

## Pak Nor (“Bamboo Forest”) Village Profile

Geographical Location: Pak Nor village is located in Luang Prabang province, 20km from Luang Prabang city.

### Village basic information:

- 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 6th Month (June) until 10th Month (Oct).
- Language – Laos, Khmu. Use Laos to communicate with other tribal people i.e. Hmong.
- Village cooperative bank – Village Committees: 5,000 kip/share

### Economic profile and main occupations:

Average annual income per person is \$595 (\$1.63 per day).

Villagers sell the following products on local markets:

- Madiues (a fruit)
- Excess eggs and chickens
- Bamboo
- Corn
- Onions

Many households strip bamboo of its bark and sell the raw material for 2,500 kip / kilo. While other villages in the district make paper out of the raw bamboo material and sell for over 5,000 kip / kilo, villagers we interviewed in Pak Nor did not have the knowledge or skills to make this paper.

### Agriculture and food consumption

Bamboo, onions, corn, mushrooms and farmed in the surrounding forests and caves.

Fish and meat is purchased in markets. Some meat e.g. mole and snake is obtained in the village and surrounding forests.

Land for farming is purchased by individual families. All but a couple of families own land, those who do not own land earn their living from working in the city.

### Education and literacy levels:

All children in the village go to school, and according to the Village Chief, approximately 50% go on to study at university, mostly in Vientiane but a small number study overseas.

There is one school in Pak Nor village, for Grade 1 and 2 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. School fees are 35,000 kip per year. The teacher has a teaching license. 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 after Songkran festival. This company may also provide a water system for the school but this has not been confirmed.

After completing grade 2, primary school students go on to study at Tinpha Primary school in the neighbouring Khmu village. This school was built in 2006 by AEON and the Japanese Committee for UNICEF. The school is in good condition but due to lack of water the toilets and water facilities are unusable. Consequently students defecate in surrounding forests despite awareness of the dangers of this practice; posters illustrating the risks are placed in visible areas around the school.

Secondary school students travel over an hour each way to school in Xieng Muak, young villagers express a need for a secondary school to be built in Pak Nor village.

All education is taught in Laos language and follows a Laos curriculum.

Among adults, the literacy level is approximately 50%. The head of the women’s association did not identify literacy training as a need for the adults in the community, saying that it is challenging for them to learn at their age, and they have confidence in the future as all the children are going to school.

### Health and sanitation:

In the neighbouring village Nong Tok, there is a pharmacy. When villagers suffer health problems they must travel either to Nong Tok or Luang Prabang. There is no first aid service in Pak Nor village.

All houses have a toilet but all toilets are now ‘full’ due to a lack of knowledge among villagers regarding how to produce more sustainable toilet systems.

Infrastructure: The community is accessible by road in both dry and wet seasons and has telephone services and adequate electricity.

#### Water

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

Each person contributes 1,000 kip per year for water. This money goes on maintaining the water system. Approximately 500 metres from the centre of the village, at different sites, are 4 wells. The water in these wells is used for washing and showering. One well dries out in the dry season. Interviewees cited their water usage per household as 60 – 200 litres per day. The young people interviewed said they drink approximately 2.5 litres per day.

When asked how an improved water system would affect the village, young people said the village would be 'stronger' and 'cleaner'.

The root cause of the water problems in the village is lack of water during the dry season.

Organizations: These include a village committee comprising 14 members, which meets every 15 days to discuss political, economic and social topics of the village, and a women's association. The women's association receives visitors from the city giving health education approximately once a month.

The village committee includes:

1. Chief of the Village Viengporn Chanthakorn
2. Deputy Chief Boonthan
3. Committee 1 – Representative of the Elders - Onnsri
4. Committee 1 – Economy - Khumkaew Pongsawas
5. Committee 2 – Education - Onnchan
6. Director of Secondary School
7. Head of Women's Association - Somsri

#### Cultural profile

Khmu movement towards mainstream Laos culture

Pak Nor village is becoming increasingly closer to mainstream Laotian culture. The changing of clothing styles and housing styles is a visible representation of this. Since 1965 the villagers consider themselves Buddhist, though elder villagers still maintain respect for the traditional Khmu spirits. Young people interviewed feel proud to identify themselves as Khmu and will speak to their children in the Khmu language when they start their own families. Despite this they welcome the move towards more mainstream Laotian culture. The annual Khmu New Year festival in Jan/Feb is a time of celebration of Khmu culture.

#### Khmu and other indigenous groups in the area

Pak Nor village is an entirely Khmu community. The neighbouring Tinpha village is also Khmu, and beyond that the village of Nong Tok consists of Khmu, Laos and Hmong. Pak Nor villagers have a good relationship with those from neighbouring communities; stressing that they will come together to share new resources that come available.

#### Gender

Observations at the central village tap showed that it is the women's role to wait for and collect water. In an interview with the Head of the Women's Association, she said that women are listened to when it comes to the decision making process in the village. That said, during our first meeting with the village committee, there were no women participants, aside from one who observed from the outside. Of the village committee comprising 14 members, 13 are male and 1 is female.

#### International aid to the village

The EU built a conference room since 2001 which has been used regularly for village meetings. The

EU also was the donor who brought electricity into the village and laid the pipe for getting spring water from the original source to the village (about 1 km long pipeline).

Current projects in the village

Pak Nor school (Grade 1 and Grade 2 students). Proposal approved by officials, got 100% funding, will start construction after Songkran festival. Somnuk (p'Sith friends) is the coordinator who helped secure the funds. The school will move to another location according to the suggestions of the committees to a larger space which shaded by trees and is on flat land.

The new school will have toilets, 2 rooms, new desks & chairs and blackboard, the village will provide labour and construction will take 2-3 months.

The villagers commenced the construction of a temple but were forced to abandon the project due to a lack of funds. Construction got as far as the foundations and pillars but no further.

Needs identified by the community:

- Improved water system

This will reduce waiting time at the village tap and provide families with more water to better meet their needs.

- New primary school for grades 1 and 2

The current school is dilapidated and unsafe.

- Temple

Reflecting the community's movement towards Buddhism and its lack of any spiritual gathering points, the villagers expressed a need for a temple. At present the villagers are unable to properly commemorate births, deaths, marriages or Buddhist occasions; this impacts upon their sense of community pride.

- Kindergarten on same site as Tinpha Primary School

There are no educational or day care facilities for children under 5 years.

- Meeting centre

The meeting centre that was created by the EU does not meet the community's needs. It is situated on a precarious slope and has no facilities for storing books or official documents. Villagers would like a centre that can be staffed at all times and used both for meetings and for receiving guests.

- First aid resources

At present villagers with health complaints must travel to a pharmacy two villages away, or to Luang Prabang city. This can be both costly and time consuming, and could be dangerous in times of emergency.

- Skills training

The lack of literacy among adults in the village leaves them struggling to perform well on local markets.

- Improved toilets

At present, all household's toilets are full and unusable. The village's Grade 1 and Grade 2 school does not have toilets, and those in Tinpha Primary School are unusable due to no water supply.

Resources of the community:

Labour can be mobilized on a rotating basis.