential benefits of the first.

Roads have little commercial value to poor villagers if they are unable to produce goods for the market because of lack of suitable land.

Education is not responding to the real needs of poor villagers, especially non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups. In a number of locations education is viewed as a burden rather than a service.

Health coverage is steadily improving, but costs of health care and transportation prohibit most poor people from utilizing services.

Agricultural extension services are not currently capable of addressing the needs of poor villagers due to the shortages of land and water, and lack of veterinary coverage. There is a burgeoning awareness that financial assistance in the form of credit can help in cases where land is available for cropping or livestock grazing, as evidenced by the solutions proposed by the villagers. But this was also true in the first PPA, and so far no program has emerged to assist, at least in the villages under study. What few examples occur in the data were unsuccessful in their attempts to help the poor.

With the concentration of populations and over-harvesting of forest products due to poverty, ecological degradation and resultant shortages of natural resources is on the rise. Indigenous moral structures that have the potential to counteract greed and corruption are being dissembled.

Recommendations: Where do we go from here?

1. It is clear from the PPA that some of the conventional solutions to poverty, especially those that involve relocation of villages, eradication of swidden farming, or land allocation, in spite of their good intentions, have caused severe hardships for many of the poorest villages. This suggests a need to reassess these policies and to seek other approaches that are less socially disruptive. For example there is no scientific basis for eradicating swidden agriculture in Laos (see Appendix 5).
2. Some improvement has occurred in infrastructure for transport, classrooms, and health clinics. Service delivery for vaccination of women and children remains good. However, in many of these, actual services provided are far below those needed by the poor. More emphasis needs to be placed on the intellectual resources and the software necessary to provide adequate services. Until shortage of cultivable land and inadequate support for breeding of livestock, two key contributors to poverty as defined by the villagers, are resolved, they will likely be reluctant to participate in development programs, such as easier access to credit, that entail risks. Likewise education for poor ethnic groups is unlikely to improve without more focus on mother tongue instruction.
3. The poor of Laos are agriculturalists, and their analyses of causes and solutions are predictably agricultural. Planning for poverty alleviation should therefore reflect this reality, and build upon farmers' inherent strengths and capabilities. Many of the situations encountered in the PPA, especially those where villagers are deprived of suitable land for cultivation, imply the creation of a system of social classes, usually along ethnic lines, where the underclass will become laborers working for the rich. This is obviously an undesirable situation and should be studied and stopped before it becomes worse.
4. In the same vein, there is a vital need for research that examines existing systems of upland agriculture in detail, and such research needs to be interdisciplinary, involving ethnographic study as well as the mainly biophysical. In principle, this was the intention of land use planning or land allocation, and the original period of any investigation of the land use system of a village was estimated at 2-3 years. However, in practice, land allocation for a village is typically carried out in 2-3 days which from a scientific point of view is inadequate. Furthermore, the bulk of the research on upland agriculture has been carried out in the environs of Louang Prabang city, which is atypical and not representative of the ethnic and biophysical diversity that exists in the rest of the country.
5. There will need to be an upgrading of the intellectual resources in the social sciences. Currently, for example, the national university falls far below international standards in the teaching of anthropology and sociology, so the government's capacity to address and analyze social problems and issues is severely limited. This situation is symptomatic of a larger overall problem of the slow pace of university development

and hence knowledge acquisition. Comparatively little foreign aid goes into university development as a whole. The allocation of some foreign assistance into the intellectual infrastructure that will enable social problems to be analyzed in manner that is suitable in terms of quality and sustainability would be desirable.

6. Related to this, assuming the value of qualitative research is realized, especially as it relates to the assessment and analysis of poverty in Laos, it is recommended that a special division within the National Statistics Center be created specifically for this purpose. This implies the hiring or retraining of staff.

Epilog: Correcting a too purposive view of the world

There are necessities in poetry without which prose is pathogenic.
— Gregory Bateson

In studying the causes of poverty and the solutions it is clear that one of the underlying reasons for the design of policies and practices is the overwhelming emphasis on things physical. The mental worlds of the poor are usually overlooked and in so doing understanding of the systemic nature of life and livelihood are lost. As a result, as may be seen in the comparisons of the various parameters of poverty between 2000 and 2006 examined here, the poor remain poor in spite of large investments to alleviate poverty.

This should not be construed as some new-wave mystification of what development is all about, but rather as a purely scientific attempt to view development and the study of poverty within a holistic systems frame. The fundamental premise is that human consciousness and conscious purpose are limited and are not capable of perceiving whole systems without the aid of aesthetic knowledge (knowledge that is located in the unconscious). The three pillars of ecosystemic knowledge become: consciousness, aesthetics (beauty), and the sacred. Sustainability of systems (including sustainable development) is dependent upon aesthetic principles that in systemic terms may be defined as the valuing of life.²⁴ Feelings and emotions are relevant here as well and have the status of ideas in ecosystems as they occur in the context of reason and knowing.

...Consciousness is necessarily selective and partial, i.e. ... the content of consciousness is, at best, a small part of the truth about the self. But if this is selected in any systemic manner, it is certain that the partial truths of consciousness will be, in aggregate, a distortion of the truth of some larger whole.²⁵

Aesthetic experience, in the ecosystemic sense, becomes the corrective feedback loop that prevents systems from running amok. It acts to correct a too purposeful view of the world and the spread of greed and corruption.

In the study of poverty especially the words of William Blake should not be forgotten,

“...a tear is an intellectual thing.”

²⁴ Harries-Jones, Peter. 1995. *A Recursive Vision: Ecological Understanding and Gregory Bateson*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

²⁵ Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York. Ballentine.

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Appendix 1 – Districts and Villages: PPA 2006

Province	District	Village	Category	Ethnicity	Ethnolinguistic Family
North					
LGNT	Vieng Phoukha	Kap Neua	PPA2	Lahu Na	ST
		Nong Kham	LECS3	Kwène	MK
	Na Le	Hat Loy	PPA2	Khmou Nyuan	MK
		Vath	LECS3	Lue	LT
	Long	Phonsamphanh	PPA1	Lahu Shi Soung	ST
		Pha Tè	PPA1	Akha	ST
BKEO	Nam Nyoun	Nam Hok May	PPA2	Lamet	MK
		Phou Savang	PPA2	Lahu Na	ST
	Moeng	To Le	PPA2	Lahu Pfou	ST
		Poung Pha	PPA2	Lahu Pfou	ST
	Pha Oudom	Had Kham	PPA1	Lamet	MK
		Kène Kham	PPA1	Khmou Khrong	MK
ODXY	Nga	Phon Kham	PPA1	Hmong	HM
		May	PPA1	1. Khmou Lue 2. Khmou Ou	MK
	Beng	Phon Si	PPA2	Hmong	HM
		Kok Ngiu	PPA2	1. Khmou Khrong 2. Khmou Lue 3. Khmou Rok	MK
	Houn	Na Phok	PPA2	Khmou Khrong	MK
		Phou Phon	PPA2	Khmou Khrong	MK
	Pak Beng	Phou Soung	PPA2	Khmou Rok	MK
		Chomleng Nyay	PPA1	Khmou Rok	MK
	Na Mo	Pang Sa	PPA1	1. Khmou Lue 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nhang)	MK, HM, LT
		Pak Nam Tong	PPA1	1. Lantène 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nyang)	HM, LT
PSLY	Samphanh	Pha Nang	PPA2	Khmou Ou	MK
		Seua Thiau	PPA1	Khmou Ou	MK
	Nyot Ou	Louam Pho	PPA2	O Nyoe	ST
		Souan Teng	PPA2	Mien	HM
LBNG	Phonxay	Donexay	PPA2	Khmou	MK
		Tha Kham	PPA1	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	MK, HM
	Viengkham	Phonsavang	PPA1	Khmou	MK
		Sop Heua	PPA2	Phouan	LT
	Phou Khoun	Phouvieng Noi	PPA2	1. Hmong 2. Khmou	HM, MK
		Kalo	PPA2	Khmou	MK
	Pak Xeng	Sop Vat	LECS3	Khmou	MK
		Hat Tham	LECS3	Khmou	MK
XBRY	Xieng Hone	Nam Kok	PPA1	1. Lue 2. Nyuan	LT, MK

		Thong Kap	PPA1	3. Khmou 1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Pray 4. Khmou Rok 5. W. Hmong 6. G. Hmong	LT, MK, HM
	Xaygnaboury	Houay Pho'	PPA1	Pray	MK
		Houay Sangiam	PPA1	1. Hmong 2. Pray 3. Lao	HM, MK, LT
East					
HPNH	Xam Tay	Na Ngiu	LECS3	Tai Deng	LT
		Nyot In	LECS3	Hmong	HM
	Viengxay	Houay Sa	LECS3	Hmong	HM
		Phonxay	PPA2	Khmou	MK
	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	PPA1	1. Khmou 2. Neua	MK, LT
		Keng Xeuk	PPA2	Khmou	MK
	Vieng Thong	Nam Xat	LECS3	Khmou	MK
		Na Bouak	PPA2	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	MK, HM
	Xieng Kho	Mouang	LECS3	1. Tai Deng 2. Neua 3. Ksing Moul	LT, MK
		Houay Lang	PPA1	Ksing Moul	MK
XKNG	Nong Het	Soum Phay	LECS3	Hmong	HM
		Din Dam	PPA1	1. Khmou 2. Phouan	MK, LT
	Khoun	Nong Louang	PPA2	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	MK, HM
		Xanh Louang	PPA2	Hmong	HM
	Tha Thom	Nam Long	PPA2	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	MK, HM, LT
		Xam Kothong	PPA2	1. Phouan 2. Khang	LT
BKXY	Khamkeut	Na Hat	PPA2	1. Bo 2. Liha 3. Thene	LT, MK
		Na Heuang	LECS3	1. Phou Thay 2. Hmong 3. Liha	LT, HM, MK
	Borikhanh	Hat Yeun	PPA1	1. Lao 2. Hmong	LT, HM
		Na O	PPA2	1. Lao 2. Hmong 3. Khmou	LT, HM, MK
	Vieng Thong	Na Xouang	PPA2	1. Hmong 2. Khmou	HM, MK
		Pha deng/Mixay	PPA1	1. Phong 2. Hmong	MK, HM
KMME	Boualapha	Pak Phanang	PPA1	1. Ngouan 2. Kaleung	MK, LT
		Tha Kachanh	PPA1	Tri	MK
	Nakai	Na Sida	LECS3	Makong	MK
		Boua Ma	PPA1	1. Makong 2. Bo	MK, LT

South					
SVKT	Phin	Nong Boua	PPA2	Katang	MK
		Keng Koua	PPA1	Katang	MK
	Xepon	Rabo Tham	PPA1	Makong	MK
		Houay Tone	PPA2	Tri	MK
	Nong	Tako	PPA1	Makong	MK
		Alaukonky	PPA2	Makong	MK
	Vilaboury	Na Va	PPA2	Makong	MK
		Keng Tau	PPA2	Makong	MK
SRVN	Samouay	Talo Tay	PPA1	Pacoh	MK
		Avao	PPA2	Kado	MK
	Ta Oy	Pong Nam	PPA1	Ta Oy	MK
		Laxeng	PPA2	1. Ta Oy 2. Katang	MK
XEKG	Dak Cheung	Dak Deng	PPA2	Tarieng	MK
		Dak Ran	PPA2	1. Yeh 2. Tarieng 3. Lakang	MK
		Dak Vay	LECS3	Tarieng	MK
	Kaleum	Bak	PPA1	Ngkrieng	MK
		Lakai	PPA1	Ngkrieng	MK
CPSK	Bachieng...	Keng Kia	PPA2	Ta Oy	MK
		Don	PPA2	1. Ngkrieng 2. Ta Oy	MK
	Soukhouma	Non Khoum	PPA1	Lao	LT
		Pak Xangbolong	PPA1	Lao	LT
ATTP	Sanxay	Tat Seng	PPA2	1. Tarieng 2. Alak	MK
		Phia Keo	PPA2	Brao	MK
	Phouvong	Houay Kout	PPA1	Brao	MK
		Ta-oum	PPA2	Brao	MK
Central					
VTE	Xaysomboun	Nam Mo	PPA1	1. Tai Dam 2. Khmou 3. Tai Deng 4. Phouan	LT, MK
		Nam Chia	PPA1	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	HM, MK LT
	Hom	Phonlau	PPA2	1. Khmou 2. Phouan	MK, LT
		Done Seua	PPA2	Hmong	HM
VTEM	Sang Thong	Tha Nakham	LECS3	1. Lao 2. Khmou	LT, MK
		Vang Ma	PPA2	1. Khmou 2. Lao 3. Tai Dam	LT, MK

Appendix 2 - Summary of Comparisons between 2000 – 2006

Table 20 -Portions of Meat, Vegetable and Vegetable Diet from Wild Sources (2006, Per Cent)

	Province	District	Village	Ethnicity	Meat	Fish	Vegetable
N O R T H	LGNT	Long	Phonsamphanh	Lahu Shi Soung	70	90	80
			Pha Tè	Akha	40	100	70
	BKEO	Pha Oudom	Had Kham	Lamet	30	100	60
			Kène Kham	Khmou Khrong	50	80	70
	ODXY	Nga	Phon Kham	Hmong	20	90	70
			May	1. Khmou Lue 2. Khmou Ou	50	na	80
		Pak Beng	Chomleng Ny	Khmou Rok	20	70	80
		Na Mo	Pang Sa	1. Khmou Lue 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nhang)	5	95	75
			Pak Nam Tong	1. Lantène 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nyang)	10	100	80
	PSLY	Samphanh	Seua Thiau	Khmou Ou	70	100	80
	LBNG	Phonxay	Tha Kham	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	30	70	60
		Viengkham	Phonsavang	Khmou	25	70	80
	XBRY	Xieng Hone	Nam Kok	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Khmou Rok	15	30	60
			Thong Kap	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Pray 4. W. Hmong 5. G. Hmong	10	70	50
	Xagnaboury	Houay Pho'	Pray	30	80	20	
		Houay Sangiam	1. Hmong 2. Pray 3. Lao	10	30	70	
E A S T	HPNH	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	1. Khmou 2. Neua	30	80	70
		Xieng Kho	Houay Lang	Ksing Moul	50	70	80
	XKNG	Nong Het	Din Dam	1. Khmou 2. Tai Chang	80	70	80
	BKXY	Borikhanh	Hat Yeun	1. Lao 2. Hmong	-	100	70
		Vieng Thong	Pha Deng	1. Phong 2. Hmong	20	100	30
	KMME	Boualapha	Pak Phanang	1. Ngouan 2. Kaleung	70	100	80
			Tha Kachanh	Tri	70	100	70
	Nakai	Boua Ma	1. Makong 2. Bo	70	100	70	
S O U T H	SVKT	Phin	Keng Koua	Katang	80	100	90
		Nong	Tako	Makong	80	100	90
		Xépon	Rabo Tham	Makong	90	80	95
	SRVN	Samouay	Talo Tay	Pacoh	40	100	20
		Ta Oy	Pong Nam	Ta Oy	20	100	70
	XEKG	Kaleum	Bak	Ngkrieng	30	90	80
		Lakai	Ngkrieng	70	80	70	

	CPSK	Soukhouma	Non Khoum	Lao	80	95	95
			Pak Xangbolong	Lao	80	95	80
	ATTP	Phouvong	Houay Kout	Brao	80	100	70
C E N T R A L	VTE	Xaysombou	Nam Mo	1. Tai Dam 2. Khmou 3. Tai Deng 4. Phouan	15	10	60
			Nam Chia	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	20	80	30

Note: only the 2006 percentages are available here

Table 21 -Comparison of Population and Land: 2000 / 2006²⁶

Province	District	Village	Ethnicity	PPA 2000			PPA 2006		
				Pop (hhs)	Paddy	Swidden	Pop	Paddy	Swidden
North									
LGNT	Long	Phonsamphanh	Lahu Shi Soung	245	0.5	120	122	10	500
		Pha Tè	Akha	30	15	++	62	20	40
BKEO	Pha Oudom	Had Kham	Lamet	28	5	26	31	6	70
		Kène Kham	Khmou Khrong	28	6	18	179	250	50
ODXY	Nga	Phon Kham	Hmong	20	0	++	24	14	2
		May	1. Khmou Lue 2. Khmou Ou	51	++	++	54	21.8	33.75
	Pak Beng	Chomleng Nyay	Khmou Rok	54	0	200	64	0	42
	Na Mo	Pang Sa	1. Khmou Lue 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nhang)	44	0	30	77	17.37	71
		Pak Nam Tong	1. Lantène 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nyang)	33	14	34	82	16	67
PSLY	Samphanh	Seua Thiau	Khmou Ou	35	0	48	37	0	56.4
LBNG	Phonxay	Tha Kham	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	31	0	45	51	0	30
	Viengkham	Phonsavang	Khmou	48	4.2	28	55	13.2	26
XBRY	Xieng Hone	Nam Kok	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Khmou Rok	46	0.5	35	110	21.5	71.0
		Thong Kap	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Pray 4. W. Hmong 5. G. Hmong	115	+	++	155	52.41	170.2
	Xaygnaboury	Houay Pho'	Pray	44	0	++	74	3.5	89.25
		Houay Sangiam	1. Hmong	60	10	40	70	5.12	73.55

²⁶ The table shows land under cultivation primarily for rice in the year visited. In cases where hectareage was not available, + = 'some,' and, ++ = 'a lot.' That is, during the 2000 PPA, many villagers could provide only the approximate weight of the total yield, or the amount of seed used, but not the area of land. By 2006, villages were all able to provide land area figures.

			2. Pray 3. Lao						
East	District	Village	Ethnicity	Pop (hhs)	Paddy	Swidden	Pop	Paddy	Swidden
HPNH	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	1. Khmou 2. Neua	28	0	15	32	0	23.25
	Xieng Kho	Houay Lang	Ksing Moul	50	1.5	40	63	3	45
XKNG	Nong Het	Din Dam	1. Khmou 2. Tai Chang	31	0	++	32	0	38
BKXY	Borikhanh	Hat Yeun	1. Lao 2. Hmong	85	0	170	89	9	80
	Vieng Thong	Pha deng/Mixay	1. Phong 2. Hmong	53	2	95	113	17	89
KMME	Boualapha	Pak Phanang	1. Ngouan 2. Kaleung	40	5.5	12.3	57	11.23	3
		Tha Kachanh	Tri	50	+	50	50	15	6
	Nakai	Boua Ma	1. Makong 2. Bo	66	5	60	80	0.5	156
South									
SVKT	Phin	Keng Koua	Katang	22	++	0	25	30	0
	Nong	Tako	Makong	38	+	++	39	5	41
	Xépon	Rabo Tham	Makong	36	0	34	46	5.4	43
SRVN	Samouay	Talo Tay	Pacoh	17	13.18	11.13	25	9.83	32.38
	Ta Oy	Pong Nam	Ta Oy	42	0	42	44	0	34
XEKG	Kaleum	Bak	Ngkrieng	17	0	27.5	22	0	23,8
		Lakai	Ngkrieng	15	0	14	23	3	21
CPSK	Soukhouma	Non Khoum	Lao	50	++	0	62	104.34	0
		Pak Xangbolong	Lao	90	139	0	154	301.19	0
ATTP	Phouvong	Houay Kout	Brao	36	30+	0	42	3.68	5
Central									
VTE	Xaysomboun	Nam Mo	1. Tai Dam 2. Khmou 3. Tai Deng 4. Phouan	142	26.52	77.71	214	46.2	43
		Nam Chia	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	124	62	16.7	134	62	8

Table 22 -Comparison of Large Bovine Holdings: 2000 / 2006

Province	District	Village	Ethnicity	PPA 2000			PPA 2006		
				Pop (hhs)	Buffaloes	Cows	Pop	Buffaloes	Cows
North									
LGNT	Long	Phonsamphanh	Lahu Shi Soung	245	0	5	122	0	23
		Pha Tè	Akha	30	20	50	62	50	60
BKEO	Pha Oudom	Had Kham	Lamet	28	2	0	31	24	19
		Kène Kham	Khmou Khrong	28	11	0	179	90	50
ODXY	Nga	Phon Kham	Hmong	20	0	0	24	9	50
		May	1. Khmou Lue 2. Khmou Ou	51	20	0	54	46	16
	Pak Beng	Chomleng Nyay	Khmou Rok	54	60	90	64	4	8
	Na Mo	Pang Sa	1. Khmou Lue 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nhang)	44	81	18	77	20	20
		Pak Nam Tong	1. Lantène 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nyang)	33	11	24	82	6	27
PSLY	Samphanh	Seua Thiau	Khmou Ou	35	18	2	37	2	4
LBNG	Phonxay	Tha Kham	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	31	0	25	51	6	51
	Viengkham	Phonsavang	Khmou	48	38	5	55	25	20
XBRY	Xieng Hone	Nam Kok	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Khmou Rok	46	16	0	110	47	120
		Thong Kap	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Pray 4. W. Hmong 5. G. Hmong	115	180	260	155	210	340
	Xaygnaboury	Houay Pho'	Pray	44	0	22	74	0	32
		Houay Sangiam	1. Hmong 2. Pray 3. Lao	60	9	200	70	13	251
East	District	Village	Ethnicity	Pop (hhs)	Buffaloes	Cows	Pop	Buffaloes	Cows

HPNH	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	1. Khmou 2. Neua	28	ur	ur	32	2	16
	Xieng Kho	Houay Lang	Ksing Moul	50	25	30	63	18	23
XKNG	Nong Het	Din Dam	1. Khmou 2. Tai Chang	31	28	35	32	10	65
BKXY	Borikhanh	Hat Yeun	1. Lao 2. Hmong	85	103	133	89	-	-
	Vieng Thong	Pha deng/Mixay	1. Phong 2. Hmong	53	43.	15	113	91	80
KMME	Boualapha	Pak Phanang	1. Ngouan 2. Kaleung	40	15	17	57	25	90
		Tha Kachanh	Tri	50	46	59	50	20	44
	Nakai	Boua Ma	1. Makong 2. Bo	66	425	12	80	474	4
South									
SVKT	Phin	Keng Koua	Katang	22	28	34	25	27	36
	Nong	Tako	Makong	38	30	40	39	39	11
	Xépon	Rabo Tham	Makong	36	3	14	46	12	0
SRVN	Samouay	Talo Tay	Pacoh	17	20	50	25	28	16
	Ta Oy	Pong Nam	Ta Oy	42	70	12	44	100	31
XEKG	Kaleum	Bak	Ngkrieng	17	35	16	22	28	15
		Lakai	Ngkrieng	15	10	0	23	13	3
CPSK	Soukhouma	Non Khoum	Lao	50	54	65	62	25	8
		Pak Xangbolong	Lao	90	190	296	154	361	390
ATTP	Phouvong	Houay Kout	Brao	36	73	0	42	64	0
Central									
VTE	Xaysomboun	Nam Mo	1. Tai Dam 2. Khmou 3. Tai Deng 4. Phouan	142	83	151	214	63	183
		Nam Chia	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	124	533	470	134	268	670

Table 23 -Education

	Province	District	Village	Ethnicity	2000		2006		Comments
					No. grades	No. teachers	No. grades	No. teachers	
N O R T H	LGNT	Long	Phonsamphanh	Lahu Shi Soung	2	1	5	8	Not enrolled 200, f 120. Current enrollment is 80, but only 4-5 attend on any given day. Teachers are all Tai. i.e. not much real change since 2000 – only the trappings.
			Pha Tè	Akha	2	1	5	4	Teachers: Tai & Hmong
	BKEO	Pha Oudom	Had Kham	Lamet	0	0	2	1	Attendance regular, but most don't continue beyond p2 . Teacher is ethnic Lao.
			Kène Kham	Khmou Khrong	0	0	3	3	Teachers are all Tai Dam. Most do not continue after P3.
	ODXY	Nga	Phon Kham	Hmong	0	0	3	3	Teachers: 2 Lue, 1 Hmong. Attendance regular.
			May	1. Khmou Lue 2. Khmou Ou	0	0	4	2	Teachers: 1 Lao, 1 Khmou Lue. Attendance very poor.
		Pak Beng	Chomleng Ny	Khmou Rok	0	0	8	8	13 teachers, 10 Khmou, 3 Lao. Attendance is poor, parents not interested in education for children. Only the wealthier children go regularly. Out of 65 in P1 only 32 completed.
		Na Mo	Pang Sa	1. Khmou Lue 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nhang)	2	1	5	6	Teachers: 4 Khmou, 2 Lue. 15 children not enrolled. Attendance is better in lower grade, but falls off in later ones.
			Pak Nam Tong	1. Lantène 2. Hmong 3. Yay (Nyang)	0	0	0	0	Students expected to attend in another village, 45 minutes walk. But attendance is not regular, and the Lantène children usually don't go because they feel inferior.
	PSLY	Samphanh	Seua Thiau	Khmou Ou	2	1	3	1	Teacher is Khmou. Most do not continue beyond p3. Attendance is regular.
	LBNG	Phonxay	Tha Kham	1. Khmou 2. Hmong	2	1	2	1	Teacher is Khmou. Can continue and attend thru M6 at Dist Seat only 2 km from village.
		Viengkham	Phonsavang	Khmou	2	1	3	1	Few continue beyond P3. Parents don't encourage.
	XBRY	Xieng Hone	Nam Kok	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Khmou Rok	2	1	5	4	All teachers are ethnic Nyouan. Grades thru secondary are available 2 km walk. Khmou children do not study beyond p3.

			Thong Kap	1. Lue 2. Nyouan 3. Pray 4. W. Hmong 5. G. Hmong	3	2	5	7	Teachers: Lue, Nyouan, Lao. Most do not go beyond P5, even though secondary is accessible only one km away.
		Xagnaboury	Houay Pho'	Pray	4	2	5	3	Teachers are ethnic Lao. Few go thru M3 (2 km away) and none have completed upper secondary (17 km away).
			Houay Sangiam	1. Hmong 2. Pray 3. Lao	1	n	5	3	Teachers all ethnic Lao.
E A S T	HPNH	Houa Meuang	Nam Nat	1. Khmou 2. Neua	2	1	2	1	No one continues to secondary. No difference between 2000 and 2006.
		Xieng Kho	Houay Lang	Ksing Moul	2	1	4	2	Ratio of girls still small
	XKNG	Nong Het	Din Dam	1. Khmou 2. Tai Chang	0	0	5	2	Many leave before completing primary school.
	BKXY	Borikhanh	Hat Yeun	1. Lao 2. Hmong	5	8	5	5	Some Hmong students don't attend.
		Vieng Thong	Pha Deng	1. Phong 2. Hmong	0	0	4	2	Nearest secondary school is 17 km.
	KMME	Boualapha	Pak Phanang	1. Ngouan 2. Kaleung	5	3	3	n	Nearest secondary in 6 km away, but no students have completed secondary. Only two have attended M2. 40% of the P1 students failed the final exam; 20% of the P2 students failed, but all of the P3 students passed.
			Tha Kachanh	Tri	4	2	4	2	Attendance is regular but no children study beyond P4. (In 2000, tho, 7 boys were studying in secondary school in the dist.)
		Nakai	Boua Ma	1. Makong 2. Bo	3	1	4	1	This year, 47% of P1 passed; 54% of P2 and 60% of P3. Teacher is ethnic Lao.
S O U T H	SVKKT	Phin	Keng Koua	Katang	0	0	0	0	School will begin in 2007 with grades p1-3. Most of the village is non-literate except for 7 men and one woman.
		Nong	Tako	Makong	0	0	0	0	No school at time of survey, but was to began in 2006-2007 school year. In 2000 98% of the women and children could not speak Lao.

	Xépon	Rabo Tham	Makong	0	0	0	0	There is a school in another village 2 km away, but only one child attends.	
SRVN	Samouay	Talo Tay	Pacoh	1	1	3	1	Same teacher (ethnic Kado) as in 2000 PPA. Only difference is that 2 grades have been added. Of the total pop of 188, most are non-literate in Lao (130, 87f). Beyond P3 must go to the dist (3 students study there now).	
	Ta Oy	Pong Nam	Ta Oy	0	0	2	1	Drop-out rate is high	
XEKG	Kaleum	Bak	Ngkrieng	3	1	5	2	Villagers say the teachers aren't so good, and they are absent a lot, usually from 15-20 days at a time. Both speak Ngkriang with students.	
		Lakai	Ngkrieng	2	1	4	2	Uniforms for students strictly enforced.	
CPSK	Soukhouma	Non Khoum	Lao	3	1	3	1	Attendance not regular. Usually children start P! when they are 8-9 year of age. No one studies beyond P3.	
		Pak Xangbolong	Lao	3	1	3	2	Secondary school is 18 km away and most do not continue. A few attend P4-5 in a nearby village. Many student drop out by failing to show up for exams, Otherwise parents are fined when they drop out earlier. Students say they are ashamed because they are older than their grade level.	
ATTP	Phouvong	Houay Kout	Brao	2	2	3	2	About 15 school age children do not attend. They are accused of being lazy. Parents not interested. The 2 teachers are both ethnic Lao and do not attend regularly.	
CENTRAL	VTE	Xaysombou	Nam Mo	1. Tai Dam 2. Khmou 3. Tai Deng 4. Phouan	5	8	P1-M3	13	Teachers: 1 Hmong, 12 Khmou, 1 Lao.
			Nam Chia	1. Hmong 2. Khmou 3. Phouan	P1-M6	33	P1-M6	11	Teachers: 5 Khmou, 5 Hmong, 1 Lao.

Appendix 3 – Village Discussion Topic Instrument

Date:

Name of village, district, province:

Names and positions of persons present at discussion:

Background Information:

1. General characteristics of village
2. Ethnicity of village, languages spoken, dominant language, lingua franca
3. Age of village
4. History of village
5. Religion, names of important spirits, spiritual territory boundaries etc..., major cultural events on calendar
6. Characterization of relations with other ethnic groups and/or nearby villages
7. No. of households / families / population (m/f) [for past five years if available], by age cohort if possible
8. School, number of classrooms, grades, teacher(s) [distance]
9. Health services [distance], health workers in village, midwife, pharmacy, and most common health problems.
10. Roads – type, DS only or all weather
11. Water sources
12. Electrification
13. Markets

Livelihood

14. Land use: by type (note local terminology wherever possible and proportion cropped by season) How do villagers rate varieties, preference, taste, etc.
 - a. rice
 - b. paddy (variety)
 - c. swiddens
 - d. other (e.g. direct seeded lowland, variety)
 - e. upland (crops, orchard etc., specify)
 - f. garden plots (specify)
 - g. grazing (cattle, buffalo, etc.)
 - h. other (specify)
15. Yields (of the same)
16. Livestock, numbers
17. Market values for rice and livestock
18. Hunting and fishing (consumption or sale, if sale give prices, give species or local names)
19. Forest products (specify)
20. Rice sufficiency (number of months per year, if short how are deficits made up)
21. Indigenous definitions of rich and poor
 - poverty/well-being distinctions by households within village (numbers)
 - villager explanation of causes of poverty in those hhs/villages

- local terms and meanings
- at the village level, how do these apply, how would neighboring villages be classified and why

22. On-farm income generating activities, handicrafts, etc...by gender
23. Off-farm labor, wages, temporary or permanent, etc., number of individuals engaged and in what types of labor or other work, by gender
24. Traditional economic activities (ethnic-specific)
25. Problems of livelihood
26. Solutions
27. Coping strategies
28. Non-food consumption, durables, etc.

Alimentary Patterns

29. Staple foods, preferences
30. Animal proteins, types, wild vs. domestic, animals hunted/trapped and frequency of consumption
31. Fish types and consumption, quantities
32. Fruits and vegetables, wild/domestic
33. Tubers and shoots
34. Eggs, quantities
35. Methods of preparation
36. Edibility interdictions

Social Structures

37. Leadership
38. Kinship
39. Gender roles

Institutions (Villager opinions of)

40. Education
 - 1 describe types: elementary, non-formal, adult literacy (in Lao and in minority languages)
 - 2 attendance: good or not good? why? language problems?
 - 3 attendance by gender, age...
41. Health
 - 1 types of diseases
 - 2 number of health personnel by type
 - 3 distances from dispensaries, hospitals, etc.
 - 4 frequency of visits, for what reasons
 - 5 availability of medicine, costs
 - 6 sanitation, mosquito nets...
42. Agricultural Extension, frequency of visits, activities
43. Other Government programs / projects (describe)
44. NGO or International Organization projects (describe)
45. Villager assessment of the above and recommendations for improvements

Appendix 4 - Sameness and Difference: Qualitative Theory and Practice

In the social sciences much of the terminology used is borrowed from physics, no doubt to make them appear more 'scientific'. The work of Freud in psychoanalysis is a good example, with its use of such terms as 'drive', 'resistance', 'pressure', 'energy,' and so on to refer to mental phenomena, all borrowed from physics or biology (in fact he constantly struggled to distinguish such terms from their biological associations, desire from need, drive from instinct, etc.). In the case of social research the origins of the qualitative/quantitative distinction appear to be from chemistry where beginning in the first half of the 19th century, qualitative analysis refers to the identification of the chemical composition or constituents of unknown materials, compared to quantitative analysis, the measure of the amounts of known constituents present in a substance.²⁷

C.S. Peirce, who in 1905 considered the qualitative approach to be a form of induction, has perhaps the most succinct and enlightening statement:

The remaining kind of induction, which I shall call Qualitative Induction, is of more general utility than either of the others, while it is intermediate between them, alike in respect to security and to the scientific value of its conclusions. In both these respects it is well separated from each of the other kinds. It consists of those inductions which are neither founded upon experience in one mass, as Crude Induction is, nor upon a collection of numerable instances of equal evidential values [quantitative], but upon a stream of experience in which the relative evidential values of different parts of it have to be estimated according to our sense of the impressions they make upon us.²⁸

Peirce's definition is closest to the present usage in social research, although more recent attempts to define the term fall short of the clarity expressed here.

Qualitative research seeks pattern, context and meaning. This is approached by looking at difference in what is observed, and the patterns that result are patterns of difference. Moreover, difference is not the diametrical or logical opposite of sameness. Sameness leads directly to quantification because there is always the issue of "how much," it can be counted and measured. And while the question may be asked, "how much sameness ?", we cannot pose as the opposite, "how much difference ?". Groups of things that are the same can be grouped into sets and sameness can be measured, differences cannot be grouped into sets, de facto. Difference must be described and explained and in that way patterns emerge, patterns of difference that make the world visible and comprehensible.

Perhaps as a result of its birth in the womb of sameness, quantitative measurement usually focuses on things and degrees, and these fall into the realm of the biophysical. And in the search for concretistic reifications of non-substantial subjective experiences it soon becomes readily apparent that mental constructs and gestalts are

²⁷ Later in the history of Chemistry 'qualitative' was used to refer to procedures or reactions having an efficiency yield of 100 per cent (OED).

²⁸ Hartshorne and Weiss. 1933. *Collected Papers 2: Elements of Logic, Book 3: Critical Logic*, Chapt 9, "The varieties and validities of induction." Section 759. The brackets have been added.

not readily open to measurement. It would seem silly, for example, to ask, “how much sadness does this village have ?” in the same way we would inquire, “how much land is cultivated in this village.” Of course one could set about measuring subjective indicators of well-being as is currently being done by social scientists in the field of happiness studies, but interestingly, or tellingly, this has never been included in quantitative studies of poverty, at least not in Laos.

In the final analysis it is the responsibility of qualitative research to represent to the rest of the world how local people think and reason. To do this the researcher must in a reflexive way situate him or her self in the world and establish the means by which that world can be observed and understood. That is to say, qualitative research studies things in their natural settings and attempts to make sense of the world in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Appendix 5 – Swidden Agriculture is Not the Enemy

In both PPAs it was found that the poor villages have been typified by local officials as belonging to non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups residing in remote areas and practicing swidden cultivation. Indeed a link has developed in the minds of many that swidden agriculture causes poverty. Looking at swidden agriculture from a purely scientific perspective a much different picture emerges.

For example, in Southeast Asia Michael Dove (1983, 1985, 1997) concluded that depending on conditions, when measured as a return on labor, swidden production was anywhere from 88 percent to 256 percent higher than paddy production.²⁹ Such systems flourish in societies structured by complementarity in gender roles typical of Southeast Asia (as discussed in the main text).

A study by Conklin (1980) on the Ifugao, famous for their extensive terraced rice paddies, notes that even in this system where owned land is divided into essentially three types, paddy (17%), swidden (15%), and woodlots (25%), on landscapes dominated by the spectacular terraces, the bulk of the food consumed is produced in the swiddens. Two tons of unmilled rice per hectare are produced in the paddies, whereas 6.5 tons per hectare of tubers are produced in the swiddens. Measured as a return on labor the production for swiddens are even more dramatic, 2.5-4.0 kg of rice per day for paddies, compared to 26 kg of tubers per day for swiddens. Furthermore, population densities in these Ifugao upland areas were as high as 291 persons per km², or 360 if persons/km² if only cultivatable land is calculated.

These numbers far exceed the maximum of 50 pers/km² carrying capacity that is reckoned for upland Southeast Asia by Peltzer in 1948 and has been used extensively in the literature ever since. The gender balance of the Ifugao people is equal, with ambilocal residence, bilateral kin system, and inheritance of land based on ranked bilateral primogeniture. The complex terracing evolved here without complex bureaucratic organization normally associated with paddies and without assistance from recognized central authority both of which tend to be associated with patriarchal structures.

In other words, ecosystems need to be thought of as inclusive of humans. For example, both biodiversity and NTFPs depend upon environments created in the process of long term rotational fallows in swidden agriculture. As these are eradicated, so too are biodiversity and NTFPs.³⁰

²⁹ Dove, Michael R. 1983. Theories of swidden agriculture and the political economy of ignorance. *Agroforestry Systems* 1:85-99. ; Dove, Michael R. 1985. The agroecological mythology of the Javanese and the political economy of Indonesia. *Indonesia* 39 (April):1-35. ; Dove, Michael R. and Daniel M. Kammen. 1997. The epistemology of sustainable resource use: managing forest products, swiddens, and high-yielding variety crops. *Human Organization* 56, 1:91-101.

³⁰ This has been clearly demonstrated in a recent publication from Yale University: Dove, M, P. Sajise, and A. Doolittle (eds.). 2005. *Conserving Nature in Culture: Case Studies from Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph 54.

Table 24 – Comparison of Swidden and Paddy Productivity (Dove 1983)

	Constraint	Ton/ha	HH labor	Return on labor
Paddy	Land	2.5 t	412 days	4.2 kg
Swidden	Labor	0.75 t	95 days	7.9 kg

Benefits of swidden cultivation include (*ibid.*):

- 88% - 276 % higher production per unit of labor than paddy cultivation
- Protection of watersheds
- Enhancement of biodiversity (birds, ruminants, wild pigs, carnivores ...)
- Diversity of cultigens which provides better nutrition
- More time and space available for cash crops

It is a pity that the beneficial aspects and productivity of swidden agricultural were not realized earlier. Following the findings of the first PPA and with the recent workshops conducted by NAFRI there is beginning to be a reconsideration of the situation. The value of long term rotational swiddening is coming to light in Laos.³¹ But two hurdles need to be overcome: (1) the knowledge needs to be transferred from the Central level to the provincial level, because at the present time, in spite of the changes in Vientiane, the provinces continue to blame all development problems on swidden cultivation, including poverty, and (2) reversing the damage that has been done, not an easy task, but undoing or redoing land allocation is the obvious first step, one that many villagers suggested as a means to alleviate poverty.

³¹ See especially, Ducourtieux, Olivier. 2006. Du Riz Et Des Arbres: L'élimination de l'agriculture d'abattis-brûlis, une constante politique au Laos (Rice And Trees: Eradicating shifting cultivation: an abiding policy in Laos). Thèse pour obtenir le grade de Docteur de l'Institut National Agronomique Paris-Grignon.