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**SEP-Dev**

Sekong Ethnic People's Development Project



## Piloting Khumban Phathana in Sekong Province

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## Abbreviations

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| CPI     | Committee of Planning and Investment                     |
| CPPB    | Central party Polit Bureau                               |
| DPI     | Department of Planning and Investment (provincial level) |
| GoL     | Government of Lao  |
| GPAR    | Governance and Public Administration Reform              |
| GPS     | Global Positioning System                                |
| NGPES   | National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy         |
| NSC     | National Statistic Centre                                |
| OoG     | Office of the Governor (province)                        |
| PACSA   | Public Administration and Civil Service Authority        |
| PM      | Prime Minister   |
| SEP-Dev | Sekong ethnic People's Development Project               |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme                     |
| UNV     | United Nations Volunteers                                |



## Foreword

This report is targeted the Office of the Governor in Sekong (OoG), the Department of Planning and Investment in Sekong (DPI), Sekong Ethnic People's Development Project, SEP-Dev, GPAR Central, and other people, who might work with participatory planning and *khumban phathana*<sup>1</sup> in Lao PDR, especially those people who might continue work in Sekong after April 2006. The report is also written to facilitate knowledge sharing in GPAR Central and the provinces. The person who wrote this report was assigned to SEP-Dev as a participatory planning specialist (hereafter the planning specialist), from April 2005 to April 2006, and was based in DPI.

## Background for khumban activities in the SEP-Dev project

SEP-Dev<sup>2</sup> was in 2004 moved from the UNDP poverty unit to the governance unit. Subsequently, a series of new activities were added to the project's work plan. One of them was to do participatory planning, not in the project's target villages (this was already done), but in villages of khumbans established and selected by the local administration. The village planning exercise should pave the way for planning at khumban level, which should be integrated into the district planning and so forth. In this way the aim of the new activity was to support the local authorities in interpreting a new decentralisation law (Instruction 09/CPPB) to the context of Sekong, and to pilot khumban planning.

## Provincial administration and decentralisation

Today the provincial administration of Lao PDR contains three levels: province, district, and village.

In the past Government of Lao, GoL, experimented with a system with four levels of administration in the provinces. The *khet* was a level in between district and village. The khets were to a high degree established and administered according to security concerns. However, financial and human resources were too scarce to make the khet function well. As a consequence the khets were abandoned.

The district still has too scarce resources to adequately deliver services to the villages. Therefore, GoL - supported by the UNDP's governance programme - has started a new initiative of establishing a better link between district and village. This initiative is called khumban phathana. A khumban is meant to be a group of villages that have the potential of generating socio-economic development if they act together. The khumban is not an administrative level, but a community organisation level. Participation of community members is emphasised. Thus, khumban phathana must be understood as a decentralisation initiative where villages are expected to organise themselves in the khumban and take more ownership for their development process. The role of the district in this sense would be to empower the communities, facilitate access to the administrative system, and organise meetings.

Most provinces in Lao PDR have at present established their khumbans. A few provinces have piloted methods to establish khumbans (Khamuane) or to integrate khumban planning into the district plans (Luang Prabang, Sekong). All piloting have been conducted with support from UNDP.

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<sup>1</sup> Khumban means a cluster of villages. Khumban phathana means village cluster development.

<sup>2</sup> SEP-Dev pilot project: 1999-00. SEP-Dev phase I: 2001-05, plus one year of extension (2006)

## Legal framework

Khumban phathana is implemented in accordance with Instruction 09/CPPB from 2004. Instruction 09 is a communist party instruction. For this reason, implementation, and administration of khumban phathana are not yet delegated to the administrative system, i.e. the planning offices and the line-agencies. At provincial level khumban phathana is under discretion of the OoG, unless the province has taken additional initiatives and delegated the khumban phathana to the relevant offices for planning and socio-economic development.

The fact, that khumban phathana is not yet officially delegated to the line-agencies creates administrative barriers to implementation. For this reason, Public Administration and Civil Service Authority, PACSA, is currently in the process of elaborating on supplementary instructions and guidelines, which, if passed, could move responsibility of implementation from the party to the administrative system.

Instruction 09 is the single most important legal basis for khumban phathana. It is a rough guideline, which does not go into detail with procedures and must be adapted to the local context. Security is still a top priority, but socio-economic development and grassroots development is a key issue as well:

*‘Establish village and village development groups, ..... raise people’s awareness of importance of village and khumban establishment and campaign for their active participation and ownership.’ (Instruction 09/CPPB)*

Apart from instruction 09 there is a number of other laws and decrees with relevance for local level development. The Law on Local Administration, stipulates among others that it is important to preserve cultural diversity:

*‘... preserve and promote good national traditions and cultures of the multi-ethnic Lao people’ (Law on Local Administration)*

Prime Minister Instruction 01/PM states that the village is the implementation unit in the administration

*‘... build the province to become the strategic unit, the district as budget-planning unit, and the village as the implementation unit.’ (Instruction 01/PM)*

Prime Minister Decree 135/PM talks about the duties of the local administration and the adaptation to the local situation:

*‘Local authorities research and produce their own development plans based on their specific characteristics, potentials, ability and their various resources.’ (Decree 135/PM)*

Last but not least, the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, NGPES, states that development planning will increasingly be based on local participation through appropriate planning manuals and participation processes.

*‘To enable people to organise themselves and to improve their livelihoods according to their own initiatives and visions of the future’ (NGPES)*



All these laws, decrees and instructions shape the legal framework for participatory village and khumban development. Common to all of them are that they emphasise diversity, participation and adjustment to local conditions.

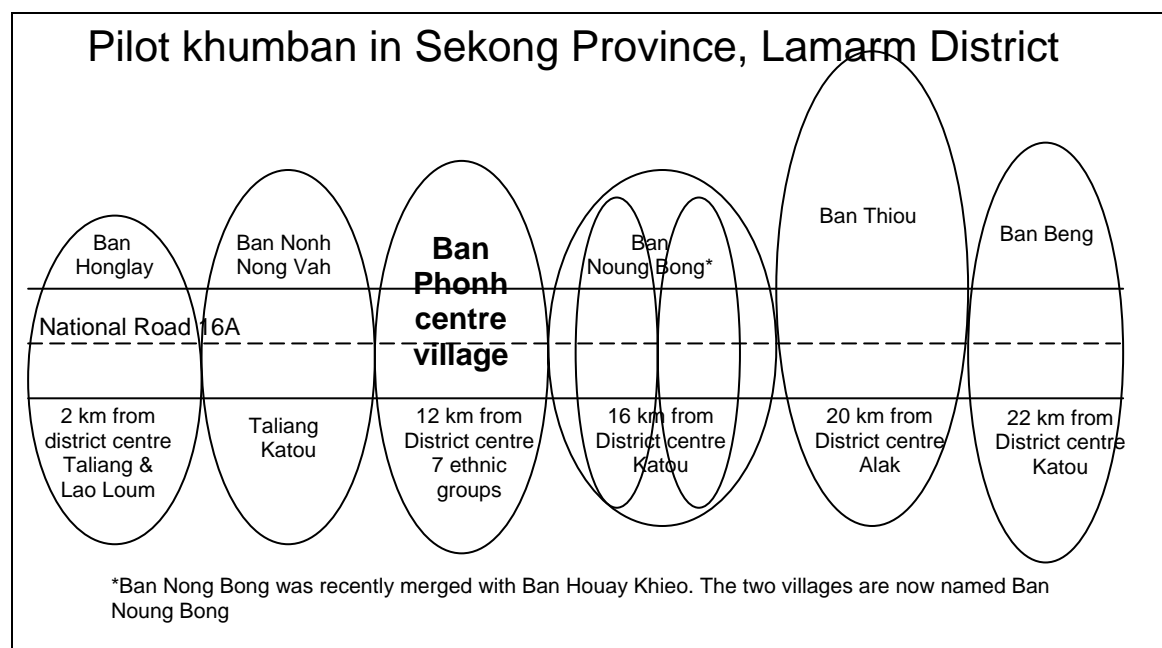
### History of khumban phathana in Sekong<sup>3</sup>

Khumban phathana in Sekong Province is under the discretion of OoG. The responsible official is one of three deputy heads.<sup>4</sup> However, as in any other province, the khumban establishment, activities, and appropriate changes have to be approved by the district governor.

In 2001 OoG and DPI started to interpret and adapt the khumban idea to the situation of Sekong. In 2002 they decided to use the draft guideline from Committee of Planning and Investment, CPI, on participatory village, khumban, and province planning.<sup>5</sup> Complementarily, they developed two data gathering manuals.<sup>6</sup> No English versions of these manuals exist.

At time of finishing the desk study OoG selected a village called Ban Thok Lok in Thatheng District as a khumban centre village for testing the khumban concept. However, Ban Thok Lok had recently been resettled from the mountains in Kaleum District and the villagers were not skilled in low land rice cultivating. They had rice paddy fields but cultivation methods were new to them and output low. The idea of the authorities was that the pilot khumban should be a model khumban. Therefore, OoG and DPI realised that Ban Thok Lok was inappropriate as khumban centre village and gave up working with it.

Afterwards, a village called Ban Thiou in Lamarm District was selected as new centre village for piloting khumban phathana in Sekong. The khumban was called Khumban Thiou. See the figure below.



<sup>3</sup> Sources: Mr Kaisone Saysangkhy, Head of DPI, Sekong, and Mr Noupone Khemmalay, Deputy Head of GoO.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Noupone Khemmalay

<sup>5</sup> The same draft guideline as UNV GPAR Luang Prabang has piloted

<sup>6</sup> One of the manual is titled: 'Village Level Survey, Province of Sekong, Department of Planning'. The other one has not yet a title.

There are 6 villages in the khumban. Khumban Thiou is different from khumbans in rural areas. The land is flat and facilities are good relatively to other villages in the province. The 6 villages are close to each other and all are situated along National Road 16 – they are not spread out in the mountains, like most other villages in the province, especially, as in Kaleum and Dakcheung, the two districts that border Vietnam and which are the target districts of the SEP-Dev project.

The criteria for selecting the focal village were:

1. A per capita income of more than 300 US\$ per year
2. A rice consumption of at least 16 kg per month per capita (food sufficiency)
3. Presence of electricity
4. Road access
5. Presence of an irrigation system
6. Presence of high quality cultivation area for wetland rice and other crops

Working in the khumban it became clear that Ban Thiou was not the most suitable village to establishing a khumban centre. Instead a village called Ban Phonh, which was bigger, and had better access to neighbouring villages and the river, was suggested as khumban centre. Now Ban Phonh is the khumban centre, but the khumban is still called Khumban Thiou.

Data was collected in the pilot khumban and a district official from the Office of Propaganda was appointed khumban head. However, the process stopped there. There was no budget to go on with activities. Today this first data is lost.

At times of writing this report it is still not clear (at least not to the planning specialist) how khumbans in all the four districts are established. It is said that Thatheng District was the first of the four districts in Sekong Province to establish all its khumbans. Thatheng is the district closest to Champassack Province and it might have been influenced by Champassack, which already had established its khumbans.

The pilot khumban in Lamarm was established according to clear criteria and with the aim of making it a model khumban, but how and when other khumbans were established remains a concern for the district governors. It is known that in Kaleum District the khumbans were designed, but that the appropriateness of the way they were selected and grouped was raised afterwards. District officials do not have the resources to travel around to all villages before grouping the khumbans. Therefore, it came up that some villages belonging to the same khumban had huge mountains in between each other, which, obviously, limits the opportunities of developing together and use common facilities as schools, markets, and health centres.

A noticeable barrier to establishing khumbans appropriately is that there are no district maps that show the actual existing villages and their geographical positions. The existing maps are old and inadequate. This means that many of the villages on these maps have resettled, changed their name, merged, etc. Also new villages have appeared. In DPI a staff member got GPS<sup>7</sup> training and went to all the villages in the province to record their positions. However, the coordinates of the villages are not yet entered into a map, and the staff member needs further training and software before she will be able to fulfil the task.

During the assignment of the planning specialist only one khumban, Khumban Thiou, was selected as a khumban where the SEP-Dev project and relevant government officials could pilot participatory khumban phathana. Selecting a second pilot khumban had been discussed since

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<sup>7</sup> GPS: Global Positioning System, a tool that uses satellites to define the exact coordinates of a geographical spot.

June 2005, and in March 2006 an agreement between the provincial khumban responsible and the Governor of Dakcheung has taken place. The second pilot khumban consists of 7 remote and mountainous villages close to the Vietnamese border.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time as the first khumban planning in Sekong is finished, a new discussion is raised at national level (GPAR Central / PACSA) on khumban establishment. The point of this discussion was to secure that villages in a khumban fit well together before the planning process starts, i.e. that villages have a potential of sharing facilities and thereby developing together. For this reason, no planning exercises are yet planned for the second pilot khumban. Instead steps are taken to set up a meeting with the khumban responsible at provincial level (deputy head of OoG), the governor of Dakcheung, and a planning official from DPI. The aim was to facilitate discussions between district and province and to collect data in the second pilot village to support the district governor in finding out if the villages in the khumban fit well together.

The last thing in the khumban development is that there in future will be three khumbans in each district. This, however, might render the participatory process difficult.

### **Piloting participatory khumban phathana in Khumban Thiou**

Piloting khumban phathana in Khumban Thiou was made as an integrated training and piloting session. 12 government officials were trained in participatory planning and during their field practise they collected data and did the participatory planning in six pilot villages and at khumban level.

Before going into detail with the Sekong experience, I will draw some parallels to the field testing of participatory khumban planning in Luang Prabang, which was supported by the UNV GPAR project. This comparison is made because the Luang Prabang experience is the largest test done, and because it has provided the most important results in the field of khumban phathana. Furthermore, it is important that the provinces as well as the GPAR projects share their knowledge in order to obtain best practise. It was the intention that Sekong should do something similar to the piloting in Luang Prabang and an exchange visit was arranged in June 2005 to let project staff and government officials from Sekong learn about khumban planning.

Conditions for testing khumban phathana were different in Sekong compared to Luang Prabang. SEP-Dev had not a similar amount of resources allocated to the activity. In the UNV GPAR was a two-year project focusing only on this participatory khumban phathana, whereas SEP-Dev had participatory khumban phathana as a side-activity, which was added to the project late in the project phase. In Luang Prabang there were three international staff and two translators based in DPI, and there were 24 educated field workers (many were young engineers). In Sekong there was only one international staff assigned to do khumban piloting. There were no fieldworkers allocated to this activity and there was only one translator for three month, who was shared with the rest of the SEP-Dev project.

Another difference was that in Luang Prabang the districts had already defined their khumbans, whereas khumban establishment was in process in Sekong. It is normal that new law initiatives are implemented first in the northern provinces and last in the southern.

Thus, conditions were different but this can be seen as both a disadvantage an advantage. It is clear that the field testing of khumban planning had to be done at smaller scale in Sekong and

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<sup>8</sup> Normally SEP-Dev works in Kaleum and Dakcheung Districts. However, since the local authorities had appointed a khumban in Lamarm District as pilot khumban an exception was made.

that the same range of activities could not be carried out. However, the limitations in resources meant that some extra effort had to be done in order to find solutions within the Lao administrative system and reuse some of the data that the planning officials collect as part of their ordinary duties. This will be explained into detail under step 1 below.

### **Step 1 - Collecting baseline data**

The pilot experience in Sekong did not include household interviews and village profiles as part of the participatory process. Instead DPI's statistic unit was used to gather baseline data from the villages. The village summaries of these statistics were perfectly equal to village profiles made by a team of field workers.

The 'Village Statistics Book' developed by the National Statistics Centre, NSC, was used to gather baseline data from the villages. This book is an official form that is distributed by the district planning office to all villages in the district. It is the responsibility of the village head man to fill it in and to submit a summary to the district planning office at an annual basis.

However, it is not an easy form to fill in by somebody, who has a low level of education. Filling the form requires interview with each household on a range of issues and afterward summing up the results. In big villages with hundred or maybe two hundred households it is a very big and difficult task to fill the form. It is the task of the statistic unit in DPI to train the villagers in using the Village Statistics Book, but scarce resources and the extra time required to train people, who do not have the basic qualifications for understanding statistics, makes it impossible to cover all villages in the province.

Status in the 6 villages of Khumban Thiou was that village management from 4 of them had been trained in using the Village Statistics Book. However, since this training had taken place management had been replaced. Therefore, it was decided to train four villagers from each village. These were the headman, the village statistic person, a teacher, and the head of Lao Women Union.

On request of the statistic unit in DPI a resource person from NSC was invited to Sekong to train the staff members to become trainers on village statistics. The head of DPI selected one district and one province official to attend this training and to fill in the form with the villagers (see names in annex).

The training and the data collection was completed successfully. A drawback was that the villagers were informed very late about the training. The reason for this is the institutional and procedural constraints related to having three different departments and organisations at provincial level involved in the decision-making process (OoG, DPI, SEP-Dev), and to the fact that the training had to be carried out in 2005 and could not be postponed because the project account had to close accordingly to the rules. In this case, unfortunately, the villagers were the ones suffering from the institutional constraints. This is in contradiction to the principles of participatory approaches where activities are scheduled to fit villagers work. However, in spite of the disorganised start-up the training was carried out with happiness and good results.

The data provided in the forms gave good profiles of the villages, their resources, and opportunities. In some of the forms there were clear inaccuracies, but as a general picture the data was very useful in order to prepare fieldwork and to understand the villages and their situations.

By using the Village Statistics Book capacity was build by strengthening the already existing system, also village management was trained, and in this sense villagers were more involved in the process than if field workers had written village profiles.

## **Step 2 - Writing a Sekong manual of participatory planning**

Next step was to prepare a manual to carry out fieldwork. The aim was to make a manual which could at the same time serve as a training manual and a village planning manual.

Preparing a Sekong manual was done by studying the guidelines on participatory planning already present in the Lao system. These documents were (see exact titles in annex):

- A planning manual published by CPI in 1998 for province level (Lao and English)
- Same manual as above adapted to the district in 1999 (Only Lao)
- A CPI field guide on participatory planning from 2000 (only English version available, but a Lao version necessarily exist)
- A Sekong guideline on building the village as the implementation unit from 2001 (Lao and an unofficial English translation)
- Two Sekong data gathering forms from 2001 (only Lao)
- The 2003 draft guideline from CPI which is tested by UNV GPAR Luang Prabang (Lao and English)
- Two supplementary participatory planning guidelines developed by UNV GPAR Luang Prabang in 2005 (Lao and English)
- A manual developed in 2005 by the CPI unit working with the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, NGPES (only Lao)

As part of the desk study undertaken by the planning specialist, the official planning manuals from CPI were carefully read and analysed. The manuals were rough guidelines that were very comprehensive but which required a certain level of background knowledge to use. The head of the planning unit in DPI, Sekong, expressed that they were in fact too difficult to apply, especially in the districts where officials have a lower level of education. For this reason, the head of the planning unit used to prepare his own guidelines before going to the districts to train and discuss with the officials. The drawback of the guidelines was also that there were no schemes or forms that could be used to organise the data and write the report.

The draft guideline prepared by CPI and tested by UNV GPAR Luang Prabang was another important document, which was best used together with the supplementary guidelines developed by the UNV project.<sup>9</sup> However, it was said that the CPI guideline would not be passed on to become an official document. In Sekong these documents were used as an important source of inspiration, but they were not followed step by step, because they were more comprehensive and required resources that were not available.

The Sekong guideline on building the village as implementation unit was also studied. It was concerned with household planning. The two data gathering manuals were never translated.

The NGPES guideline did only exist in Lao version. It was said that it would be improved after field testing and become the new official manual for participatory planning in Lao PDR. The approval came in mid-December 2005 when our preparation course for the field testing in Sekong was already in process. It did still only exist in Lao and could not be integrated in the training, even though, this would have been appropriate in order to building capacity and strengthen the system.

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<sup>9</sup> Written by Anil Adhikary

Thus, none of the above manuals were used. Instead the planning specialist wrote a new manual. It was a guideline and form to fill in one book. It could be filled in in the field and filed in the office afterwards. It did not require a lot of desk work after the end of the fieldwork.

Participatory methods are qualitative tools and are meant to be used in a free and flexible manner. The practitioners carry out the exercises and make notes relevant to the data they receive. In general, the use of participatory techniques is not based on a manual or a form to fill. There might be a guideline that explains the exercise but how to organise the data and how to present the analysed results is up to the practitioner.

However, in this case the planning specialist decided to include the forms to fill in the guideline. This was a first time training for many of the attendants, and it was important to make the exercises and data collection as simple as possible. Also it was important to secure a somehow streamlined and coherent result. The form to fill was prepared to assist the practitioners in better understanding the objectives. However, the form was free enough for the officials to adapt it and to add comments.

The idea was also to keep the explanations short. It should not be a long, complicated document that would require days to read. It is known that officials have many daily tasks to carry out because human resources are scarce. Therefore, explanations were kept short. However, sometimes it is difficult to keep complicated correlations short and therefore a simple manual is not only an advantage.

The following two documents were written:

- Khumban Phathana, Gender and Ethnicity: A Sekong Manual on Participatory Planning – Book 1: Village Book
- Khumban Phathana, Gender and Ethnicity: A Sekong Manual on Participatory Planning – Book 2: Khumban Book

While preparing the manuals it was taken into consideration that the tool would be used one or maximum two times. If a new project starts up in Sekong a new specialist will prepare his/her own tool, or there will be a tool adopted at national level, which will be used. Therefore, the aim was to learn the officials the basic principles and methods of participatory planning and thereby prepare them for the future, for new projects, or for training by other organisations.

The village manual was prepared for a 5 day stay in a village and ended up containing the following exercises:

**Day 1: Meeting with village headman**

Explain objectives and the participatory process

**Day 2: Focus group meeting**

Ethnic diversity

Village history

NGOs and projects working in the village

Village resource mapping on the ground

Social ranking

Mapping cooperation with other villages

Local resource people

**Day 3: Income and problem ranking**

Matrix-ranking of income generating activities, 2 groups of women and 2 of men

Problem ranking, 2 groups of women and 2 of men

#### **Day 4: Problem ranking**

Problem ranking men and women together

#### **Day 5: Debriefing**

Debriefing

A special exercise was included to find out if the khumban was righteously established. This was a mapping exercise (mapping cooperation with other villages), where villagers would show which other villages they used when they send children to school, went to the health clinic, market, etc, - or from which other village people came to use the resources of the village.

The khumban book was prepared for a 1-day preparation meeting in office and a 1-day khumban meeting in the centre village.

### **Step 3 - 3-day workshop in office**

After having finished writing the manuals a 3-day training course was conducted in DPI. 12 officials attended the training 9 were from DPI, 2 were from the relevant district planning office (Lamarm), and 1 was from OoG (see names in annex). The OoG official was the technical staff of the deputy head responsible for khumban phathana. He was invited to the training to secure that the responsible person could get information about the training and the scheduled activities.

The course was conducted with many games, exercises, and examples. Every morning a test was run with the participant. To secure a relaxed learning environment the test was turned into a happening by awarding a Beerlao to the the winning officials.

In the course the attendants learned:

#### **Basic methods:**

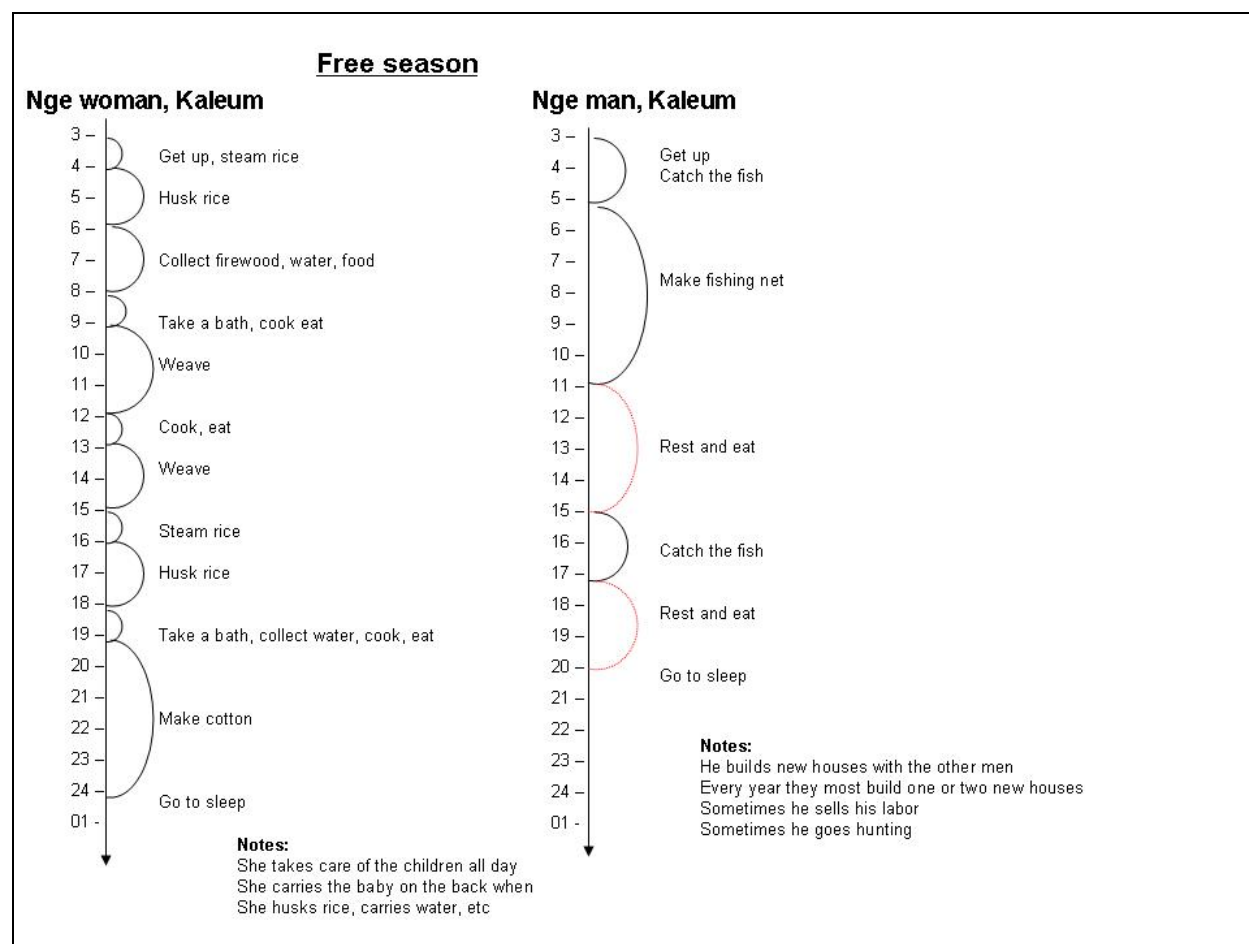
- History of participatory planning
- Basic principles of participatory planning
- Behavior and attitudes necessary for successful implementation
- The role of the facilitator

#### **Specific tools:**

- Focus groups interview
- Gender analysis
- Daily activity charts for man and woman
- Village history timeline
- Seasonal calendar
- Social ranking / wealth ranking
- Resource mapping
- Khumban mapping / village cooperation mapping
- Matrix ranking of income-generating activities
- Problem ranking in men-women groups
- Village and khumban planning meetings

To make the course relevant to the attendants an effort was made to use examples from other provinces of Lao or from Sekong. For example, the daily activity charts used in the gender training showed data from an ethnic village (Nge) from Sekong. Most officials, especially at province level are Lao Loum, and Lao Loum women are known to have more power, however

indirect, than the ethnic women of Sekong. To make officials aware of differences it was important to use local examples. See the Nge daily activity chart for the dry season (free season) below.



**Daily activity chart for the Nge woman and man**

Other sessions focused on empowerment of villagers. The khumban structure does not provide extra financial resources to the districts and villages. The idea is that villages should take more actively part in planning and development. Therefore, the officials had to learn about empowerment.

The last sessions of the course focused on khumban phathana. The concept of a non-administrative level was explained and the pilot khumban was discussed. In order to secure coherence with government policies the khumban responsible at provincial level was invited to speak about government policies from national level and about the Sekong interpretation of khumban phathana.

While preparing for the course it was taken into consideration that many of the officials might be invited to other trainings in other organisations in future. Also they might meet new participatory approaches if they work with another UNDP project. For this reason the planning specialist made an effort on teaching the attendants the basic methods and tools, so that they would recognise them when they meet them again, even if they have another shape or are adapted to other contexts.



The 12 officials in the course worked very seriously during the three days of the workshop. They participated with great enthusiasm in the games, and exercises and showed good presentation skills while presenting results from the team work. Attendance was high. There was only one official who was absent for one afternoon session. He was one of the unit heads of DPI and had to attend another meeting.

The largest constraint through the theoretical training was that the manual for the fieldwork was not yet translated into Lao. The translator arrived at the project only the day before the training course started.

#### **Step 4 - Field practise at village level**

During field practise the officials were divided into 3 teams, which conducted data and participatory planning in each two villages. The first week a team went to the field, the planning specialist supervised them. The second week they went alone. In this way it took four hours to carry out fieldwork in all the villages.

The teams worked for five days in each village as described under step 2. After having finished all work in the village they exercised project proposal writing.

Basically, the field work was carried out well. The officials were very serious and eager to learn, and an especially positive feature was that they showed a lot of respect and friendliness towards the villagers. The first week was generally difficult. The manual, the tools and the situations were all new. Each afternoon after finishing the meetings with the villagers there was a team meeting where the process, results, and lesson learned were discussed. The next day's facilitator was also selected and the next days programme was reviewed. Each morning the team held a preparation meeting where the tools and sessions of the day were discussed.

The planning specialist was out supervising some of the teams when they did their second village. In general, the second week went more smoothly than the first week. It was easy to see that the officials had gained a lot more confidence and worked more relaxed, which created openness and good results.

As I trainer the planning specialist was very contented by the seriousness of the officials when they carried out fieldwork. From what she could observe they learned a lot. For many of them the tools were new and the fact that participatory methods contradict traditional Lao top-down planning in many ways make the tools difficult to use. The behaviour of participatory approaches forces the Lao officials to work outside the unspoken social conventions, and this makes participatory work extremely difficult. Seen in this light, the officials' performance was real good. However, all of them would benefit from more training to become more confident and to know more details about the techniques.

The concrete result of the field practising was 6 filled village books and the inclusion of two more villages into the khumban.

#### **Step 5 - Khumban planning meeting**

After finishing participatory planning in the villages, a planning meeting at khumban level was arranged. The day before the meeting the officials and representatives from the line-agencies met in DPI. The planning officials presented the work done in the villages and the procedures for the following day were discussed.

The following people participated in the khumban planning meeting which was held in the Temple in Ban Phonh:

1. Village headman from each village (6 persons)
2. Lao Women Union head from each village (6)
3. Representative from district education office (1)
4. Representative from district agriculture office (1)
5. Representative from district health office (1)
6. Representative from Lao Women Union at district level (1)
7. Deputy head from OoG, khumban responsible at provincial level (1)
8. Deputy from Office of Propaganda, khumban head for khumban Thiou (1)

The khumban meeting was carried out with a lot of fruitful discussion. The deputy head from Office of the Governor filled in the role as facilitator. This was not foreseen at the preparation meeting the preceding day, but the official did a very good job as facilitator, especially focusing on the role of women in development. At a very early stage he pronounced that:

*'Lao is not colonised by any foreign country anymore, however, inside Lao there is one group of people, which has colonised another group - the men have colonised the women'.*

This is a very strong message when it comes from a deputy head of a provincial governor's office.

After having said this, the deputy head encouraged the women to talk openly about gender issues in their villages. The representative from Lao Women Union gave good support and constructive ideas for solving problems. However, the meeting was not only about gender, even though this was a cross-cutting issue.

Problems in the three sectors of health, agriculture and education were discussed one by one and so were the causes and the solutions for each problem. A special focus was put on problems that could benefit more villages. The representatives from the line-agencies explained to the villagers, which immediate support they could apply for in the district and for which projects they would need to apply for special funds. Some money is already available in the districts to certain activities, and ordinary technical staff can help village representatives to get this money. Applications for non-earmarked funds have to be submitted to the annual district plan or 5-year district plan. The annual and the 5-year plans are ultimately decided on and approved by the district governor. This means that while villagers at the khumban meeting ask for funds, the representative can in certain situations affirm that money for this activity is available straight away, whereas he/she will not be able to give information on the possibilities of obtaining funds for certain other activities.

Thus, the immediate results of the meeting was that villagers became aware that they could apply directly, e.g. to the education office, and get extra money straight away to let their teacher teach illiterate adults in the evening. Also the representative from Lao Women Union affirmed that she would include gender training courses for some of the villages, those with most gender problems, in the next district plan.

However, the khumban plan - the concrete output of the meeting - was not very tangible and not very detailed. This was due to a mix of factors. Participatory khumban planning is new activity in Sekong, and line-agencies normally make their own plans, therefore it is very difficult suddenly

to make an integrated plan, especially when it is not clear from where the money comes. Furthermore, it was not clear who should implement the activities and who should coordinate and monitor.

The possibility of appointing resource people in the line-agencies, who could be the ones affiliated to the specific khumbans turned out to be difficult. It is only the district governor, who can make this kind of appointments, and since it is a long and difficult process to obtain the appointments, this solution was considered not feasible. This means that next time there is a khumban meeting with the involved line-agencies, it might be new representative, who comes, and who do not know the history, the actual situation, and the plans of the khumban. Another barrier to the whole structure and ideas of khumban phathana is that staff in line-agencies normally works within specific sub-sectors, such as livestock, fish raising, rice paddy, non-formal education, or mother and child health. For this reason, it is difficult to the staff suddenly to work with geographical areas as generalists.

As a first time exercise the khumban level planning in Sekong must be considered as a success. We have to remember that this was the first step in a whole new process. If the result is blurred it can help us to understand some of the main barriers to khumban phathana. The biggest constraint is without doubt that there are not yet any legal structures and procedures in regard to khumbans. As far as there are no such procedures, ordinary staff cannot coordinate and implement activities. To do this would be to work against the already existing structures, which no one would do. It is obvious that unless some clear and functional structures and rules for khumban phathana are passed as laws, there will be no efficient khumban phathana.

### **Step 6 - Evaluation**

After the khumban meeting there was a debriefing where the manual and the process were discussed. In general the officials were very positive towards the manual. Maybe it was politeness, but in any case, they did not want to take out any of the exercises, even the exercise on matrix-ranking of income-generating activities, which was difficult to conduct. Rather they wanted to include additional exercises, e.g. drawing dream maps of the village in men and women groups.

Some of the comments at the debriefing were:

*'...focussing on ethnics helps us to understand the villages and the poverty much better. The traditions and the way they work differ from group to group. Knowing the ethnic composition of the village help us to make better plans for the village...'*

*'...The participatory tools learned us a lot about the villages that we didn't know before. For example, we learned how the village had in the past had benefited – or not benefited - from projects. If the villagers, e.g. had got latrines but didn't use the latrines it would help us to understand that the village had a problem with their water supply...'*

After the debriefing the planning officials were asked to fill in an evaluation form, where they should write at least one good and one bad thing about: 1) the 3-day workshop, 2) the field practise at village level, and 3) the khumban meeting. The answers can be summarised as follows:

**What was good about the 3-day workshop?**

- It's a first training on how government officials and villagers can use participatory methods. We have learnt a new lesson.
- The expert use specific strategies to transfer knowledge, so we can understand well
- We learn about participatory planning which is very important to develop our country
- We learned about village income-generating, village relation mapping, priority mapping and the situations in khumban
- During these 3 days I can understand clearly on government policies and gender

**What was not good about the 3-day workshop, or could have been done better?**

- The line-agencies should have participated in the workshop
- Understanding would have been higher, if the planning officials had had the manual before the workshop
- Some of the words the translator used were difficult to understand
- The planning and budget committee of the district should have been invited to open and close the workshop
- Some officials have not enough experience in cooperation as well as other skills

**What was good about the field practice in the villages?**

- We learn how important it is to involve the villagers in the planning
- The villagers have learnt to develop their own village
- We learn about the history, living conditions, and development priority in each village
- Field practise gives the officials the real information about the villages and helps them to make better village development plans
- We experience a better way to help villagers so they are not just waiting for government to help them

**What was not so good in the field – what could have been done better?**

- Some officials did not always understand the translation
- The village chief should know about participatory planning before the first meeting, so he can inform the villagers before the officials come to the village.
- Some officials were not able to transfer the ideas clearly to the villagers
- The Per Diem was too low. It did not commensurate with the hard work in the villages and it did not encourage the officials to work.
- I did not always have confidence enough to speak because sometimes I don't understand the villagers. However, I have tried my best.

**What was good about the preparation meeting and the khumban meeting?**

- The meeting was well organised. It is a good way to generate discussion between villagers and academic staff
- The villagers have a chance to share their ideas and write a plan to develop their own villages
- The meeting provided clear understanding on responsibility of government and villagers
- Officials got a chance to work closely with the villagers
- We tried to make villagers understand about gender. We learnt that in some of the pilot villages women are still colonised by the men
- We learnt the importance of developing the khumbans

**What was not so good – what could have been done better or different?**

- The villagers are stuck in the past and they don't keep time
- The project should support activities in villages 100%. Villagers should not co-finance.

- Too much talking in the meeting. We did not follow the agenda we discussed in the preparation meeting
- There were too many things to discuss to finish in one day
- The villagers just want to get funds they don't understand that they should participate in work or co-finance

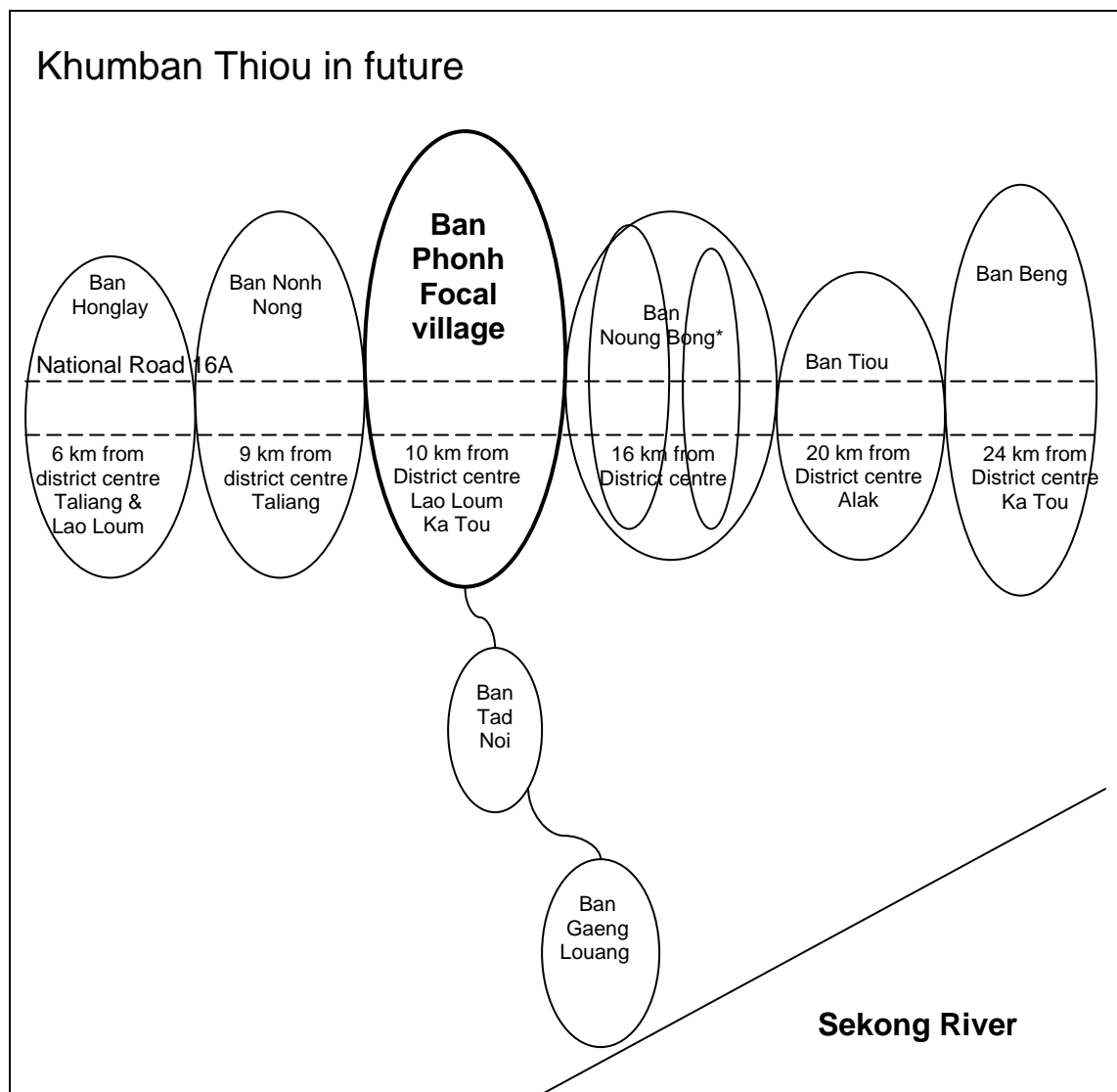
#### **Other comments**

- We need more training to understand clearly
- There should be a team leader in the field
- The team leader should transfer politics and train village chief so he can continue the work
- There should be a good cooperation between the officials in the team
- We should use this knowledge to continue developing khumbans in Lao
- There should be a person who is responsible for following up in the khumban, and this person should be given some responsibility
- The line-agencies should have participated in the training and field-practise
- I have build up strong abilities on participatory planning, I remember well, and I am sure I can implement it in future.

The answers from the evaluation schemes show many personal as well as general comments, - which are both very important to improve in future. The essence of the answers is included in the results and findings below.

#### **Future of Khumban Thiou**

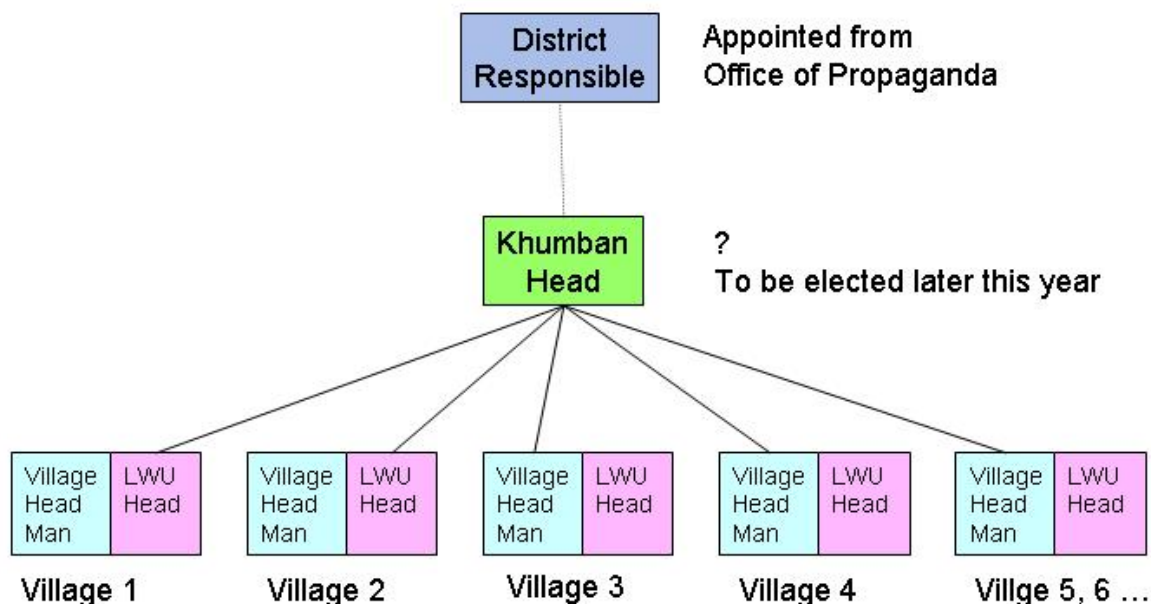
As mentioned under step 4 working with the village cooperation mapping led to the inclusion of two new villages into the khumban. The deputy head of OoG, who is khumban responsible at province level, has made a request to the district governor to include the two villages in the khumban. It is the district governor's decision, but chances are very high that he will approve the request. Therefore, in future, the map of Khumban Thiou might be as in the figure below.



The khumban management was also discussed. The current khumban committee consists of village headman and head of Lao Woman Union from each village. This set up secures gender balance. If otherwise a development committee is selected, appointed, or elected it is likely that it will be dominated by men.

The current khumban head is a district official from Office of Propaganda. The idea of OoG is that in future - to secure the participatory approach - the khumban head should be a villager elected by the khumban committee. However, right now it is a transition period. New village heads will be elected later this year. Therefore, the election of khumban head is postponed.

# Village Committee



**Current structure of khumban committee of Khumban Thiou**

The latest development in regard to Khumban Thiou is that the province as a start allocated 12 mil kip to the khumban to conduct activities discussed at the khumban meeting. This positive development is due to a wholehearted effort from the deputy head of OoG who has promoted the khumban phathana in the province. The money is ear-marked to fish ponds which were a priority in all villages.

## Results

The results of the work done can be summarised as follows:

- Piloted the concept of khumban phathana in Sekong
- Completed participatory planning in 6 villages
- Completed participatory planning in 1 khumban
- Trained 12 government officials on participatory planning for 3 weeks
- Trained 2 officials as trainers on statistics
- Trained 24 villagers on statistics
- 6 filled Statistics Books
- 6 filled books on participatory village planning
- 1 filled book on participatory khumban planning
- Villagers and women experienced for the first time in Sekong to be included in the government planning process
- 2 new villages will be included into the khumban – the result of a mapping exercise showed that these villages already were connected to the khumban in socio-economic matters.
- LWU will include gender training for some of the villages in the next annual plan
- Villagers found out that there are available funds for non-formal education in the district
- The provincial level allocated 12 mio kip to the khumban to conduct fish pond activities

## Lesson learnt

Positive:

- In general, the participating officials were very serious and learned very well.
- As a first time test of the khumban planning in Sekong the results were positive.
- Villagers participated a lot and the fact that they are now involved in the process – men as women – rich as poor – is a new and better situation

Negative:

- It is difficult to work with the khumban concept because it is not yet well-defined
- The fact that there are no procedures for reporting, responsibilities and cooperation among line-agencies on khumbans, makes it difficult to make good and detailed plans.
- The fact that staff in line-agencies is responsible for sub-sectors such as livestock, fish raising, or paddy field cultivation, - not geographical areas – makes it very difficult to coordinate activities.

## Recommendations

- Participants learnt very well, but more training would be recommended to make officials more confident with principles and tools. Especially, if some are supposed to be trainers in future.
- It is recommended that central level defines structures and procedures for responsibility and for how the line-agencies should work in the khumban
- If the khumban process continues in future it is recommended that the line-agencies are included in training and khumban awareness building
- It is recommended that Sekong province focus on establishment of khumbans first and afterwards goes on with the planning process.



**Annex 1 - Officials trained as trainers of village statistics**

|   |
|---|
| Ms Pom, Technical staff from of Statistic Unit, DPI, Sekong                         |
| Mr Vongnakhon, Technical staff from Statistic Unit, Lamarm District Planning Office |



## Annex 2 - Planning documents

Planning and Reporting Reference Manual for Provincial Authorities, Vol I, Guideline for Planning, Project Documentation and Reporting

State Planning Committee (now CPI), 1998, (Lao and English)

Guideline for Planning and Reporting at District Level, Basic Knowledge on Planning, Project Proposal Writing, and Reporting

State Planning Committee (now CPI), 1999, (only Lao)

Support to the Provincial and District Capacity Building for Socio-Economic Development Planning: Review of Impacts and Achievements

Committee for Planning and Cooperation (now CPI) & Swedish International Development Authority, 2002 (only English)

Manual on Planning and Project Proposal Writing, Analysing and Assessing Projects  
Mini Project on Rural Development, Luang Prabang Province, 2003 (only Lao)

Manual on Building the Village as the Implementation Unit  
Sekong Province, 2001 (Lao & unofficial translation to English)

A Field Guide to Data Collection with an Emphasis on Rapid Rural Assessment Technique  
CPI, 2000 (Lao and English)

Guideline for Participatory Planning  
NGPES, Improved version, 2005 (only Lao)

Guidelines for Development Planning at the Village/Khum Ban, District and Provincial Level  
CPI, Draft, 2002 (Lao and English)

The Village Statistics Book  
NSC (only Lao)

The District Statistics Book  
NSC (only Lao)

The Provincial Statistics Book  
NSC (only Lao)

Participatory Village Development Planning Manual  
Anil Adhikary, Participatory Planning specialist, Luang Prabang (Lao and English)

Participatory Khum-Ban Development Planning Manual  
Anil Adhikary, Participatory Planning specialist, Luang Prabang (Lao and English)

Village Level Survey  
DPI Sekong, probably from 2000 (Lao)

Khumban Phathana, Gender and Ethnicity: A Sekong Manual on Participatory Planning – Book 1: Village Book  
Katrine Plesner, Participatory Planning Specialist, 2005 (Lao and English)

Khumban Phathana, Gender and Ethnicity: A Sekong Manual on Participatory Planning – Book 2: Khumban Book  
Katrine Plesner, Participatory Planning Specialist, 2005 (Lao and English)

Training Manual for Participatory Poverty Monitoring  
Asian Development Bank, 2003 (Lao & unofficial translation to English)



### **Annex 3 - Officials trained on participatory planning**

|   |
|---|
| Mr Bounoi Soukhounmy, Head of Statistic Unit, DPI         |
| Mr Ngungsi Khoummavong, Head of Investment Unit, DPI      |
| Mr Bounsone Lienglouang, Head of Planning Unit, DPI       |
| Mr Bounka Choumaly, Personnel Management, DPI             |
| Mr Pounsy Saypaserth, Accountant, DPI                     |
| Mr Gondavanh Vongsa, Tech Staff, Investment Unit, DPI     |
| Mr Phaivanh Phimmassen, Tech Staff, Planning Unit, DPI    |
| Mr Vathana Thammavong, Tech Staff, Statistics Unit, DPI   |
| Mr Soumpa Keodavong, Tech Staff, Unit of Planning, DPI    |
| Mr Somdy Phaimalayvanh, Lamarm District Planning Office   |
| Mr Outhaivanh Keopadapsy, Lamarm District Planning Office |
| Mr Somephorn Saysouvan, Tech Staff, Governor's Cabinet    |