

SPERI YEARLY REPORT



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MECO-ECOTRA PROGRAM - VN102011

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Part II: Yearly Report of MECO- ECOTRA's Thematic Networks and SPERI's Departments

MECO-ECOTRA in Laos

Farmers Network including Lao Sung (H'mong), Lao Thang (Khmu) and Lao Lum at the three mountainous pilot villages in Luang Prabang province, Laos has joined the MECO-ECOTRA network since 2006.

From 1999, the network has gone through several periods. In the initial stage (1999-02), the network was established, and with partners at all levels i.e. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos (MAF), Project for Rural Development of Focus Areas (PRDFA), Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry (PAFO) to involve in pilots on cultural identity based community development of H'mong and Lao Lum in Luang Prabang. In the second phase (2003-05), the network focused on self-strengthening its capacity by facilitating community based groups i.e. savings-credit, animal husbandry, cropping, forest protection, traditional cultural performance and so forth. In the third stage (2006-09), the network has strongly specialized itself as customary network in watershed natural resources management of H'mong, Khmu and Lao Lum people in Luang Prabang.

The network has successfully developed and well maintained several models i.e. poverty alleviation, community-based land allocation, cultural identity preservation, customary based community forest management. Especially, the network has rapidly expanded to other communities in/outside the province i.e. Xieng Khoang, Bokeo and Luang Nam Tha. Achievements and approach of the network are taken into the government policies and development organizations in Laos for the larger scale of application, and become case studies for teaching in Suphanuvong and Doong Dok National Unis. These models also become live forums for ethnic minorities in Thailand and Vietnam to exchange experiences.

In coming years, the network will stronger focused on: a) community institution in watershed resources governance, b) eco-farming production and community eco-enterprise, c) transferring knowledge and skills of a & b for youths by running a pilot FFS in Luang Prabang



Abbreviations

CHESH	Center for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands
CHESH Laos	Program of CHESH in Laos
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
NRM	Natural Resources Management
HEPA	Human Ecology Practice Area
PAFO	Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office
SPERI	Social Policy Ecology Research Institute

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Background

The period 2006 - 2009, CHESH Laos Program focuses on promoting activities of the network for customary law and local knowledge in natural resources management (NRM) in watershed areas in Luang Prabang province, Laos. Network is an open forum of voluntary behaviors and collective power of the diversity of local linkages, interests and concerns. It is a foundation of freedom and creative environment for implementation of the rights of indigenous people in decentralization and democracy of natural resource management (NRM) in sensitive watershed areas.

Following approaches of the CHESH Laos Program, Luang Prabang Provincial People's Committee, leaders of Luang Prabang provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) was aware of challenges of development programs such as rubber plantations, resettlement, hydropower dams and so on to security of local livelihoods and biodiversity in watershed protected forests. Therefore, provincial government issued policies and guidelines to minimize negative impacts of above risks, for example dismissing position of chairman of Nam Bac district People's Committee because they allowed several companies to purchase land for rubber plantations. Further, the province establishes some special protected forests based on customary law of minority groups for strict protection. PAFO established two new functioning departments to manage watershed forests as well as agri-forestry extension.

In this stage, communities, especially the Hmong in Long Lan village have effectively promoted the traditional value of customary laws in NRM as well as economic self-development and self improvement of the life. Capacity of people in Long Lan, Nam Kha and Xieng Da has been improved significantly. They can self-identify problems, planning and implementing development activities of their families and community. People in Long Lan actively collaborated with the Luang Prabang H'mong Association, district and provincial governments to organize traditional ceremonies such as 'No Song'¹- Community's Sharing meal and Promise in NRM and maintenance of H'mong traditional institutions. Lum Lao people in Xieng Da village, Nam Bac district, Luang Prabang province actively develop small scale projects to call for supports like the 300 million Kips project of Thailand to re-build a primary and secondary school. Besides, different donations are being also contributed to construction of the cultural house, house of Monks and restoration of the ancient Buddha statues. Khmu people in Nam Kha village, Nam Bac district, Luang Prabang province are confident to cooperate with functioning offices to allocate rights for village herbal medicine groups to manage and use over 30 ha of community herbal medicine preservation forest. Also, they have formed economic models of farm at small scale based on local experience, such as dry rice cultivation-forest-garden-pond-raising animals in order to gradually improve their life.

¹ This is specific ceremony of Hmong, which consolidate and strengthen customary laws and tradition. 'No Song' helps community to modify, adjust certain provisions of natural resource or community management, security, customs of marriage, funeral, etc.

The yearly report (from Jul 2008 to Jun 2009) will analyze approaches, outputs, effectiveness and impact of activities implemented in relation to promotion of traditional cultural values in watershed forest management. In addition, the report also analyzes effectiveness of the connection, collaboration between traditional leaders - government authorities - functioning agencies and the CHESH Laos Program in implementation of development activities at community level. The specific objectives of the CHESH Laos Program in this stage include:

- i. Strengthen and promote the value of customary law of Long Lan village (H'mong ethnic minority) in management of watershed resources and community through the 'No Song' traditional institutions. From that, it expects to gradually establish criteria for developing Long Lan to become human-ecology village.
- ii. Having criteria in creating fair market, product trademark for eco-localized fruits and vegetable production of Long Lan village. Since then, it expects to contribute to improving income and living conditions of the locals.
- iii. Evaluate the CHESH Laos Program to have indicators of outputs, effectiveness and impact of traditional culture-based development approach after 10 years of support, consultation of the program in Luang Prabang province.
- iv. Evaluate appropriateness of the approach of CHESH Laos Program to government policies and trends of world towards strategy to ensure the quality of life in relationship to local traditional values and conservation of natural resources in watershed areas.
- v. Evaluate effectiveness of association, cooperation between communities, central-provincial and district governments, functioning agencies and CHESH Laos Program in community sustainable development.

Output indicators

Native-ecological vegetables of Long Lan preoccupied the market share in Luang Prabang city and contribute to improving lives of villagers

Via supports and advices by the CHESH Laos Program on 23/10/2008 a shop in name of "Fresh Organic Vegetable" of Long Lan opened with the participation of local government authorities, media agencies and famous hotels in Luang Prabang City².

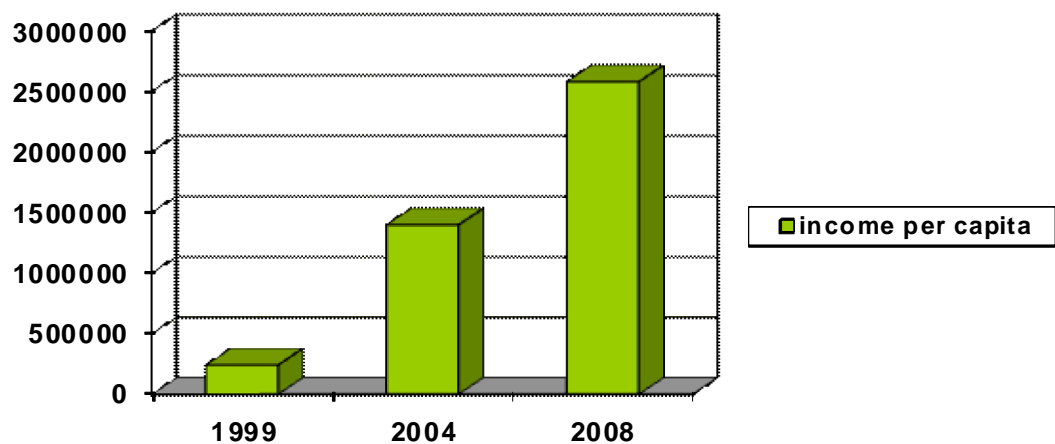
"I highly value the quality of vegetables grown by Long Lan people. This heritage should be preserving for development. I saw some problems that Long and Lan Luang Prabang district notes that: Many people mixed not good vegetables with that of Long Lan. So, we

² Mr. Thong Xa Van – vice chairman of Luang Prabang People's Committee, Mr. Xay Nha Phan, deputy director of PAFO, Mr. Xay Phon, Party Secretariat of Luang Prabang District, Luang Prabang Provincial department of Commercial and Trading, department of Environment, H'mong Newspapers in Luang Prabang, Luang Prabang News, Luang Prabang TV and Radio, Cultivation Office and Forestry Office of Luang Prabang provincial department of agriculture and forestry, Phu Vao and Phu Sy - Five Stars Hotel and so on. .

need to check strickly” (representive of Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Environment).

Development process for production and selling of eco-vegetables of Long Lan initially have effective and widespread impacts. According to villagers, vegetables by Long Lan is very good quality and well-known by consumers in Luang Prabang City.

According to statistics, the shift from slash-burnt cultivation to eco-vegetable growing increased significantly. In 2004, area for grwoing eco-vegetables is only 5.71 ha, and increased to 60 hectares in 2009. In 2004, production of vegetables has only 30 tons. In 2008, total yield is 384 tons. Average capita income also increased from 1,398,000 Kip in 2004 up to 2,581,000 Kip / person in 2008.



‘No Song’ Institution means ‘Eating commitment’ to the implementation of traditional customs of H’mong people in 22 villages of Luang Prabang district

On 31/3/2009, leaders of Long Lan in cooperation with the H’mong Association in Luang Prabang district organized the traditional ceremony - ‘No Song’ in community herbal preservation forest of village. Attending the ceremony with 74 representatives of 22 villages of H’mong people in Luang Prabang district, 130 people of Long lan, 55 representatives of provincial government departments, 9 representatives of research institutions³, networks of ethnic minorities inThailand and 30 delegates - representing Vietnamese government and tnetwork of ethnic minority in Vietnam⁴.

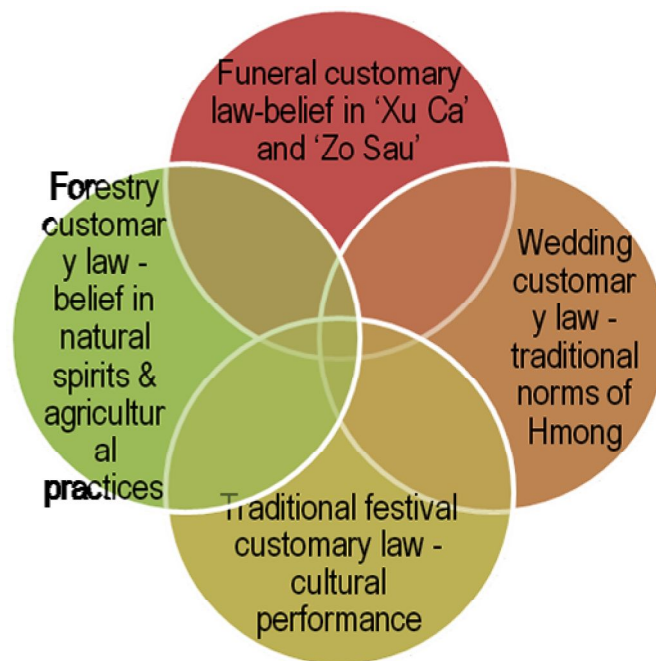
After the ceremony, representatives of 22 villages in Luang Prabang has discussed and unified commitments to implement different regulations in the customary law of H’mong.

³ Institute of Social Studies, Chiang Mai Uni. in Thailand

⁴ Legislative Department of Vietnamese Government Office, Vietnamese Embassy to Laos, Vietnam Union of Scientific and Technology Association (VUSTA) and Vietnam Multi-media Corporation (VTC)

The customary law relates to funeral regulation, wedding regulation, New Year regulation, and management and use of forests and agricultural land. As some villages like Khua I and Khoc Van⁵ have little or no forest, so the 'No Song' has agreed terms to get a community regulation of Long Lan in NRM which was recognized by the district government in 2006, become the commitment for implementation. The festival has also elected a board of leadership for 'No Song' and coordinating board for funeral of H'mong in Luang Prabang district⁶.

So, after 23 years (from 1986), 'No Song' ceremony is held back. However, the ceremony in this year is bigger in organization with participation of many representatives, especially government levels, and H'mong people from Vietnam and Thailand. Mr. Xay Xua Lu, Deputy of Luang Prabang H'mong Association, said: "Thank to supports of the CHESH Laos Program, we held successfully the traditional ceremony. We have wished this event for long time ago, but still not happened. This time, all representatives of 22 villages presented and agreed with the sense of constructive. Everyone is very excited because the traditional institution of H'mong in Luang Prabang is unified and committed to follow".



The re-organization of 'No Song' has brought big meaning in terms of confirming commitment of H'mong people in maintaining traditional customs, practices as well as NRM effectively on the basis of the customary law. Moreover, 'No Song' is being

⁵ There are villages bordering with Long Lan of Luang Prabang and Phon Xay districts, Luang Prabang province

⁶ Five members in the traditional 'No Song' structures of H'mong includes: Mr. Ly Pao - head, Mr. Xay Xua Lu and Xay Khu Zang and two other youths - deputy. Five members of funeral organization committee, leading by Mr. Pang Da.

spreading out 690 households of H'mong people (over 10,000 people) in 22 villages of Luang Prabang district.

Success of 'No Song' is the participation, recognized by government authorities at provincial and district levels, which helps the community to be confident to follow their commitments. This is a ten-years indicator for community development based on the foundation of traditional culture facilitated by the CHESH Laos Program. The traditional law of community in NRM is being realized and recognized by the government. It means the right of customary law of H'mong is recognized and being equal to the legal system. That is the process of grassroots democracy - people have rights to integrate their customary law with State's legal frames in responsible and transparent ways throughout the process of management and use of different types of natural resources.

Environmental degradation, natural resources exhausted, cultural erosion are concerns of the whole society. Practically, through lessons at the Long Lan, allocation of rights to the locals in management and use of forest resources, land is seen as an effective strategy. To achieve that, it needs a scrutinized research to incorporating the traditional institutions of ethnic minorities and State policies in the process of co-management of different forms of natural resources.

Since 2006, along with recognition of the local authorities to the traditional institutions, Long Lan villagers become confident and active in development process based on their traditional values. They have totally eradicated opium growing, limited slash-burnt agriculture. They gradually shift to growing the high value eco-vegetables for income generation. Quality of people's lives improved clearly. Specifically, total income of the whole village after 10 years (1999-2009) increased 10 times⁷. Importantly, not only Long Lan, but 22 Hmong villages in Luang Prabang district also began to realize the value of customary law in NRM, improving the livelihoods and community development. They pride and desire to develop as Long Lan.

Workshop on “Watershed special forest management and Community Development” organized by PAFO and the CHESH Laos Program is an open forum of strategic management of natural resources of minority groups in Lao-Vietnam-Thailand

The workshop is held at Suphanuvong University, Luang Prabang province from 2 to 3, April 2009. Attending the seminar are 96 official representatives, of which 9 of them are professors, elders from Thailand, 30 delegates - representing the Government, media agencies, researchers, elders, minority students from Vietnam, delegates of Luang Prabang provincial authorities, Luang Prabang, Phon Xay and Nam Bac district leaders, and 21 representatives of Long Lan, Xieng Da, and Nam Kha. Closing the seminar, representative of Luang Prabang Provincial People's Committee has officially declared the conclusion as a strategic direction for action, including:

⁷ In 1999, average income per capita in Long Lan is around 240,000 Kip; this increases up to 2.5 million Kips in 2009.

First: The workshop created a forum which is really meaningful for people, leadership, government at all levels, research institutes, training and development organizations to discuss hot issues related to sustainable management of forest resources in watershed areas based on customary law of ethnic minorities. This is a turning point of the theory and practice of the Luang Prabang province in forest management of special forest resources in watershed areas - where ethnic groups live.

Second: the customary law of ethnic minority plays a special role in sustainable management of forest resources in watershed areas which contributes to maintaining, upholding traditional values and stabilizing the life of people.

Third: allocation of rights to minority groups in watershed areas for long-term management and use of land and forest resources is an effective strategy. In which, there is a need to incorporate the customary law and state legal frames in the process of co-management of natural resources in watershed areas.

Fourth: it needs to integrate key local persons such as elderly, prestigious people, minority youths, researchers, development workers to record and summarize customary laws of communities in sustainable management and use of natural resources in watershed areas.

Fifth: Need to have carefully studies in which there is a special role of village elders the customary laws of minority groups in order to integrate into training programs at elementary, secondary, intermediate, college, university, etc.

Sixth: There should have other workshops at the higher levels e.g. National and Mekong about the customary law in NRM in watershed areas in order to share experiences for expansion.

Seventh: We would like to suggest the CHESH Laos Program to continue to supporting, consulting our officials and authorities to expand the pilot model on sustainable management of forest resources in watershed areas based on customary law to other villages in the Province.

Long Lan initially became Village of Culture - Economy - Ecology

The traditional value of Hmong have been consolidated and developed

Long Lan has long-historical traditional institutions and being consolidated through education system which is performed in spiritual ceremonies, such as 'No Song', 'No Pi Chau' (new year festival), 'Ua Su' (releasing un-lucks in the year). Through enabling opportunities and conditions, from 1999 to present, values of customary law and indigenous knowledge of the community have been promoted.

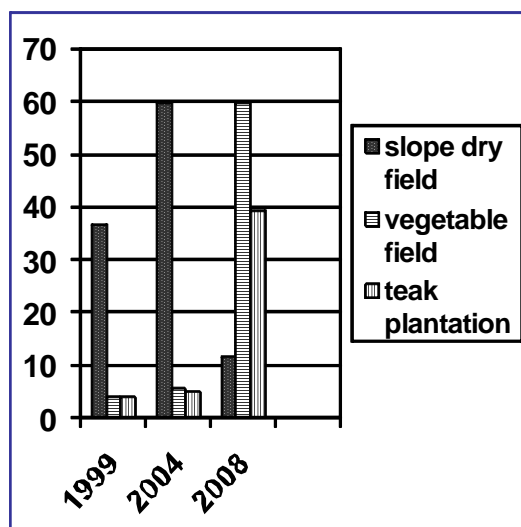
Different study-exchanges in-outside country of key persons such as elders, prestigious people, key farmers have not only contributed to raising awareness that help them to

identify risks affecting their cultural values and sustainability of management of natural resources and security of livelihoods.

Program of land allocation, in one hand, allocated rights for individual households, community organizations as well as the whole village to long-term use and management of land and forest resources. Further, it affirms rights of customary law in the formal system.

The traditional ‘No Song’ ceremony of Hmong in Luang Prabang district is a turning point in conservation and promotion of values of cultural identity, stability and strengthening of the traditional institutions. After 23 years, the ‘No Song’ is re-organized not only to show the local commitment to maintain the long historical traditional customs, further is the position of Hmong asserted by the society. First time in Luang Prabang, the government authorities recognized traditional institutions of Hmong. It could be said that this is a process of institutionalization and grassroots democracy of the customary law which has been practiced effectively by the locals for many years ago.

Long Lan completely removed opium growing, limited slash-burnt agriculture and gradually changed to eco-vegetable cultivation. Economic life of Long Lan community has been improved. Indicators of economic growth increased significantly.



Before 2000, people's lives in Long Lan mainly depend on planting opium. In 2001, the government imposed the policy to eradicate opium growing; villagers have to switch to slash-burnt cultivation and started experiment of new ways for economic development via growing fruit trees and apparatus. So that, area of slash-burnt cultivation raised up from 36.7 ha in 1999 to 59.9 ha in 2004. Income per capita per year increases from 241,000 in 1999 to 1,398,000 in 2004. In 2006, along with needs of consumers, people are aware of values of these eco-vegetables in the market. Mr. Chong Zia Zang is a pioneer in

experimenting apparatus and the high values native vegetables. According to Mr. Zang: slash-burnt cultivation made only 2 tons of rice per year, 5 tons of maize which are enough for self-consumption. However, it takes a lot of effort. Particularly, traveling from house to the fields could take half a day. Many cases, villagers did not harvest any things due to bad weather, wild animals and poor quality of soils. Growing vegetables takes less time for traveling, not need to taking care much until harvesting; so that, we can annually earn over ten million Kips. This amount not only enough to buy foods, but also save for other family's affairs.

As a result, land area for eco-vegetable increases from 6 ha in 2004 to 60 ha in 2008, and production raised up from 30 tons in 2004 to 384 tons in 2008. Income per capita in 2008 reached 2,600,000, up 200% compared with the year 2004.

As the advantages of suitable weather and food availability, in addition to revenue from the growing and consumption of vegetables, Long Lan villagers also focus on raising local species of cows. So that, the total cow population has grown from 320 in 2005 to 389 in 2008. On average, one family has 6 cows. These cows are also a reserved capital to spend in big events in families or the whole community.

Currently, whole village has 67 households, of which 10 households excess food (16%), 52 households having enough foods (77%) and 5 households facing food shortage (7%). In 2000, there is only one motorcycle, the village has 41 motorcyles, 5 cars and 2 agrimotors in 2008. Moreover, in 2008, the Luang Prabang provincial department of education give a award for Long Lan as a village of illiterate eradication.

Long lan people are always aware of hygiene environment and community solidarity

One of the community regulations of Long Lan is that addicts who continue to smoke must go out of the village. Therefore, 2001 Long Lan has 54 households, of that 51 households grow opium, but only 3 people smoke. In 2008, Long Lan sent ththese three addcted people to set addicts. Presently, one people has still not cut drug.

All village does not have anyone smoking, no alcohol, even in big festivals as 'No Song', 'No Pi Chau 'or funeral and wedding. This is special, different from any H'mong communities in Laos and Vietnam.

Since 2000 up to date, Long Lan has set up and well maintained a commual area for raising pigs. The village has spent more than 20 hectares of land located next to the forest, surrounded by greens. So, those who raise pigs into that area, to meals for the food, pigs will eat any of that. They never compete each other for foods. The communal area for raising pigs contributes very much for keeping hygiene, as well strengthen the solidarity among families in village.

Not specified, but every day, in the evening families all involve in clean in their house and around the village. Therefore, the village is always clean, no garbage and cattle. In 2008, Long Lan is recognized by Luang Prabang province as the 3 clean village (clean in family, clean in village and clean in foods).

System of traditional and government leadership of Long Lan is responsible, creative and able to decide issues of developmen

Village formal leadership system⁸ includes enthusiasm and responsible people. They unite and respect the traditional village elders. Anything related to the community they all

⁸ Mr. Blia Tua Zang - Long Lan head, Mr. Kong Chu Ly, vice head of Long Lan village, Mr. Hay Ho Mua, vice head of Long Lan village and Mrs. Nang Chu – chair of Village Women Union, and Mr. Za Cha - chair of Village Youth

ask for advices of the traditional village leader - Mr. Khay Xu Zang. Coalition and unity between the formal and traditional village leaders have helped to resolve many challenges related to maintaining the traditional values and effective management of natural resources⁹. The formal and traditional village leaders successfully organize the ceremony of 'No Song' of the H'mong people in Luang Prabang district in April 2009.

Mr. Henk - Representatives of ICCO after the field trip to Long Lan has some quick assessments: *'I am very pleased to see the active and confidence of Long Lan villagers in their own decisions. They have very interesting initiatives!'*

From 2000 to present, with the support of CHESH Laos Program, Long Lan villagers have self-decisions via particular indicators. For example, they have successfully lobbied

Union. New Board of Long Lan Farther front includes: Mr. Za Zi zang - head, Mr. Bua Zia tho - deputy, Mr. Kong Minh Zang, Pa Xo Ly, Chia Po Ly, Xenh Hu Ly, Xay Tua Zang, Cho Va Ly and Xua Cho Ly - members.

⁹ *Meaning of the customary law in management of natural resources and community: Mr. Henk Baker - ICCO representatives in Vietnam asked: If there is a decision in the community who decides? Are there any difficulties and how does the village solve? Mr. Xay Khu Zang - Long Lan village elders answered: Imagine, Long Lan is seen as a small country. Therefore, Long Lan must have its regulations to adjust and harmonize all acts and behaviors of village members.*

Long Lan has its own community structure leading by the formal village leaders, including village head, deputy and representatives of mass organizations such as farther front, youth, women, etc. Moreover, Long Lan has the elder council to advice in time for the formal village leadership in all activities. Under the elder council is 6 clans. This structure ensures participation of all families, clans related to common activities.

To maintain unique values of Long Lan, we set up a system to customary law. Our law reflects both education and punishment. For example, if any families want to live permanently in village, they first must learn Long Lan customary law. If they agree to comply with the law, they are allowed for settlement. In ten years of living, if they do not violate the law and have good relations with villagers, they are allowed to constitute to live in village. Moreover, they are also allowed to collect wood, bamboo in the community productive forest for housing. If not, they have to go out of the community.

In general, our costmary laws are mainly to educate and awaken men. Therefore, when someone violates terms of the customary law, they are educated by clan head at first; after that is the village elder council and formal village leadership. If there are no any changes after educated, they must be fined by the village regulation or sent to the higher levels of authority for resolution. For example, if someone cut one tree, ones have to re-plant 3 trees, not including cash penalty.

In fact, most of the households are in compliance with terms of the village regulation, for example regulations of not drinking and smoking in village. At the beginning, some people, especially young in village did not comply. Then, elders in village discussed and agreed to not drink alcohol and smoking in wedding and funeral. Young saw their grand-fathers and fathers then give up all bad habits.

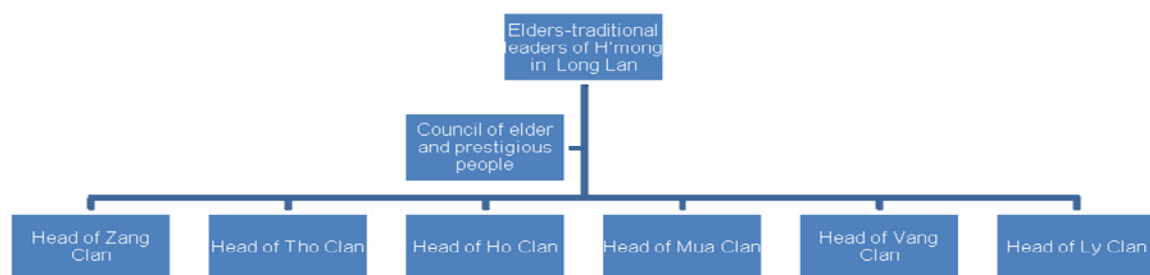
The customary law is not fixable. It can be changed to suit the specific condition. When I was head of Long Lan region, I've witnessed 5 times of change in the customary law to wedding custom. Previously, the boys must prepare 18 ingots of silver or 1 pig with the length of 6 spans (instead of 1 ingot) to pay as wedding offerings to the girl's family. However, the poor family or orphaned youth did not have enough weeding offerings for marrying to a wife. Because of that, many youths had to be self-poisoned. Therefore, I organized a meeting with the village elder council to solve that situation. After 5 times of change, the weeding offerings just only include 1 million Kips, 10 liters of wine and 1 pig with the length of 6 spans. Indeed, there is no need to regulate such weeding offerings. However, many cases after getting marry, the husband violated his wife. So that, we still maintain this regulation just as the guarantee.

The fact is that the traditional Long Lan regulation can only be applied to insiders. Many outsiders do not follow that regulation. Therefore, in 2005 we recommended the district authority to approve our customary law in management and use of forest after the land allocation supported by the CHESH Laos Program. The community regulation incorporates village norms and government laws. Therefore, it can apply to both Long Lan people and outsiders. The regulations have defined the right of village to arrest and punish acts of violating our forest and land. It just shows the education and use of a penalty. Our forests are protected as good as today because of the community regulations.

the district authorities to recognize their customary law in forest management and land use planning based on indigenous knowledge. Besides, they've cooperated with 12 neighbouring villages to protect over 5,000 ha of natural forests effectively. After the forest land allocation, people self-find their own direction in effective usage of allocated land and forest areas.

Based on specific land and climate conditions, people have effectively grown native vegetables without using chemicals. As a result, whole village can annually produce over 300 tons of native vegetables, fruits of all kinds for the market in Luang Prabang City. Revenue from production of fresh vegetables has improved the livelihoods of households.

Therefore, development is a process towards self-determination and self-resolution. Currently, local people are able to identify difficulties and challenges, self-identify potential opportunities in that autonomy process.



Since the autonomized decisions, villagers self-made initiatives in accordance with terms of the localities, while there still harmonize with changes of the whole society. Especially, that development dose not abuses the availability of natural resources.

Autonomy and creativity is a foundation of the grassroots democratic process. In other words, if there is not transparent democracy, people will not have opportunities to develop their creativities. Dependent situation of the local communities to outside will be inevitable.

In order to obtaining positions of the customary law in the formal system, it is obvious that the traditional village leaders (e.g. Mr. Xay Khu Zang and Cho Xy Zang¹⁰) play a

¹⁰ Mr. Xay Khu Zang – Hmong people in Long Lan village, Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos was born on 5/8/1946. From 1980 to 1985, he was a policeman and responsible for ‘Phu Sung’ - mountainous region in Luang Prabang district. From 1986 to 1995, he was a head of the mountainous department of Luang Prabang district. Currently, he is an advisor for Long Lan Council of Elders and play a role of the spiritual village leader. So that, most people respect him. His concerns are how to preserve cultural identity of Hmong and forest protection.

Mr. Cho Xy Zang – Hmong pepple in Long Lan village was on 15/7/1937. He graduated at Colleague of Health Care in 1970. Mr. Cho Xy Zang is a head of Zang Clan in Long Lan. From 1971 to 1988, he was a chairman of the ‘Phu Sung’ region. From 1989 to present, he is a head of Organization Office of Luang Prabang district People's Committee. That they clock in Long Zang Lan. He is a prestige for upland ethnic groups in Luang Prabang. His concerns is how to

crucial important role. Mr. Xay Khu Zang has advised villagers and district authorities to reallocate 170 hectares of cultivated land for Hmong people in Nam Bo - neighboring village of Long Lan. Also, he has advices for the community to democratically re-elect a new board of village leaders¹¹. Families in and out village whenever have problems, they all ask for advisory and educative opinions from the traditional village leader. Therefore, Mr. Xay Khu Zang is elected as a prestigious leader in 22 Hmong villages of Luang Prabang district.

Long Lan becomes a forum for people in and outside the country to learn, share experiences in preserving traditional cultural values, sustainable management and usage of natural resources and economic development

Since the community regulation of Long Lan in management and usage of forest and agricultural land is approved by the Luang Prabang district authority, the villagers become confident and active in resolving their own problems. For example, Long Lan effectively resolve the land and forest lease to private company to grow coffee, land disputes between Long Lan and Nam Bo, especially cases of stealing woods and herbal medicines in the forest. Presently, more than 6,000 ha of natural forests is well managed. Luang Prabang province has planned forest area of Long Lan to become 'natural protected forest'. Suphanuvong University in Luang Prabang has taken Long Lan for different Master Researches of its students such as community-based forest management, community based land allocation and herbal medicines.

Luang Prabang district proposed cooperation with Long Lan and CHESH Lao program to expand the model on growing and selling eco-vegetables to other local neighborhoods. In addition, Department of Cultivation of Ministry of Agriculture and Forest of Laos has taken the model on eco-vegetables of Long Lan to become the field learning for replication across the country. Department of Cultivation invited Long Lan villagers to become key-note speakers in the workshop on promotion of fresh vegetable growing in Luang Prabang province.

Clearly, Long Lan as a bright model as Mr. Xay Nha Phan - Deputy Director of PAFO affirmed: 'With supports of the project, Long Lan is currently recognized by Luang Prabang province as: hero village, cultural village and three clean villages, well-forest management village, eco-agricultural and eco-tourism village'.

Lao Lun in Xieng Da village, Nam Bac district, Luang Prabang province are confident, active in management, development of economic and community development based on advantageous potentials of the local

With the higher knowledge and awareness, in 2008, leaders and people in Xieng Da are active, confident to develop small-scale projects for mobilizing capital resources of

enhance capacity, awareness of minority groups in traditional cultural preservation and sustainable economic development

¹¹ Mr. Chong Vu Zang, Long Lan village head and Mr. Pa Chong Zang - head of fartherland front of Long Lan

organizations in and outside country. Mr. Xom Lit, a key farmer confidently said: *'In the end 2008, the village carried out a lot of work, especially the mobilization of outside resources to build communal constructions.*

I adopted what is learned by CHESH Laos to build the plan as small scale projects for resources mobilization. The projects must indicate long-term goals, short-term, systematic work, which focuses on the participation and contribution of people as well as cost-effective after completion. Then, I ask for seal and recognition of the district authority and functioning sectors. I made a project, and submitted to aid's program of Thailand to build a cultural house in Xieng Da. After reviewing the submitted proposal, they highly appreciate and agreed to support 10 millions Kip, with 12 millions voluntarily contributed by villagers, the cultural house is currently constructed. The village just got a new project worth 300 million kips for building a primary and secondary school. Currently, schools are beginning constructed. In addition, I along with the village leadership mobilized a lot of money by individuals, enterprises to upgrade the pagoda'.

Communal spiritual and educational infrastructures such as school and pagoda of Xieng Da has gradually become more spacious. The old pagoda of Xieng Da has been re-borned after 10 years of ruin. The base of beliefs is being recovered through the charitable contributions of their children in and out of village. New house for monks also completes, very nice. The cultural house is built next to Nam Buoi River. The old school is replaced by spacious classrooms khang page, enough for childrens to study up to secondary level.

Currently, the traditional handicraft group is well maintaining its activities of weaving, natural dyed colors and making products for selling at markets in Luang Prabang city. Member of the group increase steadily. More other women voluntarily involve in the group. Monthly, the group organizes a meeting to share experiences. The group cooperates companies and shops to produce handicraft products. Therefore, this activity significantly contributes to improve income of the group's members. Daily average revenue per producer is up about 21 thousand Kips. The group's fund also is increased with the total more than 3 million Kip.

Healers in Xieng Da have processed herbal medicines for many patients, including soldiers and people in NamThuom region¹². Currently, number of patients asking for healers increased. Sometimes, healers can not be processed in time for the medication of patients. So that, the healer group has a plan to set up a community center for herbal medicine based health care treatment in the community herbal medicine forest. This plan is agreed by village leaders and Nam Bac district agriculture and forestry office (DAFO).

It can be confirmed that after 10 years of support and consultation of the CHESH Laos Program, ability and awareness of village leaders and Lao Lum community in Xieng Da have been clearly enhanced. The traditional cultural values are well restored and

¹² Nam Thuom is planned as an economic development zone of Nam Bac district, Luang Prabang province. Xieng Da and Nam Kha villages are core parts of this zone.

maintained. The pagoda where is home to belief and norms of the community is spaciouly upgraded. Beliefs through the traditional festivals of the community are being re-born¹³. The traditional handicraft production has been recovered and developed. Some small scale of community enterprises in agriculture and handicraft production appear. Economic conditions of households has been improved. From 2008, Xieng Da is not listed as a poverty village in Luang Prabang province.

Valuable experiences through study-exchange visits in Vietnam as increase awareness and confidence of elders, healers and Luang Prabang government authorities in sustainable management of natural resources

In accordance with needs of Xieng Da, Nam Kha and Long Lan villages, from 6 to 19 May 2009, The Lao-Viet Network for Traditional Culture Herbal Medicine organized study-exchange visits to Vietnam¹⁴ for 17 for healers¹⁵ and authorities of Luang Prabang province¹⁶, Laos the doctors and staff Luang Prabang province, Lao PDR in Vietnam.

Delegation visited and shared with elders at community forests based on 'Nao Long' customary law of H'mong in Simacai district, Lao Cai province, healers of Black Thai at community herbal medicine forests in Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province, as well as visiting the model forest biodiversity in HEPA. Experiences and lessons from the trips strengthen awareness, ability and confidence of elders and Luang Prabang authorities.

After the trip, delegates recognized that: the philosophy of SPERI in 'Nurturing the Nature' is being as values of customary law of ethnic minority groups in protection of natural resources. 'Nurturing the Nature' is not only by words but by their daily behavior. This behavior is derived from the emotional heart, with experiences of life and customary laws of minority groups. Hmong minority has customary laws such as 'Tong Seng', 'Nao Long' and 'Thu Ty' while Black Thai in Hanh Dich practice 'Lac Xua' - all to protect land and forest resources which nurthre their origins. HEPA has a nine-pillars Da tree and Huyen Vi temple to transfer values of 'Nurturing the Nature' for students from ethnic

¹³ On 16/10/2008, Xieng Da village organized the spiritual ceremony, namely 'Oc Phan Xa'. This is the biggest yearly spiritual ceremony according to Buddiism. So that, all villagers in Xieng Da and neighboring villages attended. After this ceremony, Monks could get out the pagoda. Daily, villagers of Xieng Da bring offerings like flowers, foods and etc to place in the pagoda for praying.

¹⁴ Delegates visited and shared with: Black Thai healers in Hanh Dich, Que Phong district, Nghe An province, minority students in the Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA) in Son Kim I commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province and Farmer Field School in Nan San_Simacai district, Lao Cai province, H'mong healers in Can Cau and Can Ho commune, Simacai district, Lao Cai province.

¹⁵ Xieng Da and Nam Kha village, Nam Bac district, Long Lan in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Nong Het district of Xieng Khoang province and Vientiane province, Laos

¹⁶ Representatives of Luang Prabang PAFO, Luang Prabang Provincial Office of Forestry, Luang Prabang and Nam Bac DAFO, Luang Prabang Provincial Association of Oriental Medicine, and authorities of Luang Prabang district People's Committee.

minorities. Forests, ecological farms and traditional houses in HEPA are to getting back and preserving the harmony between Nature and People.

The delegation also understand very clearly values and linkages of Forest – Herbal Medicines – Culture. These are three survival factors of ethnic minorities and Forest likes Mother's men. The forest provide men everything such as water, fire and air which help people survival. Land - Forest create the cultural value of minority groups. Forest nurtures herbal medicines which create culture of herbal medicines. Without forest, everything will be disappeared, herbal plants loose their mother, man live without direction.

One of the challenges that the delegation recognized is that forests in Laos and Vietnam are being threatening. Therefore, they are all aware of the need to protect forests. These lessons are useful to all delegates. They firmly believe in the results achieved by minority communities in Laos, especially that of Long Lan village over the past 10 years.

Valuable experiences of Black Thai healers in Hanh Dich in confirming the right of community herbal medicine and practices of healers are all concerned by the delegates. Then, there is a need to setting up open networks for healers to share and practice their traditional knowledge. The networks must include voluntary members - not for individual benefits but mainly of the community. Operation of the networks should be recognized, and then integrated into the system at all government levels. Also, supports of functioning agencies such as provincial and district association of oriental medicine are necessary.

Reflecting into activities of the herbal medicine networks in Laos, the delegates recognized that they have more advantages compared to Vietnam. First, there are constructive supports of government at all level. Second, forest resources and land are still rich; so that herbal medicine plantts are availably diverse. Therefore, members of the visit is very confident for development activities in the future of their localities. They actively propose action plans after the trip¹⁷.

¹⁷ i) The CHESH Laos should support Luang Prabang district to set up a model of biodiversity and practical training as HEPA. Mr. Som Vang - Head of Agri-Forestry Office of Luang Prabang district, said: *We would like to have a model in Luang Prabang as HEPA*. In Luang Prabang, Kuang Si waterfall area where there are Hmong and Khmu people is the most affected. So, that area is the most suitable to set up a model. If the CHESH Laos support us, Luang Prabang district of Agri-forestry office is willing to allocate land for building such model.

ii) Organize survey, investigation and assess the quantity, quality of herbal medicine plants at HEPA forests for conservation and development. Mr. Lam Bay, coordinator of the Lao-Viet Traditional Culture Herbal Medicine, said: HEPA has very good forest, diversity of herbal plants. These are valuable assets not only of SPERI, but also for ethnic minority groups. However, we have not yet did survey and investigation.

iii) Strengthen the networks of herbal medicines in Laos for sharing with each other and training young minorities. Mr. Bun Phet - healer in Xieng Da, said: Currently, we have three healer groups. In which, the group in Long Lan is already strong. The groups in Xieng Da and Nam Kha still need to be reinforced. We must provide training classes for young people and recruit more members like Hanh Dich.

Approach

Community-based development activities in all consultation and supports:

Based on the customary laws and local knowledge in accordance with leadership role of the village elders and prestige people as well as to promote inner-strengths of the community. For Hmong in Long Lan village, approaches of the CHESH Laos Program have effectively promoted community regulations in management and usage of forest resources and agricultural land as well as the decisive role of village elders and prestige people in the community. More effective activities in Long Lan are mainly based on active participations of the elders.

For Lao Lum people in Xieng Da, the CHESH Laos Program has flexibly applied values of Buddhism beliefs, decisive roles and dare to think, dare to do of some key farmers such as Mr. Xom Lit and Chan Keo. Activities for Khmu people in Nam Kha are mainly based on responsibilities and understanding of some key farmers such as Mr. Thoogn Phay and Bun Chin Lieng Pha Chanh.

Approach and promote the role and prestige of authorities at all levels¹⁸

They are authorities who deeply understand of the CHESH Laos approach on community-based NRM. Besides playing a role of legal umbrella for CHESH Laos activities, PAFO is quite active and responsible to implement development activities such as organizing big workshops proposed by villagers. Workshop on Community Base Special Forest Protection and Community Development' in May 2009 was successful because of the cooperation closely with local governments and functioning agencies in Luang Prabang province. Through PAFO channel, results of the CHESH Laos after 10 years are confirmed, publicized and expanded in Luang Prabang province. Mr. Som Phong - director of PAFO suggested the continuity of the CHESH Laos in the years to come. So that, he will create enabling conditions and legal frames for the CHESH Laos to get long term right to use over 10 hectares of land to build a center for practical training on ecological agriculture.

Based on the role of leadership and staffs of Luang Prabang and Nam Bac district by creating opportunities, conditions for them to discuss and work directly with local people to understand of the realities. From that they will have consultations suitable with values of the locals. For Luang Prabang district, the program works based on role of Mr. Cho Xy Zang, responsible official for the mountainous areas, while he is a head of Zang clan. His voice has a great reputation for Hmong people in high land areas of Luang Prabang. Based on his advices, Mr. Xay Khu Zang – the village elder of Long Lan actively joined back activities of the community. In addition, in order to successfully solve land and forest conflicts between Long Lan and the neighboring village - Nam Bo, CHESH Laos program has mobilized the participation of leaders and heads of government departments of two district Luang Prabang and Phon Xay as well as villagers. The role of district

iv) Luang Prabang and Nam Bac district authorities should have more supports to: a) expand herbal medicine networks to other villages, and b) provide legal certificates for healers to practice.

¹⁸ For instance, Mr. Song Phong PRADICHIT – director of PAFO and Mr. Bun Than – deputy director of PAFO

chairman and deputy head of Nam Bac district agriculture and forestry is also mobilized in coordination of development activities at Xieng Da and Nam Kha village.

Mr. Henk, ICCO representative in Vietnam after the field visit to Long Lan, said: Programmatic Approach is a respect, cooperation between NGOs, between NGOs and other partners. Partners may be government institutions, research and training organizations, media and press. This strategy aims to create opportunities and conditions for different social thematic networks, beneficiaries to learn from each other. It is important that partners respect concerns, interests and approaches of each other's. In such a playing field, if partners find out the same sense of, interests and concerns, they can come together. Coming to each other is because of common development of the whole society, which specifies targeted groups they are reaching.

The CHESH Laos is an example of the Programmatic Approach. Why? Firstly, the CHESH Laos has cooperated very effectively with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos, the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture Forestry Office (PAFO) and different functioning sectors, together with people to find appropriate solutions in sustainable management of local livelihood resources. It is important, the CHESH Laos has helped Luang Prabang province to have a good model in sustainable management and usage of forests, land and fair market for eco-vegetables.

Second, in the process of industrialization and globalization, natural resources play a key role for balance and autonomy. World is today quite open, but very small. Trans-national companies are hunting natural resources left in developing countries such as Vietnam and Laos. And that, themes that CHESH Laos has been much focused are suitable with the new trends- which is concerned by ICCO - border crossing issues. For example, herbal medicine is a very important topic, not only at community level but it also connects people from different countries.

Third, CHESH Laos has proper strategies to lobby the government at all levels to participate in activities of the locals. Also, the CHESH Laos has put away of complexity - the relationship of power to find out long-term strategic cooperation for common development.

Fourth, the CHESH Laos has created democratic spaces for different thematic networks such as herbal medicine, traditional handicraft production, growing eco-vegetables to promote their strengths in the process of cooperation. Thus, the programmatic approach is not only at cooperation among NGOs, but also among community based organizations (CBOs) which have the same interests and concerns.

Incorporating the government policy and customary law in all developmental activities at community level. Based on the traditional law and local experience, since 2005, Long Lan villagers have set up their own community regulation in management and use of forest resources, agricultural land and herbal medicines. The community regulation is incorporated with the law on land, law on forest for practical implementation¹⁹. The laws of custom, on protection of forests

¹⁹ In Article No.46 of the forestry law of Laos mentioned: Annually, the government has a campaign to grow trees on the first June, Xieng Da village take the date on 15/8 to hold 'Bot Ton May' spiritual ceremony to protect forest. In Article No. 28 of the Forestry Law of Laos mentioned: families are allowed

through the 'No Song' traditional institutions of Hmong with the participation of provincial and district authorities is the process of incorporating the traditional and formal systems. Based on the values of Buddhism, Lao Lum in Xieng Da held the spiritual ceremony, so-called 'Buot Ton May' to protect watershed forests. Beside, the herbal medicine group in village facilitated villagers to set up community regulation for preservation of herbal medicine forest. As a result, Nam Bac district Peoples' Committee has allocated right to the herbal medicine group to manage over 51 ha of communal herbal medicine forest for community usage.

Mobilizing the participation of press and media as well as professional training colleagues in research and public awareness raising for approaches and results of community development.

In recent years, CHESH Laos has associated with the Hmong Newspapers, Television and Radio of Luang Prabang province to promote eco-localized vegetable products of Long Lan. This has made the image and prestige of vegetable products of Long Lan increasingly spreading in markets of Luang Prabang city. Experience in organization, production of vegetables of Long Lan is being known by Department of Cultivation, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos. At the same time, effective in management and protection of forests of Long Lan is also recognized by provincial authorities and functioning agencies. As a result, in 2008, forest of Long Lan is planned by the Luang Prabang province as good model in community based forest conservation. Moreover, Suphanuvong University has organized different Master studies in Long Lan for its students such as community based land and forest allocation, community based forest management and herbal medicine based community health care treatment.

Collaboration with the farmer field schools of SPERI to organize practical training on ecological farming for minority youths.

In previous years, the CHESH Laos has sent two students - one is of Hmong in Long Lan and other is Khmu in Nam Kha to participating in long-term practical training courses in land use designing for eco-farming at FFSs in Human Ecology Practice Areas (HEPA) in Son Kim commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province-Vietnam. As a result, after 15 months, these two students are confident to build up eco-farming models at household level. This is an appropriate strategy and will be continued by the CHESH Laos in coming years in order to create a network of young minority farmers in ecological agriculture and community development workers at their own villages.

Challenges

1. How to manage well over 8 thousand hectares of forest and land resources of Long Lan while that of surrounding villages are little with high density of population as well as the increasing demand of cash crop and plantations due to the promotion policies of the government?

to cut maximum of 5 m³ of woods to make a new house, while the customary law of Long Lan stipulates: Families are allowed to cut not over 5 m³ of woods in communal usage forest to make a new house, but that families must resettle in Long Lan at least 10 years.

2. In 2008, more than 6 thousand hectares of watershed forest of Long Lan is recognized as the conservation forest of the Luang Prabang province. However, the actual mechanisms are not specific for implementation of such decision. This is a new challenge for Long Lan, local authorities and the CHESH Laos to find appropriate mechanisms to create a model in which local people as main managers, instead of government officers.
3. When eco-localized vegetables of Long Lan become goods and accepted by the market, and occupy the main proportion in income structure of families, it could lead to a number of trends: i) increase the intensivity of cultivation, abuse new technologies and chemicals, ii) expand more forest for growing commercial vegetables with mechanized measures. Both the above cases can lead to an increase in the level of dependency, reducing the quality of natural resources, as well as reduction or loss of reputation for ecological vegetables in the markets of Luang Prabang city.
4. Currently, 80% of households in Long Lan have houses, land and relatives in Luang Prabang City. These are basis for their childrens to study and work in city. Besides these positive factors for their childrens to get the higher educations, exchanges and improve physical conditions, but there appear many challenges which cause gradually losing the traditional culture and norms among youths. According to Mr. Xay Khu Zang: *“land, forest of Long Lan may be maintained, but the traditional culture of H’mong people could be difficult to be preserved. Currently, we can not distinguish who are H’mong and Lao Lum - majority youths.*
5. Nam Thuom which includes Nam Kha and Xieng Da village is planned by Nam Bac district, Luang Prabang province to become an economic development zone and massive development programs of the government such as Pac U Hydropower Dam Building, cash plantations (e.g. rubbers) on areas of agricultural land and watershed forests may lead to new conflicts, including:
 - i) Land disputes between immigrants and indigenous people
 - ii) Disputes over forest resources between immigrants and local people to maintain life
 - iii) Local traditional insitutions could be inverted due to mixation of many ethnic groups with different values
 - iv) Consequences may be conflicts between ethnic groups, uncertain life and poverty.
6. After 10 years, the CHESH Laos has withdraw experiences and lessons learnt in management of watershed forests based on customary law, sustainable community development, community based land and forest allocation and conservation of local knowledge, etc. Therefore, how can experiences, lessons learnts and approaches of the CHESH Laos become theories and lectures for professional training organizations and become the government policy to expand to other provinces in Laos?

Orientation of CHESH Laos Program (2009-2012)

1. Research and consulting to establish a model on special forest conservation based on Hmong community in Long Lan village, Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos. The goal is to propose policies in recognizing local communities to become main managers of the special forest conservation in watershed areas.

2. Collaboration with research centers and professional training organizations to develop researches on watershed forest resources management based on customary law, sustainable community development, community based land and forest allocation and conservation of herbal medicines, etc. These above topics are basics for setting up theoretical frameworks, curriculum for research institutes and professional training organizations (e.g. Chiang Mai University - Thailand, Suphanuvong and Dong Dok University in Laos) in Mekong region.

3. Collaboration with Suphanuvong University in Luang Prabang - Lao and Chiang Mai University - Thailand to set up and operate Human-Ecology Faculty for research and training of bachelor and postgraduate degree (e.g. MA and PhD).

4. Through the traditional 'No Song' institutions, cooperating with H'mong Association in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province to carry out activities related to community development, NRM and cultural identity preservation, etc.

5. Continue to facilitate and evaluate the model of fair trade through the production-consumption of eco-vegetable products of Long Lan to expand to other villages which have the similarities of climate, socio-economic cultural and landscape conditions. In the same time, establishing farmer field schools on ecological farming based on indigenous knowledge in Long Lan for training minority youths in the region.

6. Associate with different thematic networks in the Mekong region (e.g. Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia), such as: customary law in NRM in watershed areas, conservation of herbal medicinal knowledge and fair trade for ecological products.

7. Link to farmer field schools (FFSs) of SPERI and professional training centers inside and outside country to seek for and train young minority people on different topics, such as ecological agriculture, community development, forest conservation, etc.

8. Continue the cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos, the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture Forestry Office and other agencies to: i) extend the results and approach of the CHESH Laos in the 1999-2009 period, and ii) analysing and feedback government policies at all levels.

9. Strengthening linkages with press and media at all levels (e.g. Central and Local Television and radio, Newspaper of Hmong in Luang Prabang province) to promote and expand approaches and results of the CHESH Laos with the strategy to raise public awareness and lobby the government policies.