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## From the editor

This is our third newsletter and provides news on SPSL activities over the four-month period from July to October 2015.

This period saw the commencement of the implementation of the first of two cohorts of the Resilient Livelihood for the Poor (RLP) pilot, which provides 613 poor rural households with productive assets, a monthly cash transfer and regular asset and enterprise management support. By the end of October all 613 recipients had opened bank accounts with APB branches in their respective district and the vast majority had taken delivery of their productive assets. Our Implementing Partners' (CARE, HPA and World Education) field facilitators had also commenced regular (twice monthly) asset care and enterprise management visits to each recipient.

Also during this period, the Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare (MLSW) convened the first meeting of the Implementation Management Committee (IMC), which, amongst other things, approved a series of capacity building activities that will be launched in the coming months. These include a scoping study to assess a range of non-contributory social protection options for Laos including an orphans and early childhood development grant, an elderly grant, a disability grant and an emergency grant for people affected by natural disaster. The scoping study will support the findings of the Assessment Based National Dialogue (ABND) on the introduction of a Minimum Floor for Social Protection and help the preparation of a National Strategy for Social Protection and a Decree on the Social Welfare Fund.

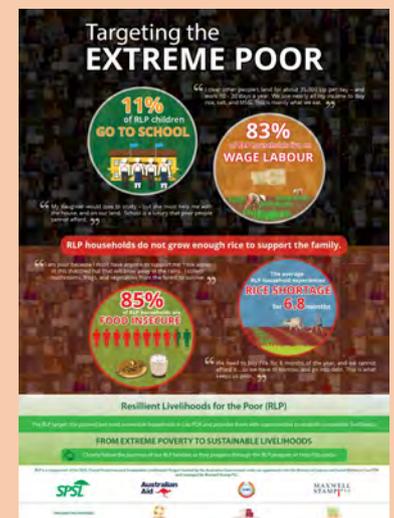
We welcome your enquiries and feedback, which you should address to Somsack, our Communications Officer

[\(somsack.souvannalath@spsl.la\)](mailto:somsack.souvannalath@spsl.la).

Please also don't forget to visit our evolving website – [www.spsl.la](http://www.spsl.la).



SPSL infographic summarizing Resilient Livelihoods for the Poor



SPSL infographic summarizing Targeting the Extreme Poor

The Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods (SPSL) project is a 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 Help Age International and Community & Environment Service Ltd (CES), in conjunction with a range of partners.

## Cohort 1 baseline survey analyzed

Data from the cohort 1 baseline survey have been processed and analyzed. The results provide insight into the profile of RLP recipients and their situation before their involvement in the pilot. The baseline will be followed up with an endline survey that will assess the impact of the pilot on the livelihoods of the 613 cohort 1 recipients. A report and a summary information brief will be released shortly and will be available in hard copy and for download from [www.spsl.la](http://www.spsl.la).

## APB bank accounts opened

In August, APB and SPSL staff conducted a series of village based meetings to register and open bank accounts for the 613 RLP cohort 1 recipients. Payments of the monthly stipend of 100,000 kip plus 15,000 kip travel allowance commenced to RLP recipients in Soukhouma district in early September and was extended to recipients in Xepon and Laongam in early October. By the end of October, bank books had been issued to the majority of RLP recipients. With the consent of RLP recipients, SPSL will monitor the utilisation of bank accounts over the duration of the pilot.

## Family stories

A second round of interviews were undertaken in October with the 15 families being tracked throughout their involvement in the RLP pilot. Now that the pilot has started, these interviews provide early insight - for example, into the way recipients use their APB bank accounts - which highlight issues that need to be addressed as the pilot progresses. Updates of these family stories are posted on [www.spsl.la/rlp](http://www.spsl.la/rlp)

*Khamla Phoutharath from SPSL explaining to a RLP beneficiary about APB bank book*



## Assets transferred

As of October, our implementing partners have nearly completed asset transfers to the first cohort of 613 RLP recipients (see adjacent table). Most RLP families have opted for goats, pigs and poultry, although 12 households selected mushroom cultivation and/or running a small shop. It is estimated that all asset transfers to Cohort 1 will be completed by the end of November.

## Marketing study underway

In order to provide RLP households with the skills to effectively sell their assets in the market, SPSL has commissioned a marketing study across the 3 RLP districts. The consultants are interviewing traders, vendors, and conducting focus group discussions with both RLP and non-RLP households in order to identify best trading practices. The findings from the study will be used to produce posters, trainings and other tools to teach RLP participants about effective marketing strategies for their enterprises, within their villages and districts.

## Preparation for Cohort 2

Preparations are now underway to transfer assets to the second cohort of RLP participants from November 2015 to January 2016. As part of these preparations, SPSL has been conducting a second round of training with field staff of the three Implementing Partners (CARE, HPA and World Education). RLP toolkit training took place between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of September, followed by asset care training from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of October. The implementing partners are also well underway with targeting efforts for the second cohort. It is estimated that enrolment for the next 600 households will be completed in November.

Asset transferred by district			
Type	S	X	L
Goats	38	412	392
Pigs/Piglets	267	0	72
Poultry	1500	80	580
Mushrooms	4	0	1
Small shops	6	0	1

*S: Soukhouma; X: Xepon; L: Laongam*

## DFAT field visit to Soukhouma & Mounlapamok (20-23 September)

DFAT Vientiane carried out a monitoring field visit to Soukhouma & Mounlapamok in Champasack province from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. The mission was undertaken by Dulce Simmanivong, DFAT's Rural Development Senior Program Manager and Mone Sysavath, DFAT's Rural Livelihoods Program Manager. They were accompanied by Keolabthavong Songsamayvong, SPSL Deputy Team Leader and Karishma Huda, SPSL Social Protection Senior Specialist. The mission visited the CARE quarantine facility in Ban Phonpheuang, where RLP assets (poultry, pigs and goats) are held and treated prior to being handed over to the RLP recipients. The mission met and talked with a number of recipients who had just received their livestock. The mission also met Soukhouma district officials, including the Vice-District Governor, Mrs. Khaikoe Singhavong, who expressed her appreciation for the support provided by the Australian Government. Mrs. Khaikoe emphasized the importance of the RLP pilot, which is targeting the poorest, and appealed for further financial support from the Australian Government both to ensure that the current recipients graduate from the poverty and to expand the project to more poor households in the district. In addition, the SPSL and CARE staff met with officials from Mounlapamok district and briefed them on the RLP pilot, which will be extended to the district in the coming weeks. The district authorities expressed their

## Implementation Management Committee (IMC)

The first meeting of the SPSL IMC was convened on the 20th of October under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare (MLSW). The IMC, which also includes representatives from DFAT and SPSL, reviews, approves and provides oversight of SPSL's work plans and budgets. The inaugural meeting, in particular, reviewed and approved a list of activities to support capacity and awareness building on social protection in Laos, including a national scoping study to investigate a number of non contributory social protection instruments and to assess their suitability and appropriateness for Laos as well as their indicative cost. Technical study tours to Myanmar and Indonesia are also scheduled for the coming months. A high level visit to



*An RLP beneficiary from Soukhouma holding her RLP ID card and APB bankbook*

## Old Age Pension for Myanmar

Following the drafting of a social protection strategy earlier this year, the Government of Myanmar is about to launch the country's first non contributory cash transfer programme; an Old Age Grant for the elderly who are not covered by existing social insurance provision. With a limited annual budget of under USD 400,000, the Old Age Grant will initially only be eligible to people over the age of 90 who do not receive a state retirement pension. It is estimated that 35,000 people will be eligible for the grant, which will provide each recipient with about 15,000 Kyat, or just over USD10, per year. Myanmar is following a similar approach adopted by Thailand and Vietnam who also started small but have subsequently reduced the eligibility age and increased the size of the regular benefits. You can read more at <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16216-pensions-provide-small-support-for-elderly.html>

## Study finds Social Protection's does not discourage work

A recent article in the New York Times (<http://nyti.ms/1Kmi2Qr>) summarized the finding from a number of recent studies which dispel the myth that providing the poor with cash transfer stops them seeking work and encourages bad behavior. Recent empirical studies by the World Bank and the Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) concluded that there was 'no systematic evidence that cash transfer programmes discourage work' and that 'money (is) not typically squandered on things like alcohol and tobacco'. These studies conclude that cash transfer provide 'very tangible benefits' and, in particular, that 'cash (transfers) early in a child's life improves the child's longevity, educational attainment and nutritional status, and income in adulthood'. These conclusions have important implications for Laos where social cash transfers are still widely viewed with suspicion and aversion.



*An RLP beneficiary from Xepon, she received two goats as her asset from the project.*

## World Food Day 2015 (16<sup>th</sup> October)

The theme of this year's World Food Day was 'Social Protection and Agriculture – breaking the cycle of poverty'. SPSL was invited to participate in the World Food Day event organized at the ITTEC by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food & Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). The project set up an information stand and made a short presentation on the reasons for social protection in Laos at an open seminar event.



*The SPSL stand at the 2015 World Food Day event in Vientiane*

## SPSL publication

The Lao language version of the SPSL report 'Social Protection in Lao PDR' and the English version of SPSL's 'gender strategy' are now also available for download at [http://spsl.la/?page\\_id=639](http://spsl.la/?page_id=639)

If you would like to receive a hard copy version, please send an email to [somsack.souvannalath@spsl.la](mailto:somsack.souvannalath@spsl.la). A Lao version of the gender strategy will be available soon.



Summary of Social Protection in Laos

## SPSL providing vehicle to Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

In October, SPSL provided the Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare with a 4WD vehicle to assist them in fulfilling their field monitoring and other responsibilities of RLP. SPSL's team leader, John Rook, handed over the vehicle to Mr Leepao Yang, the Director General of Planning & Cooperation.



Mr Leepao Yang, the Director General of Planning & Cooperation (third left) received vehicle from John Rook, SPSL Team Leader (second right)



A grass plot for goat feed. Seed provided by RLP before beneficiaries received their assets



## PROFILE: Mr. Keolapthavong Songsamayvong

### SPSL Deputy Team Leader

Keolapthavong Songsamayvong (Keo) was born in 1968 in Ban Saphantay, Kaysone Phomvihane District, Savannakhet Province. Keo is a micro finance specialist and has been at the forefront of the development of self managed village banking in Laos. His first job, in 1996, was for a French Development Agency (AFD) funded "Phongaly District Rural Development Project – PDDP". Following this he worked as a senior rural micro-finance advisor for a number of international organisations including GIZ, Lux Development and SNV.

In 2006, Keo was appointed as the Southern Portfolio Manager for the Dutch NGO SNV. At the same time, he was made a member of SNV's Laos senior management team. In 2011, he joined the UK NGO, Power International as their Country Manager and, in 2012, he was recruited by AusAID as their Rural Livelihoods Programme Manager. In February 2013, Keo joined the Social Protection & Sustainable Livelihoods project (SPSL), initially in the role of the Micro Enterprise Challenge Fund Manager, but was subsequently promoted to his current position as Deputy Team Leader in November 2014.

Keo is a committed development worker with extensive experience, not only in rural micro-finance, but also project management and social protection. He lives in Vientiane and is married with two sons.

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