



Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods



Issue 2: JULY 2015

www.spsl.la

From the editor's desk

This is our second quarterly newsletter and this quarter has certainly been eventful. We learnt that our budget was being reduced as a result of cuts affecting Australia's global development aid budget. This has forced us to review and adjust our activities and has meant a significant reduction in the scale of our Resilient Livelihoods for the Poor (RLP) pilot as well as in our support to capacity building on social protection. On a more optimistic note, the Australian government agreed to extend SPSL for a further nine months, up to March 2017, so we can complete a second cohort of beneficiaries under the RLP pilot.

Despite the cuts, a lot has been going on in the last quarter. The signing of the subsidiary MoUs between the Department of Social Welfare and our three Implementing Partners – CARE, World Education and Health Poverty Action – has meant that formal RLP field activities have begun. Six hundred first cohort beneficiaries were enrolled and chose their productive assets. Intensive training activities also took place – RLP field staff were trained, field manuals or 'toolkits' were distributed and a range of informative illustrated posters on asset care were designed and distributed.

On the capacity building front, a study tour to Hanoi was organised for Government of Laos officials to learn more about Vietnam's progressive social protection programme.

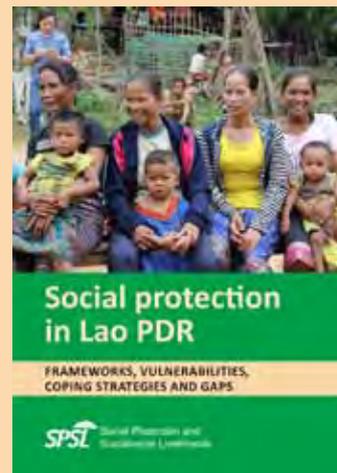
The SPSL team hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it informative. We welcome your feedback so if you have anything to contribute, please contact Somsack, our Communications Officer, at somsack.souvannalath@spsl.la.

The Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods (SPSL) project is part of the Laos–Australia Rural Livelihoods Programme (LARLP). This is an Australian Government funded project implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW).

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



An SPSL infographic summarising social protection in Laos



NEWSFLASH: Social protection in Lao PDR report

SPSL is delighted to announce that the report, *Social protection in Lao PDR: frameworks, vulnerabilities, coping strategies and gaps* will be available in both electronic and hard copy soon.

This report summarises the keys issues that emerged from a study commissioned by the Lao-Australian Development Learning Facility and carried out by Rita Gebert in 2014.

While the report was originally intended to assist the government in drawing up the social protection policy, it will also be a useful source of reference for any individuals or organisations working in the social protection and related fields in Laos.



MAXWELL STAMP PLC

Top photo: ©Asian Development Bank, Flickr.com, Creative Commons licence
Note: The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and of the SPSL project and do not reflect the opinions of Maxwell Stamp PLC or the Australian government.

Field activities underway

The Department of Social Welfare signed MoUs with the RLP implementing partners, CARE, Health Action Poverty and World Education on the 14 May, formally launching the field activities in Soukhouma, Xepone and LaoNgam.

RLP pilot scale down

The number of RLP beneficiaries has been reduced from 3,200 to 1,200. These beneficiaries will now be enrolled in two cohorts of 600 each. The first cohort is underway and the second will be rolled out in October. Although our budget has been reduced, the Australian government has agreed to a nine-month extension which will enable the second cohort to receive a full 12 months' support. However, it should be noted that in other countries, successful RLP type pilots have given beneficiaries 24 months of support through the programme.

Beneficiaries selected and enrolled

Our implementing partners have completed the selection and enrolment of the first cohort of beneficiaries. This process was a four-stage collaborative effort with district authorities and village committees and involved selecting villages and then shortlisting, assessing and verifying individuals. This process was completed in June and over 600 beneficiaries in 58 villages were enrolled across the three participating districts.

Right: Indochina Research Lao field staff conduct an interview at Dan village, Soukhouma district

Enterprises selected

Following their enrolment, beneficiaries were asked to select which productive asset they would like to base their new enterprises on. SPSL had previously carried out a detailed study to assess the best types of productive assets for the programme. This study shortlisted a number suitable assets which then formed the basis for beneficiaries selection. The table on the right shows their choices.

Enterprises selected by RLP beneficiaries (by province)

Type	S	X	L
Goats	15	206	151
Small pigs	52		12
Large pigs	60		
Poultry	41	4	29
Ducks	22	2	2
Mushrooms	3		4
Businesses	2		1
Home gardens			3
Fish ponds	1		
Fishing equipment	1		
Noodle making	1		
Food retailing	1		
TOTAL	199	212	202

Payment service provider selected

RLP beneficiaries will receive monthly allowances to help maintain their new assets, for example, to pay for veterinary care, animal feed and fertiliser. After investigating options for delivering these allowances, the Agricultural Promotion Bank (APB) was selected as the payments service provider for RLP. The APB has district branches throughout the country and is focused on extending financial inclusion in rural areas.

Beneficiaries will have individual bank accounts, opened prior to the transfer of the productive assets. This is a significant advance in expanding financial services to low-income rural households.

Baseline survey completed

As a pilot exercise, RLP has an important role in informing the design and scale-up of asset transfer based programmes. Lessons can only emerge, however, if we fully understand the situation at the outset. To this end, SPSL conducted a baseline survey covering all the beneficiaries. An endline survey will follow once these beneficiaries complete their 12-month engagement in the pilot. A similar process will be used for the second cohort. In addition, 120 of the over 600 beneficiaries were selected for an intensive expenditure and consumption survey to be conducted every two months throughout the duration of the pilot.



Field training completed:

Practical toolkit

SPSL has produced a series of practical, step-by-step training toolkits for RLP field staff.

These toolkits cover nine key topics: targeting and selection; enrolment; asset transfer; household visits; financial literacy; case management; monitoring and evaluation; management information systems; and payments.

These toolkit modules formed the basis of field staff training for cohort 1 which was completed during the quarter.

Asset care posters

Another innovation in training resources is the series of informative illustrated posters that SPSL has produced to support this pre-asset transfer training. This series of posters covers key information on the five main asset options: home gardens, cultivating mushrooms, rearing poultry, keeping goats and rearing pigs.



Above: An asset care poster on looking after goats, produced to help RLP beneficiaries with their projects

Training the trainers

Regular training and mentoring is critical in the RLP initiative and the field teams attended a train the trainers workshop in April based on the toolkit modules and including gender issues.

While the training covered the theory of maintaining and managing assets, participants also had the opportunity to have some hands-on experience (see photo).

They also benefited from lively interaction within the team and with the Village Focus International trainers.



Above: A facilitator from World Education demonstrated pig vaccination during the training

Family stories

The focus of the RLP programme is the family and to gain more qualitative information about the impact on the families we are working with, we intend to follow 15 participating families in our three target provinces over the next year.

Instead of waiting for the endline survey, our selected families will report back every quarter so we can gain an insight into their experiences, monitor their progress and identify any problems they encounter.



PROFILE: Mrs Khamla Phoutharath

SPSL Social Development Specialist

Born in 1960 in Thatkhao village, Sisattanak district, Vientiane capital, Khamla is serious about her work:

After high school I worked for the Lao Women's Union and they sent me to study for my Bachelor's in Baku. I worked in their mother and child benefits department on my return, developing rural women's skills in income-generating activities.

In need of a new challenge, in 1990 I moved into the international non-governmental organisation sector and 22 years later I had gained broad experience in the field. My focus has been on gender, ethnic groups and disability.

In 2013, I joined the Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods project where my job is to develop strategies on gender and disability and ensure they are applied.

My 34 years' experience has shown me that the challenge of gender development in Laos is intensified by factors like geography, customs, culture and language. Disabled people face further challenges in Laos as communities tend to believe that disabled people can do little for themselves and they offer little support, leaving families to take full responsibility.

BUILDING CAPACITY

LEARNING FROM OUR NEIGHBOURS:

Vietnam study tour 18-22 May 2015

Participants from Vietnam shared their experiences at the Laos Social Protection Conference in February and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) decided it was worth finding out more about Vietnam's approach to social protection.

The Laos government wanted to draw on Vietnam's wealth of experience in non-contributory, state-funded social protection in designing its own social protection strategy and policy. The study tour to Hanoi took place from 18 to 22 May 2015. It involved 23 participants, mainly members of the social protection strategy drafting committee but also MLSW staff from Savannkhet, Salavan and Champasak provinces. Apart from MLSW, the study tour included representatives from several other ministries, including; Finance; Education and Sport; and Planning and Investment (see photo below).

The tour was organised with the assistance of HelpAge International who provided operational and logistical support through their Vietnam offices, ensuring liaison with the host government, represented by the Vietnam Institute of Labour, Science and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

Participants met with Mr Pham Minh Huan, the Vice-Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, and Dr Bui Sy Loi, Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly Committee on Social Affairs. Social protection issues in Vietnam were discussed over two days, with presentations by the Institute of Labour, Science and Social Affairs, HelpAge International, UNDP, the National Office for Poverty Reduction and the Social Assistance Bureau.

Dr Giang Thanh Long of the National Economics University gave the background to financing social protection and its socioeconomic and political impacts. An afternoon field visit to relevant authorities in Ha Nam province gave further insight into implementing these national policies and plans.



Key issues from Vietnam:

- Extensive discussions and at least 10 drafts were needed before the final strategy was accepted by the fifth party congress in 2012.
- Targeting errors were significant with 52 percent of poor households excluded from the official list of poor households and 40 percent of non-poor households included. This jeopardised the success of the programme.
- Key questions in reforming the system were: **accessibility** (who will participate?); **adequacy** (will benefits be enough?); **acceptability** (will people accept change?); and **accountability** (will stakeholders accept and understand the issues?).

Participants' recommendations for immediate action:

- **Build awareness** and understanding through short, intensive training for the social protection committee members;
- **Develop a drafting committee action plan** (including a timeframe) with small working groups;
- **Establish what systems are in place**, which work well and which do not;
- **Start work** on the first draft of the national social protection strategy.

CONTACT

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

