



Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods



Issue 1 MARCH 2015

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## Welcome!

The SPSL quarterly newsletter keeps our stakeholders up to date on project progress. This first issue highlights the signing of our MoU, the first Laos Social Protection Conference and our social protection study tour to Bangladesh.

SPSL promotes social protection as a tool to reduce poverty, increase equality and promote inclusive growth in Laos. We aim to:

- build knowledge and awareness of social protection;
- strengthen the government's social protection capacity;
- help establish sustainable livelihoods for 3,000 poor families through our Resilient Livelihoods for the Poor (RLP) programme; and
- demonstrate the effectiveness of productive asset transfer schemes.

Visit our website to find out more about us.

The Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods (SPSL) project is part of the Laos–Australia Rural Livelihoods Programme (LARLP). It is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and sponsored by the Government of Laos through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW).

Maxwell Stamp PLC (MSP) leads the consortium that runs the project that includes Help Age International and Community & Environmental Services Ltd (CES), in conjunction with a range of partners.

## Bangladesh study tour

4–10 January 2015

The SPSL team organized an 8-day visit to Bangladesh from 4 to 10 January 2015 for Government of Laos officials from the central and provincial levels of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in the three implementing provinces, Savannakhet, Salavan and Champasak, and for programme or operations managers from the three implementing non-governmental organizations. The group saw two of the largest 'graduation' programmes in the world: the Chars Livelihoods Programme, implemented by Maxwell Stamp; and Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUB), implemented by BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). The schedule included visiting day-to-day operations in the field, meeting beneficiaries in their homes and learning how local governments and communities engage in and support the programmes. The highlights of the trip were:

- A half-day introductory workshop;
- Meeting with DFAT and their IT department to gain an insight into the donor experience; and
- Visiting the BRAC TUB project in the urban slums.



The SPSL group visiting the BRAC Targeting the Ultrapoor project



## CREATING SYNERGY: Resilient Livelihoods for the Poor and SPSL orientation

27 January 2015, Lao Plaza Hotel

The Resilient Livelihoods (RLP)/SPSL orientation workshop in Vientiane was chaired by Mr Pasong Vongkhamchanh, the Acting Director General of the Social Welfare Department, MoLSW, and co-chaired by Mr Mone Sysavath, Programme Manager, DFAT Vientiane. The workshop focused on the partnerships essential in achieving our project aims.

Starting with an overview of SPSL and the RLP programme, the discussion moved on to the role of our implementing partners and the sub-MoU drawn up to enable us to work together. Selecting target villages is a key part of our work and we need complete synergy between the different components of the Laos–Australia Rural Livelihoods Programme (LARLP) if our targeting is to be effective.

We shared experiences through informative and interactive presentations:

- DFAT gave us an overview of the LARLP programme;
- SPSL outlined the objectives and implementing processes for the RLP programme;
- The German Agency for International Development (GIZ) described the lessons learnt so far from their Microfinance in Rural Areas – Access to Finance for the Poor (AFP) project; and
- The Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) introduced us to their project and reported on progress to date.

### WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

There were 24 participants from the following 15 offices and organizations:

- Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW)
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
- Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods programme (SPSL)
- Microfinance in Rural Areas – Access to Finance for the Poor (AFP)
- German Agency for International Development (GIZ)
- Provincial offices for: Labour and Social Welfare (PLSW), Department of Planning and Investment (PDPI) and Province Affairs for Savannakhet, Salavan and Champasak provinces (three representatives from each province)
- Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO) Laos

## Workshop outcomes and follow-up actions

- **Synergy:** by the end of the day, everyone had a better understanding of how the LARLP components worked together;
- **Memoranda of Understanding with our implementing partners:** the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) agreed to send letters to the provinces that subsequently worked closely with the non-governmental organizations involved to draft an endorsement letter that they submitted to the MoLSW. The MoUs with our implementing partners were then discussed and finalized at a technical review workshop and these were signed by all the parties concerned at the end of February 2015;
- **RLP target villages:** The workshop concluded that all components of LARLP (RLP/SPSL, AFP/GIZ and UXO Lao) should work in the same villages, as these projects are part of the same overall programme (LARLP). Provincial participants resolved to discuss this further with provincial and district stakeholders.

## CEREMONY

### MAKING IT OFFICIAL:

## MoU signed between Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Maxwell Stamp PLC

27 January 2015, Lao Plaza Hotel, Vientiane

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Maxwell Stamp PLC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the delivery of the Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods programme in a ceremony organized by the Director General of the Planning and Cooperation Department, Mr Lee Pao Yang, and SPSL Director, Dr Rowan Mactaggart. The signatures were witnessed by Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Mrs Baikham Katthiya, and the Australian Ambassador, Mr John Williams.

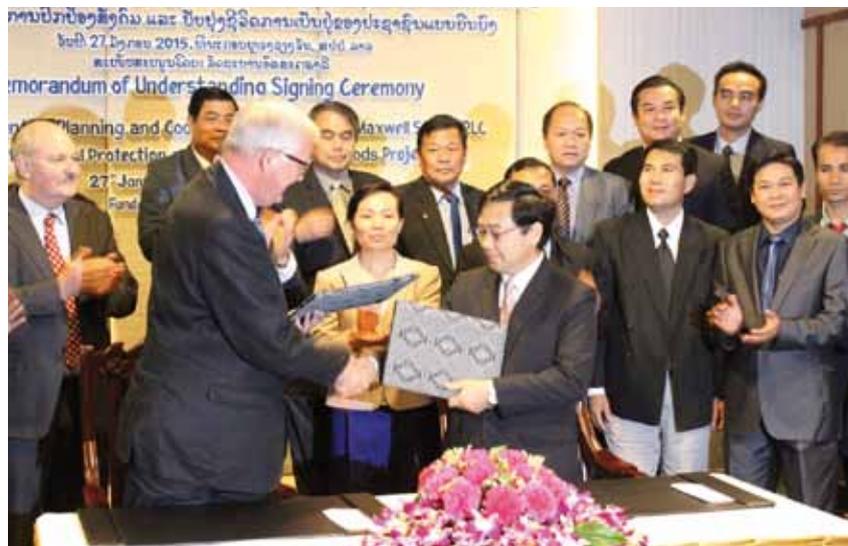
The SPSL project will initially run for 30 months from January 2014 to June 2016, with a total budget of AUD16.44 million. The project, operating in the

three provinces of Champasak, Salavan and Savannakhet, aimed to improve the livelihoods of some 600 rural households in its first year.

Now that it is established, the programme is planning to benefit some 3,000 households.

The programme aims to:

- strengthen community enterprises and market access; and
- build community resilience by helping to establish and improve social protection programmes.



Mr Lee Pao Yang shaking hands with Dr Rowan Mactaggart at the ceremony

## BUILDING CAPACITY:

### ‘Strengthening social protection in Lao PDR’

25–26 February, Vientiane

Lao PDR is currently identifying gaps in its social protection system and considering its options, reflecting the growing commitment to providing social protection among governments across South East Asia (see box). In this context, a two-day conference on ‘Strengthening Social Protection’ was held for Laos government delegates following the agreement signed between the Department of Planning and Cooperation (MoLSW) and Maxwell Stamp (see page 3).

Speaking on this occasion, the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Mrs Baykham Khattiya, explained that social development was essential, not only in terms of social needs and international demands but also in enriching both the material and spiritual wealth of our citizens. The Australian Ambassador to Laos, Mr John Williams, announced:

*‘Australia is proud to be working in partnership with the Laos government and non-governmental organizations to help pilot the beginnings of a social protection system in Laos that will target around 1,500 households and reach around 6,000 poor and vulnerable people in the country’s rural areas.’*

The conference aimed to familiarize the National Social Protection Committee with the key social protection concepts in preparation for their task of drafting a social protection strategy for Lao PDR.

The last session of the conference focused on identifying areas that warrant more training as they will help shape the future social protection activities of LARLP.

The specific objectives of the conference were:

- To provide a forum for Laos government participants to learn from experiences of social protection in ASEAN and beyond;
- To build the capacity of the National Social Protection Committee so they can effectively engage in the assessment-based national dialogue (ABND) process;
- To identify social protection topics that committee members require further training on.



Group discussions allowed participants to exchange their experiences

#### THE ASEAN DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING SOCIAL PROTECTION

Adopted at the 8th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD) in Brunei Darussalam in 2013, this declaration outlines concrete actions including:

- ‘support national policies, strategies and mechanisms to strengthen the implementation of social protection programmes’; and
- ‘advocate strategies that promote the coverage, availability, comprehensiveness, quality, equitability, affordability and sustainability of various social protection services.’

#### CONTACT

Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods  
Hom 1, Unit 17, Ban Nakham, Sikhottabong district, Vientiane capital, Lao PDR  
Tel:+852-21 255334 Fax: +856-21 255337

