

# ***Community Development Projects for Pa Nor Indigenous Khmu Community, Luang Prabang Province, Laos***

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## **About Us**

We have a needs and effects oriented approach, helping children and village communities in South East Asia in the areas of emergency, poverty and economic support. Rather than simply giving money to villagers, we work actively and directly in partnership with communities to develop sustainable projects that raise the standard of living for the community at large. We believe that the key to sustainable development is through adopting a bottom-up approach. The first phase of any project is the development of trust with the community, and throughout all following engagements it is the needs of the community that form the core of our work.

observations with a local translator. Through this process, we acquired the information provided below.

### Basic facts about the village

Name: Pak Nor meaning 'Bamboo Forest'

Location: 20km from Luang Prabang City, Luang Prabang Province, Laos

Ethnic make-up of the village: Khmu

Population of 393, with 74 families.

Established since 1982 (moved from another location where the village was severely affected by storms and death)

Seasons – raining 6<sup>th</sup> Month (June) until 10<sup>th</sup> Month (Oct).

Language – Laos, Khmu. Use Laos to communicate with other tribal people i.e. Hmong.

Annual income per person: \$595 – or \$1.6 per day.

### Khmu Cultural Profile

According to the 2005 census, the Khmu indigenous group comprises 11% of the Laos population<sup>1</sup>. Traditionally the Khmu are hunter gatherers who practice animism and spirituality and believe in close, spiritual integration with nature.

The Pa Nor villagers moved the location of their village in 1973 after their previous village was badly affected by storms and death. They have retained their hunter gatherer lifestyles, living off fruits and animals found in the surrounding forests. Over the last 30 years they have adopted Buddhism as their primary religion, although some of the elders in the village still maintain respect for the traditional spirits. Young people interviewed feel proud of their Khmu identity and will endeavour to keep the language alive in the next generation. Khmu culture is celebrated in the village during the annual Khmu New Year festival in January/February.

At present there is no cultural 'centre' to the community; i.e. there are no temples or places of spiritual significance. This results in villagers being unable to properly commemorate births, deaths, marriages or spiritual occasions.

### Water in Pa Nor

A clean water supply is available but is inadequate in the dry season. Community members wait for up to 2 hours each day at the village tap for drinking and cooking water during the dry season. Villagers who cannot spare this time are unable to collect water, and for the villagers who *do* have time to wait for their buckets to fill, the



<sup>1</sup> *The World Factbook 2009*. Washington, DC: CIA. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

time spent waiting decreases the time available for child care or engaging in income generating activities such as preparing bamboo to sell.

Every year during the dry season, one of the four wells available dries up completely.

Villagers wait up to two hours per day to fill their water buckets.

## Sanitation



Neither the primary Grade 1 and 2 school in Pa Nor, or the primary school in the neighbouring village Tinpha have functioning toilets, due to the lack of an available water supply. Consequently, students defecate in the surrounding forests which are used for farming, increasing the risk of disease.

According to the village chief, all toilets in the community are full.

At the neighbouring Tinpha village primary school, the toilet facilities remain locked and unusable due to lack of water.

## Education

There is one school in Pa Nor village, for Grades 1 and 2 at primary level. The school was built in 1973 and is in a dilapidated and unsafe condition. There are 28 students in the school but the two classes have only one teacher and there is no physical divide between the classes. The school is struggling to get a second teacher as no new teachers wish to teach in a school of such poor condition. We have had confirmation that the school is due to be rebuilt by a local company commencing in April 2010. We would like to support this company and ensure that their proposals include the development of water facilities and toilets for the students.

Currently there are no provisions for education or day care for children of pre-school age.

Views of the Pa Nor Grades 1 and 2 Primary School from inside and outside:



## Health

There are no official health facilities in Pa Nor village. As such, when visitors suffer from health complaints, they must visit the pharmacy two villages away, or make the journey to Luang Prabang city. This can be costly both financially and time-wise, and is inadequate in times of emergency.

## Economy and Livelihoods

This is primarily a hunter gatherer community; villagers live off fruits, vegetables and animals found and farmed in the surrounding forests, hillsides and caves.

Many households operate a small business such as a village store selling noodles and snacks.

Bamboo stripped of its bark is sold on local markets for 2,500 kip (0.3USD) per kilo. Other villages in the province make paper out of bamboo, and this is sold for over twice the price of the raw material. However the Pa Nor villagers were unaware of this practice and do not yet have the skills to make bamboo paper.

## Needs identified by the community

In a formal meeting with the village committee, and through more informal interviews with other community members, together we identified the following to be the needs of the community:

- *Improved water system*
- *Skills training*
- *New primary school for grades 1 and 2*
- *Temple*
- *Kindergarten on same site as Tinpha Primary School*
- *Meeting centre*
- *First aid resources*
- *Improved toilets*

## Our proposed areas of intervention

Following our approach of close partnership with community members, we would like to run projects in the community that enable the visitors to improve the standard of living in the community and to help themselves.

## Water

- **Rationale:** This community has been interacting with nature and managing their water supply for many years. We want to work with them and use their knowledge of water management and traditional practices to develop sustainable water projects that will improve access to water during the dry season. The poverty that exists in the village prevents the community from developing new projects that will bring about positive change, nevertheless there is strong will to improve the water

situation in the village. We hope that through collaboration with Laotian and international organizations with expertise on sustainable water management in arid landscapes, and with the support from donors, we can find and implement solutions to the lack of water in Pa Nor.

- **Methodology:** Establish with the community what potential there is for extraction of water from underground and from channeling water from surrounding rivers. Identify an organization who is committed to sustainable practices and respect for local customs who can implement a long-term solution to the lack of water.
- **Outputs:** New access points for clean water; decreased waiting time at taps; drinking water and toilet facilities in the village school.
- **Outcomes:** Improved health and sanitation, increase in time available to spend on family care and income generation, increased sense of community pride.

### Skills Training

To enable the villagers to gain more from their engagement with local markets, we would like to run skills training in the following areas:

- Literacy for adults
  - Bamboo paper making
  - Other income generation projects appropriate to the community
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- **Rationale:** At present the literacy levels among adults in the community are less than 50%. The result is a struggle to act effectively on local markets, and exploitation by buyers. Currently a large proportion of the villagers depend on the sale of bamboo, which, once stripped of its bark can sell for \$0.3 per kilo. Nearby villages perform the simple process of making paper from this raw bamboo, the end product of which can sell for over twice the amount of the raw material. However none of the villagers in Pa Nor have the skills to make this paper.
  - **Methodology:** Through existing village networks such as the village committee and the women's association, we plan to run training sessions delivered by local organizations such as the Laos Women's Union and representatives from the bamboo paper making factory. As well as practical skills, we will provide literacy, business and accounting training to equip the villagers with the skills they need to benefit from local markets and even start up their own businesses. All training will be gender sensitive, inclusive and respectful of Khmu traditional practices.
  - **Outputs:** Increased levels of literacy and skills training among adults and youth in the community.
  - **Outcomes:** Improved standard of living through greater income levels, increased decision making power and financial independence for women, strengthening of community organizations, promotion of locally made products.

### Other projects

- **Eco-friendly toilets:** At present all toilets are 'full', as villagers lack the skills and facilities to dispose of the waste by ecologically friendly means. Through using village and provincial expertise and exploring with the villagers what the opportunities are for new toilet systems, we plan to introduce sustainable and environmentally friendly toilets for all households and the community school.
- **Construction of a temple:** Having no religious or spiritual centre is impacting on the villagers' sense of pride, as they are unable to properly celebrate auspicious

occasions and to embrace their Khmu and Buddhist identity. They began construction of a temple in the last decade but were forced to abandon the project through lack of funds. Through mobilizing the labour and resources in the village and under the guidance of experts, we are exploring the possibility of helping the villagers to resume work on the temple.

- **Community Centre:** At present there is a community centre in the village, but due to its dilapidated condition and location on a precarious slope, it remains almost entirely unused by villagers. The community expressed a need for a well resourced community centre that can be used for meetings, the storage of books, learning materials and official documents and for welcoming guests. We feel that strengthening this community centre will have the additional outcome of facilitating the smooth implementation of long-term skills training work.
- **Access to health facilities:** We plan to provide the villagers with basic health care resources, to enable them to respond to the villagers' needs and to be prepared for emergencies.