



Work Place Diversity in Aid Agencies in Laos



– Indigenous Peoples Representation

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Acronyms

ARMI	Association for Rural Mobilization and Improvement
CAMKID	Community Association for Mobilization of Knowledge and Integrated Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CKSA	Community Knowledge Support Association
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FRC	French Red Cross
GoL	Government of Lao
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HJA	Huam jai Assassamak
ICCPRQ	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
IKAP	Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
LHD	Learning House for Development
LIWG	Land Issues Working Group
LNN	Lao NPA Network
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
LSMP	Legal Sector Master Plan
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MAG	Mines Advisory Group
MDM	Médecins du Monde
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHP	Maeying Houamjai Patthana
MMSEA	Mainland Montane Southeast Asia
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NPA	Norwegian People Aid
NPA	Non Profit Association
ON	XFAM Novib
PACSA	Public Administration and Civil Service Authority
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
RRDTC	Rural Research Development and Training Centre
SAEDA	Sustainable Agriculture and Environment Development Association
SIAG	Social Inclusion Action Group
SCI	Save the Children International
TOT	Training of Trainer
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
WLEA	Women's Legal Education Association
WR	World Renew
WV	World Vision

Background Summary, Key Findings and Recommendations

BACKGROUND

The concept of indigenous identity has gained greater acceptance amongst international non-government organisations (INGOs), bilateral donors, foundations, international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, research institutes and other development agencies from the around the world. These aid agencies now often claim to be working in the interest of indigenous peoples. Some organisations are fully dedicated to indigenous and related issues, while others list indigenous peoples as recipients of the projects implemented or supported. Embracing indigenous identity has created a discourse in development, by allowing aid agencies to claim service to indigenous peoples—whether or not their programs, staffing practices and cultural biases are actually supportive of indigenous people and communities.

In Lao PDR, nearly all international aid agencies, as well as local but mostly foreign-funded non-profit associations (NPAs), have avoided explicit recognition of indigenous people. These development agencies prefer to support, or at least not challenge, the Lao government policy that there are no indigenous people. Officially, there are 49 ethnic groups recognized, with 160 ethnic sub-groups, which belong to four main ethnolinguistic families. The ethnic Lao comprise around one-third of the total population. Approximately another third of the population consists of other Lao-Tai language speakers. The remaining third – have first language in the Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan language and Hmong-lu Mien families.

Aid agencies have passively accepted the use of the term “ethnic groups” (the term “ethnic minority” is also now not allowed in the official discourse), either to avoid conflict with the government policy or because indigenous issues is not a priority in their development agenda. What is not well understood is how

these same aid agencies internalize indigenous peoples’ issues into their own policies and program implementation, or how indigenous peoples are represented and treated within these organizations.

Work places reflect the values of the wider society including its issues, concerns and the opportunities for success and advancement. Ethnic minority representation in the workplace reflects societal attitudes towards such groups. A diverse workplace is one in which various ethnic groups, as well as women and others groups that have been historically been excluded, are well represented in numbers at least proportional to their numbers in the general population. Work place diversity has been documented in other countries as adding to innovation and excellence, enhancing the ability of organizations to represent and adapt and respond to the needs of different groups and better serve all the people, including those who have historically excluded.

Research addressed the above issues and examined what efforts have been made by aid agencies in Laos to hire indigenous peoples as staff members, at what levels and in what types of positions, i.e., field staff, junior or senior management, domestic help, what agency criteria have been used in hiring practices and how the presence of indigenous staff members has informed (or lack of presence has misinformed) underlying development concepts and philosophies, biases, and priorities held by those organizations.

The overall goal of the research was to assist aid organizations in Laos to critically assess and improve their stated values, attitudes and actual progress in becoming inclusive and diverse workplaces, to better serve and represent the interests of indigenous people and communities.

The objectives of the research were:

1. To identify and quantify the number of indigenous people employed by aid organizations and in what roles.
2. To learn if aid agencies in Laos have effective hiring policies for employing indigenous people.
3. To open a dialogue amongst aid agencies on the topic of workplace diversity and the hiring of indigenous people.
4. To create opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region.

While the main focus of the study has been international NGOs (INGOs), multilateral organizations were also contacted as were national civil society organizations (CSOs)—mainly non-profit associations (NPAs) that are locally based but mainly funded by international donors. In total, over 80 agencies were contacted including 79 INGOs. Twenty-nine Aid Agencies contacted replied to our invitation and 23 were interviewed. Seventeen agencies provided the inventory of their staff (they work in 34 districts in 13 provinces) while 6 of them were interviewed but did not provide their staff lists.

The sample includes 561 staff members, including 336 men and 224 women. Of these, 498 work for INGOs and 63 for CSOs. From a geographic perspective, out of the sample, 30% work in Vientiane Capital where most of the country offices are located, 14.3% work in Bokeo Province in Northern Laos and 10.2% in Savannakhet in Central Laos. 8.7% of the aid agency staffs members sampled work in Phongsaly Province in Northern Laos and 8.2% work in Xiengkhouang Province.

KEY FINDINGS#

1. **A minority of international organizations, INGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs)/non-profit associations (NPAs) were willing to participate in this study through sharing information on their hiring practices and workplace diversity policies.** This reluctance to participate appears to reflect the lack of priority or focus many organizations have on this issue, and perhaps sensitivity towards disclosing their own staffing policies and composition out of fear of embarrassment or due to this issue being seen as sensitive in the eyes of the Government of Lao PDR (GOL).
2. **A disproportionate number of aid agency staff members (80%) come from the dominant Lao-Tai linguistic family even though they make up less than 65% of the Lao population. In comparison to their 22.6% of the country's population, Mon-Khmer groups, but only 9.4% of aid agency staff, are particularly under-represented. The positions that indigenous staff members do have within agencies tend to be of lower paying and lower status than lowland Lao-Tai staff.** Many work as cleaners, guards and gardeners. Very few indigenous staff members in some specialized positions, such as accounting, translation, and nursing. Hmong-Mien people have in general been able to gain higher positions (project managers, project officers) than have Mon-Khmer employees (more likely employed as community workers, facilitators, volunteers, interns or in the above-mentioned lower status NGO positions).
3. **Inclusion of indigenous staff members within aid agencies varies widely.** The percentage of indigenous aid agency staffs among international NGOs surveyed varied from a high of

66.7% (GAPE) to a low of 24.2% (CARE). It is likely that some of those organizations that refused to provide staffing information have even lower percentages.

4. **International NGOs are doing a better job of hiring indigenous people than are CSOs (NPAs).** CSOs employees are 90.5% Lao-Tai ethnicity and only 9.5% other ethnic groups. For INGOS, 78.7% of employees are Lao-Tai and 18% are other ethnic groups.
5. **Overall, international aid agencies and CSOs have made good progress in employing women but very poor progress in hiring indigenous women.** Out of 561 employees included in the study, 39.9% are women. Women account for 81.3% of the accountants, 60% of the trainers and 50% of the project volunteers and interns. Reasonably good gender balance is also displayed in the position of assistants, project officers and project managers (48.6%, 46% and 40% respectively). Women (189/498) represent 38% of INGO employees and 55.6% of the National CSO staff. However, indigenous women account for only 16.4% of the women working for INGOs and 6% of the total INGO staff. Among the National CSOs the situation is even worse: Indigenous women account for 8.6% of the women staff and 4.8% of total CSO staff. There is no woman from the Sino-Tibetan ethno-linguistic family working for any of the CSOs surveyed.
6. **Higher percentages of indigenous/ethnic minority aid agency staff are employed in the provinces where those groups form large percentages of the population.** Relatively few gain positions in Vientiane, where the head offices of many agencies are located and where

many of the senior staff positions are based.

7. **The programmatic approach and orientation of individual aid agencies has a major impact on their hiring priorities.** Agencies focused on direct support to existing structures – such as government departments and programs or general support for Civil Society Organizations – are less likely to view hiring indigenous people as a priority. Agencies working at the community level to build local capacity and engage in the issues of most concern to indigenous ethnic communities are more likely to see the hiring of indigenous personnel able to work directly with those communities as a priority. The skills required for the staff located in an interface between the Vientiane Program office and the local partners are different than in the case of implementation at field level in a context of interaction with local communities. It is important to take into consideration the modus operandi of each aid agency in the analysis of hiring policies and practices since it has a deep influence on staff composition and skills required.
8. **None of the 23 aid agencies interviewed during the survey has hiring or employment policies for indigenous people.** Many organizations have policies related to gender equality, special prerogatives for disabled staffs, etc. But they lack written policies regarding indigenous people. However, many agencies have general policies of non-discrimination and are using a variety of strategies to encourage the hiring of staff, including indigenous staff, at the local level. Some specify that proficiency in indigenous language as an important asset when applying for jobs at the field level. While not explicitly

requiring an indigenous person, this policy has the effect of doing so because almost no ethnic Lao people learn to speak indigenous languages. Still, some agencies display an almost complete lack of interest or awareness regarding ethnic diversity issues in the country and so tend to end up hiring ethnic Lao staff almost exclusively.

- 9. Many aid agencies express a desire to hire more indigenous people but have difficulty doing so.** There are several reasons for this. Asserting one's ethnicity can be challenging. Ethnicity is not officially documented and many potential recruits will play down their ethnicity and say they are Lao in order to avoid stigmatization. The most common constraint in hiring indigenous people relates to their formal qualifications – mainly their education level and professional experience. There is a clear link between formal education levels and ethnicity. Agencies tend to value qualifications such as the English language, writing and computer skills more often possessed by lowland Lao people as more valuable than the skills such as ethnic minority language ability and understanding of indigenous livelihood systems and cultures that might be possessed by indigenous candidates for agency positions. A related problem is that staff recruitment often relies on informal networks and is carried out by ethnic Lao staff already working in aid agency programs. In many cases, they are much more likely to encourage other ethnic Lao people – their friends, colleagues and relatives – to apply rather than to actively outreach to indigenous people.

- 10. Passive versus Pro-Active Approaches:** Some agencies passively accept that indigenous people are less likely to have formal training and skills

and are less likely to apply for positions and so they end up hiring ethnic Lao people almost exclusively. Often they are taking an expedient approach that focuses on the quick and efficient implementation of specific projects. Within the home countries of many of the agencies, it would certainly not be acceptable to use such justifications to exclude minority groups from employment on a long-term continuing basis. Recognizing this, some agencies are taking a more pro-active approach. These include internships and scholarships, active recruitment/outreach and the use of village facilitators, including indigenous women in their community level programs. A key to success has been the willingness to make a long-term commitment to building the capacity of indigenous people.

- 11. Networking: There has been very little development of or participation in networks that might help address some of these issues.** Networking has the potential of creating opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region. Aid groups have not made any efforts to facilitate such networks within the country. Few organizations participate in, or even seem to be aware of the existence, of wider regional networks, such as Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) or Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP).

- 12. Knowledge about ethnicity and sensitivity:** Generally speaking, many Lao staff of aid agencies are insensitive at best, and in some cases clearly biased against, indigenous people and cultures. Most of the

informants were not even aware of the large number of ethnic groups found in the country or the names of the main ethnic groups found in their target areas. Very few aid agencies appear to have taken any steps to promote real ethnic sensitivity and understanding among their staff.

13. Many indigenous staff members themselves appear self-conscious or embarrassed about their ethnic backgrounds. They have never been exposed to any indigenous rights issues or efforts to maintain pride and respect for their own cultures. Many act as if they were ethnic Lao; some are not confident and have grown up with oppression and are pretending to be Lao. In some cases indigenous staff themselves have adopted ethnic Lao biases against indigenous cultures and knowledge. This impacts the way they work at the community level. Just because a staff is from a particular ethnic minority background does not mean they are culturally competent or able to avoid the same mistakes ethnic Lao people make when working with indigenous communities.

14. Many indigenous people experience difficult transitions once the specific projects they are hired to work on are completed. They may have acquired new skills and technical expertise, but still find it hard to integrate into the labor market and almost impossible to be hired by government departments. Many return to their traditional livelihoods.

15. Conclusion: While there has been an increase in awareness about issues around ethnic equity and sensitivity in Laos over the last twenty years, the overall situation is still of great concern. Given the progress that has been made in recognizing indigenous rights and promoting ethnic and

cultural appreciation and sensitivity in other parts of the world, Laos, and many of the international agencies and internationally funded National CSOs operating there, appear to be far behind the times. Only a small number of organizations have really made these issues a priority. Without a better appreciation of indigenous cultures and livelihood systems— informed by indigenous people themselves— outside efforts to ‘develop’ these people and communities will continue to fall short.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a summary of the report’s recommendations to aid agencies. For details on these recommendations see the main report.

- 1. International aid agencies and National CSOs/NPAs need to increase their focus and the priority they give to these issues — especially those working with indigenous communities.** A start would be to agree upon a joint Commitment to Achieving Ethnic Equity that would highlight key principles and best hiring practices and elaborate a code of conduct for aid agencies working in Laos. The INGO Network would be an appropriate institution to lead such an effort together with the Learning House for Development (LHD)/ NPA Network. However, it is also important that these initiatives include both larger multi-lateral/bi-lateral development organizations
- 2. Aid Agencies need to do a much better job at learning about the cultures and livelihood systems of the communities with whom they are proposing to work.** This needs to happen at the time of initial baseline or Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) data collection activities.

Collaborating with district or provincial Lao Front for National Construction is also a strategic option that can allow to inventory ethnicity of rural communities.

3. **Organizations need to do a much better job at providing training in ethnic and cultural sensitivity to their own staff and counterparts.** The goals would be to reduce discrimination and negative stereotypes towards indigenous people, livelihoods and knowledge, and to better work with indigenous/ethnic minority communities. A shift of attitude is needed— from suspicion and distrust toward embracing and appreciating cultural identity, cultural performance, songs, taboos, customary practices and customary authority structures.
4. **Agencies need to improve their hiring practices in ways that allow for the increased participation of indigenous people, especially women, and to refrain from the same excuses and explanations that have long been used to justify their lack of progress to date.** There are both short-term and longer-term actions that can be taken to address this long-standing injustice. Short-term practices may include improving outreach to indigenous people in the recruitment process, recruiting directly from local

communities, better valuing the skills and knowledge indigenous people in communities already have, taking advantage of existing opportunities such as the *Huamjai Asasamak* Association volunteer internship program, and providing financial incentives for staff able to speak minority languages. Longer-term initiatives may involve support for internships and scholarship programs focused on promising indigenous people, especially women without formal education and previous working experience.

5. **Agencies should do much more to facilitate and participate in local and regional networks.** The development of one or more networks of indigenous/ethnic minority staff working in INGOs, for example, might need an initial push or facilitation by interested INGOs. Organizations could also promote better linkages with regional international network by inviting groups like AIPP to present to INGO and CSO networks, to conduct trainings for indigenous staff and sensitivity training for non-indigenous staff. Agencies might also link with projects and academics that support research on indigenous people, languages, livelihoods, etc.

MAIN REPORT

Research background

The concept of indigenous identity has gained greater acceptance amongst international non-government organisations (INGOs), bilateral donors, foundations, international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, research institutes and other development agencies from the around the world. These aid agencies now often claim to be working in the interest of indigenous peoples. Some organisations are fully dedicated to indigenous and related issues, while others list indigenous peoples as recipients of the projects implemented or supported. Embracing indigenous identity has created a discourse in development, by allowing aid agencies to claim service to indigenous peoples—whether or not their programs, staffing practices and cultural biases are actually supportive of indigenous people and communities.

In the Lao PDR (Laos), the Government of Laos (GOL) finds the term indigenous very contentious and rejects its use. Although Laos is culturally diverse, the government has rigorously avoided the politics of indigenous identity by using the officially sanctioned yet generic term, 'ethnic group' in its place. The use of the terms 'indigenous' and 'ethnic minority' are very complex in the Lao context and their use can be controversial. It has been pointed out that some Lao-Tai groups have been in Laos longer than some other ethnic groups who more recently migrated to the country. Still, a clear distinction can be made between ethnic minority groups versus the Lao-Tai groups who represent the dominant cultural and economic power in the country. Despite whatever label is used, almost all of those groups face acute issues of the loss of traditional culture, practices, language and natural resource-based livelihood systems. These issues are largely related to power imbalances between groups and power is also a key concept in defining the term indigenous. Internationally, many organizations concerned with these issues have chosen to use the term 'indigenous' for all such minority groups faced with such challenges. For the proposed study the term indigenous is used but it is acknowledged that this is a complex issue.

In Lao PDR, nearly all international aid agencies, as well as local but mostly foreign-funded non-profit associations (NPAs), have avoided explicit recognition of indigenous people. These development agencies prefer to support, or at least not challenge, the Lao government policy that there are no indigenous people. Aid agencies have passively accepted the use of the term “ethnic groups” (the term “ethnic minority” is also now not allowed in the official discourse), either to avoid conflict with the government policy or because indigenous issues is not a priority in their development agenda. What is not well understood is how these same aid agencies internalize indigenous peoples’ issues into their own policies and program implementation, or how indigenous peoples are represented and treated within these organizations.

Work places reflect the values of the wider society including its issues, concerns and the opportunities for success and advancement. Ethnic minority representation in the workplace reflects societal attitudes towards such groups. A diverse workplace is one in which various ethnic groups, as well as women and others groups that have been historically been excluded, are well represented in numbers at least proportional to their numbers in the general population. Work place diversity has been documented in other countries as adding to innovation and excellence, enhancing the ability of organizations to represent and adapt and respond to the needs of different groups and better serve all the people, including those who have historically excluded.

Workforce Diversity in International Agencies: the Case of Nepal

A similar research project on Workforce Diversity in International Agencies was conducted in Nepal; a highly diverse country with 100 different social groups recognized and counted in 2001. The survey covered 1,425 Nepali staffs/417 women working in 30 international agencies in Nepal.

Published in 2008 by the Social Inclusion Action Group (SIAG), the report entitled: “Workforce Diversity in International Agencies” pointed out that though Nepal has a highly diverse population across castes, ethnicities, religions, languages, cultures and topographies, people employed in public and private institutions are not fully representative of this multi-cultural diversity.

Generally, “workforce diversity” refers to policies and practices that seek to include people within a workforce who are considered to be, in some way, different from the dominant groups. But diversity is not just about balancing the numbers of different groups. It is also about embracing new ideas and different perceptions. It is about ensuring that all agency personnel, irrespective of their caste, gender, race, ethnicity, and their other identities, have opportunities for career progression. Finally, it is about de-stereotyping jobs and people – reducing preconceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of certain groups and communities and the jobs that are best for them.

Lack of Indigenous People Working for Aid Agencies in Laos

In 1992, anthropologist and ethno-linguist Frank Prochan, who was researching indigenous ethnic groups in northern Laos, issued a challenge to the then-emerging international NGO community in Laos. Prochan noted that while dominant lowland Lao ethnic groups made up only approximately 50% of the country’s population, they constituted the vast majority of those working for aid agencies in the country. Representation from the other 50% of the population — the indigenous ethnic minority people — was extremely low. Prochan, in close consultation with a number of the few ethnic minority colleagues working in INGOs at the time, advocated for affirmative action by INGOs in Laos to meet the realities of the country’s ethnic demographics. Prochan stated “at least 50% of your services and resources should be directed to minority citizens and at least 50% of your national staff should be members of ethnic minorities.” Prochan recognized that this would not happen overnight but he advocated for specific steps that could rapidly move agencies in the direction of more representative diversity in their staffing.

Almost twenty years have gone by since the time of Prochan’s challenge; there is certainly a greatly increased awareness regarding ethnic and indigenous rights, and the importance of workplace diversity, at the international level. Within the countries providing most aid to Laos, this is now widely considered not only to be a basic issue of ethics and justice, but also an essential prerequisite for designing and implementing effective programs for historically marginalized or discriminated-against minority groups.

In Laos, how well has the international aid community done in ensuring that their workplaces are diverse and representative of the many ethnic groups in the country? Does unbalanced representation still persist in aid agencies in the country? Are indigenous women now well represented? Have aid agencies made the addressing of these imbalances a critical priority? If not, why not? Anecdotal evidence suggests that aid agencies may not have made as much progress in

this regard as would have been expected after twenty years. More recent research in Laos has suggested that the disproportionate representation of lowland Lao staff in aid agencies, and the resulting biases about indigenous cultures and livelihood systems within those agencies, has contributed to misinformed, inappropriate and, in some cases, harmful policies and programs towards indigenous people and communities in Laos. However, this subject has not been studied with active or verifiable systematic research in Laos. That in itself suggests that perhaps the issue has not been given the importance it deserves.

Since the time of Prochan's initial observations another area related to indigenous peoples representation has also arisen. Recent years have seen the establishment of national, regional and international indigenous organizations which are engaging at various levels in a number of issues related to the wellbeing and rights of indigenous peoples. Some countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia have strong indigenous peoples' movements which are well represented in forums, trainings and other events specific for indigenous peoples. For Laos, identifying and having indigenous peoples represented in these events has been very challenging. It is almost always the same small group of individuals – all men – who act as representatives. Expanding the number of indigenous people and including indigenous women's participation in events is important for wider representation. Additionally, at present in Laos there is no networking of indigenous/ethnic minority peoples working in aid agencies. Those employed by aid agencies are largely unaware of other indigenous staff which hinders them from meeting informally or in trying to create a more cohesive network.

The above related issues, indigenous peoples' representation in aid agencies and at national, regional and international forums, may be a key constraint to having the voices and rights of indigenous peoples included in actions and decisions impacting them.

To address and capture the issue of diversity in aid agencies, both the terms indigenous and ethnic minority will be used. Following on Prochan's work, any groups other than lowland Lao will be included.

Objectives

Research addressed the above issues and examined what efforts have been made by aid agencies in Laos to hire indigenous peoples as staff members, at what levels and in what types of positions, i.e., field staff, junior or senior management, domestic help, what agency criteria have been used in hiring practices and how the presence of indigenous staff members has informed (or lack of presence has misinformed) underlying development concepts and philosophies, biases, and priorities held by those organizations.

The overall goal of the research was to assist aid organizations in Laos to critically assess and improve their stated values, attitudes and actual progress in becoming inclusive and diverse workplaces, to better serve and represent the interests of indigenous people and communities.

The objectives of the research were:

1. To identify and quantify the number of indigenous people employed by aid organizations and in what roles.
2. To learn if aid agencies in Laos have effective hiring policies for employing indigenous people.
3. To open a dialogue amongst aid agencies on the topic of workplace diversity and the hiring of indigenous people.
4. To create opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region.

Survey design and methodology

1. The research started with a general desk review of similar research done in other parts of the world from which lessons were compiled.
2. Then, a list of all aid agencies operating in Laos (resident and non-resident) was compiled and background research on their employment policies done.
3. All INGOs working in Laos were contacted and asked to participate in the survey.
4. The LHD/ NPA Network was contacted to recruit national CSOs interested in participating in the survey.
5. Members of the HR-Admin-Network were also invited to participate in the survey¹.
6. A general questionnaire was designed to interview aid agencies. It consisted of 4 sections. The first section aimed at identifying and quantifying Aid Agency staffs including Indigenous people. Areas of investigation included location, age, gender, and initial position, number of year employed and current position, training and education level. The second section discussed about Aid Agency hiring policies and also practices and also how they make use of indigenous people's skills and insights once they are hired. Section three explored the networks, both domestic and regional in order to measure indigenous people's existing opportunities for dialogue and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region. Finally the fourth section dealt with Aid Agencies' knowledge about ethnicity/indigenous people issues in program/project/target areas.
7. Data was compiled and analyzed, and conclusions and recommendations were made.
8. The results will be presented at a national level meeting attended by aid agencies, civil society organisations and government representatives.

List and Characteristics of Research Informants

While the main focus of the study has been international NGOs (INGOs), multilateral organizations were also contacted as were national civil society organizations (CSOs)—mainly non-profit associations (NPAs) that are locally based but mainly funded by international donors.

¹ I would like to thank Ms. Somsanouk Chayisane (Nouk), Admin Manager from SAVE THE CHILDREN. She has helped me to contact all members of the HR Admin Network in order to find agencies that would accept to participate in the research project.

1. 79 INGOs were contacted through the INGO Network (See letter in APPENDIX) and invited to participate in the survey.
2. 29 Aid Agencies contacted replied to our invitation; this includes 1 multilateral organisation, 1 bilateral organization, 7 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and 20 International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). 4 out of 7 members of the INGO Committee Network (CARE, Plan International, Médecins du Monde and Helvetas) also accepted to collaborate.
3. 23 aid agencies were interviewed.
4. 17 provided the inventory of their staffs (they work in 34 districts in 13 provinces).
5. 6 aid agencies were interviewed but did not provide the list of staffs: Maeying Houamjai Patthana (MHP), Women's Legal Education Association (WLEA), Médecins sans Frontière (MSF), OXFAM, Save the Children International (SAI) and World Vision (WV).

Table 1 : List, Typology and Status of Informants

Nb	Name of the Aid Agency	Typology	Interviewed	Staff Inventory Provided	Contacted
1	ARMI (NORMAI)	CSO	1	1	
2	Camkid	CSO			1
3	CARE	INGO	1	1	
4	CIDSE	INGO	1	1	
5	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos	INGO	1	1	
6	Community Knowledge Support Association	CSO	1	1	
7	FRC	INGO	1	1	
8	GAPE	INGO	1	1	
9	Gender and Development Association	CSO	1	1	
10	GIZ	Bilateral			1
11	Handicap International	INGO	1	1	
12	HELVETAS	INGO	1	1	
13	IFAD	Multilateral			1
14	Japan International Volunteer Center	INGO	1	1	
15	Maeying Houamjai Patthana	CSO	1	X	
16	MAG	INGO			1
17	Médecin du Monde	INGO	1	1	
18	Médecins sans Frontière	INGO	1	X	
19	Norwegian Church Aid	INGO	1	1	
20	OXFAM	INGO	1	X	
21	PLAN	INGO	1	1	
22	SAEDA	CSO	1	1	
23	Save the Children International	INGO	1	X	
24	UNFPA	Multilateral			1
25	VFI	INGO	1	1	
26	Women's Legal Education Association	CSO	1	X	
27	World Renew	INGO	1	1	
28	World Vision	INGO	1	X	
29	INGO Network	Network	1	X	
			24	17	5

Research Constraints

It has been difficult to find aid agencies willing to share their thoughts and participate in the survey. Out of 79 INGOs contacted through the INGO member list (3/18/2013), only 5 replied. This means that an extra 15 INGOs were successfully involved due to the researcher's personal connections. None of the members of the HR-Admin-Network replied to the invitation to participate in the survey (3/22/2013). The request to the Learning House (coordinating CSO among Civil Society Organizations) to link with the 46 Civil Society Organizations' members to present the project and invite them to participate in the survey (as we did for the INGO AND HR-ADMIN Networks) remained unanswered (11/2/2012).

Some INGOs that were initially interested and requested additional information finally declined their participation (MAG, IFAD, CAMKID and GIZ) for various reasons including the feeling of not having much useful information to share, impossibility to disclose information on personnel based on legal data-protection provisions and in accordance with aid agency statutory regulations, or also the feeling that the survey would not be relevant to the aid agency or simply to the lack of follow up despite several emails and phone. Finally, five aid agencies that were interviewed and that were supposed to deliver their staff inventory finally never provided the list despite several promises and excuses; some of which are big INGOs and this is very unfortunate since we would have doubled our sample with their data.

The lack of consistency in the data provided by the aid agencies did not allow analyzing some indicators such as the (1) the name of the staffs (the idea was to make available the database so aid agencies could eventually search for indigenous people with experience in various fields); (2) staff's positions when they started to work for the agency and their current positions; (3) the training they have received.

Aid Agencies Profile

Aid Agencies

National Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)/Non Profit Associations (NPAs)

In Laos, space for civil society has been, albeit slowly, gradually opening up. Article 31 of the Lao Constitution In 1991 guaranteed the right of association; but at the time, there were no legislative framework that would define the type of organizations or regulations relative to associative life. In 1993, the Party promulgated a resolution, but there were no regulations for the implementations of these general directives, and in practice, this allowed many umbrella organizations to be set under various government branches.

Two other decrees, proclaimed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), regulated the setting and the functioning of water users' associations. The first (n° 0156/AF) proclaimed in March 1997, and the second (n° 1150/MAF 2000) in June 2000, define the water users' associations in terms of legal entities, set the regulations for the registration of associations, the responsibilities of the associations and of their members, and also the mechanism of management. Then, the Articles 14, 27 and 40 of the Law on Local Administration (October 2003) mention that social organizations, as the authorities and government departments have a role in participating in the socioeconomic development of the country.

INGOs

72 International Non-Government Organizations are currently registered in the INGO Network. They operate in 10 different sectors and manage over 240 projects all over the country.

Sectors	Acronym	Number of INGOS	Number of projects
Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries	[AFF]	25 INGOS	56 Projects
Community Development	[CD]	27 INGOS	57 Projects
Data Collection & Analysis	[DC&A]	16 INGOS	44 Projects
Education	[ED]	34 INGOS	69 Projects
Emergency and Humanitarian Relief	[EHR]	18 INGOS	27 Projects
Health Care	[HC]	38 INGOS	97 Projects
Human Resources Development	[HRD]	32 INGOS	89 Projects
Income Generation & Economic Development	[IG&ED]	22 INGOS	38 Projects
Natural Resources & Ecology	[NR&E]	21 INGOS	43 Projects
Social Development	[SD]	24 INGOS	46 Projects
	10 sectors	72 INGOS	246 projects

Source:

Ethnic diversity in Lao PDR

With a population of over seven million, Laos is the most ethnically diverse country in mainland Southeast Asia. The ethnic Lao, comprising around a third of the population, dominates the country economically and culturally. Another third consists of members of other Tai language-speaking groups. The remaining third belongs to the Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan and Hmong-lu Mien families.

These groups are sometimes considered to be the “indigenous peoples” of Laos, although officially all ethnic groups have equal status, and the concept of “indigenous peoples” is not recognized. The words ‘*xon phao*’, ‘*banda phao*’ and ‘*paxaxon banda phao*’ (*phao* could be translated as ‘tribal’) are alternately used and refer to the notion of ethnic minorities. The Lao government currently recognizes 160 ethnic sub-groups within 49 ethnic groups, which belong to four main ethnolinguistic families. The ethnic Lao comprise around one-third of the total population. Approximately another third of the population consists of other Lao-Tai language speakers. The remaining third – have first language in the Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan language and Hmong-lu Mien families.

Officially, the multi-ethnic Lao people enjoy solidarity and equal rights before the law. Article 8 of the 1991 Constitution presents the Lao State as multi-ethnic and forbids discrimination based on ethnicity:

“The State pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the rights to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts of creating division and discrimination among [or] between ethnic groups are forbidden. The State implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the economic and social level of all ethnic groups”.

In reality, indigenous people are unequivocally the most vulnerable groups in Laos, representing 93% of the country’s poor. They face territorial, economic, cultural and political pressures and are experiencing various livelihood-related challenges. Their land and resources are increasingly under pressure from government development policies and commercial natural resource exploitation. There is no specific legislation in Laos with regard to indigenous peoples.

Table 2: Ethnolinguistic Families, Ethnic Groups and Percentages

No.	Ethnolinguistic Family	Number of Ethnic Groups	% of National Population
1	Lao-Tai <i>(Tai Dam, Tai Deng, Tai Neua, Tai Khao, Tai Sek, Lao, Phouthay, Khaleung)</i>	8	64.9%
2	Mon-Khmer <i>(Khamuic, Palaungic Katuic, Bahnarique and Vietic sub-groups)</i>	32	22.6%
3	Hmong-Mien <i>(Hmong, Iu-Mien)</i>	2	8.5%
4	Sino-Tibetan <i>(Akha, Lahu, Phounoy, Lao Seng, etc.)</i>	7	2,8%

Laos and International Laws Related to Indigenous People

The law provides for equal rights for all minority citizens and bars discrimination against them. Nonetheless, some societal discrimination persists. Moreover, some critics charged that the government’s resettlement program for ending slash-and-burn agriculture and opium production adversely affected many ethnic minority groups, particularly in the North. The program requires that resettled persons adopt paddy rice farming and live in large communities, ignoring the traditional livelihoods and community structures of these minority groups. International observers questioned whether the benefits promoted by the government access to markets, schools, and medical care for resettled persons outweighed the negative impact on traditional cultural practices. Some minority groups not involved in resettlement, notably those in remote locations, believed they had little voice in government decisions affecting their lands and the allocation of natural resources from their areas.

The Government had made great efforts to promote human rights and has adopted a Legal Sector Master Plan (LSMP) envisioning a state ruled by law by 2020. The Lao PDR is a party to six core human rights conventions and two optional protocols: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the latter’s two Optional Protocols regarding the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child

Pornography, and the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts. The Lao PDR also signed the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance but has not ratified.

Laos has not ratified ILO 169. Those who refuse to ratify ILO 169 are not bound by the law and undermining its principles that recognizes and protects tribal peoples' land rights, allowing tribes to prosper, and the forests in which many live to flourish.

Box 1 : UN Spécial Rapporteur Comments on Ethnic Minority and Human Rights

Since 2006, the Spécial Rapporteur on the human rights of indigenous peoples has expressed concern at instances of resettlement, forced displacement and relocation of indigenous peoples within the framework of economic "modernization", as part of programs to eradicate drug plantations, and in connection with the construction of the Nam Theun 2 dam in Khammouane province.

With regard to the latter project, the Spécial Rapporteur on the right to food raised similar concerns. Similarly, CERD noted that the Laos had adopted a policy of resettling members of ethnic groups from the mountains and highland plateaux to the plains. It recommended that Laos study alternatives to avoid displacement; ensure that the persons concerned are fully aware of the reasons for and modalities of their displacement and of measures taken for compensation and resettlement; and that it endeavour to obtain their free and informed consent. Laos should pay particular attention to the close cultural ties binding certain indigenous or tribal peoples to their land. A legislative framework in this regard would be particularly useful, Human Rights Council.

The Spécial Rapporteur on indigenous peoples also noted reports of arbitrary arrests, false criminal charges and other forms of threats and intimidation against indigenous and tribal peoples, as a result of their mobilization to defend their rights.

Source: Compilation prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (b) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1. 12 February 2010

Why it is important and right to have diversity in the aid agencies?

Diversity in Aid Agencies: This is both a human rights issue and is also essential for the sake of a more representative and well-rounded approach to development. This is even further relevant in the case of Laos where half of the population belongs to indigenous people groups.

Hiring people from indigenous people groups is the prerequisite to provide culturally suitable work. In Lao PDR, IP are the most vulnerable groups; they lie at the very bottom of the social structure, stereotyped as backward, environmentally destructive and counterproductive. They face territorial, economic, cultural and political integrationist pressures.

IP staffs can bridge both culturally and linguistically with indigenous communities and adapt key concept and ideas so IP communities can be engaged in a culturally relevant way on the basis of informed consultation. They can provide both culturally specific (knowledge related to one specific ethnic group) and cultural generic (general competence to work with indigenous people groups) approach to development work.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Ethnolinguistic Groups in Aid Agencies

The sample includes 561 staffs including 336 males and 224 females. There are 498 INGO staffs and 63 Civil Society Organization (CSO) staffs. **A disproportionate number of aid agency staffs (80%) come from the dominant Lao-Tai linguistic family even though they make up less than 65% of the Lao population. In comparison to their 22.6% of the country's population, Mon-Khmer groups with only 9.4% of aid agency staff, are particularly under-represented.** Hmong-lu Mien groups account for 8.6% of aid agencies staff and Sino-Tibetan ethnolinguistic family 2.5%. **The positions that indigenous/ethnic minority staff do have within agencies, tend to be of lower paying/lower status than lowland Lao/Tai staff.**

Table 3 : Ethnolinguistic Classification of Aid Agency Staffs

Name/ Acronym	Hmong- Mien	Lao- Tai	Mon- Khmer	no data	Sino- Tibetan	Grand Total	% IP	Rank
International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)								
CARE	3	69	18		1	91	24.2%	6
CCL		10			4	14	28.6%	5
CIDSE		6				6	100.0%	
CRF		16		1		17	0.0%	
GAPE		3	6			9	66.7%	1
HELVETAS Laos	11	28	3		2	44	36.4%	4
HI	2	59	4			65	9.2%	9
JVC		6	4			10	40.0%	3
MDM		18	1			19	5.3%	
NCA		53	1		3	57	7.0%	10
WR	16	24	3		4	47	48.9%	2
PLAN	9	65	3		1	78	16.7%	7
VFI	2	35	4			41	14.6%	8
<i>Sub-Total:</i>	43	392	47	1	15	498		
<i>Percentage</i>	8.6%	78.7%	9.4%	0.2%	3.0%			
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)								
ARMI		39	2			41	4.9%	
CKSA	1					1	100.0%	
GDA	2	8				10	20.0%	
SAEDA		10	1			11	9.1%	
<i>Sub-total:</i>	3	57	3			63	9.5%	
<i>Percentage:</i>	4.8%	90.5%	4.8%					
Grand Total	46	449	50	1	15	561		

Inclusion of indigenous/ethnic minority staff within aid agencies varies widely. The percentage of indigenous aid agency staff among international NGOs surveyed varied from a high of 66.7% (GAPE) to a low of 24.2% (CARE). It is likely that some of those organizations that refused to provide staffing information have even lower percentages.



Harak female Focus Group Discussion
(CARE Sekong Province)



Akha male Focus Group Discussion
(World Renew, Phongsaly)

One of the most striking finding is that International NGOs are doing a better job of hiring indigenous people than are National CSOs (NPAs). CSOs employ 90.5% Lao-Tai ethnic people as staff and only 9.5% indigenous people staffs compared to 78.7% of Lao-Tai staffs/18% of indigenous people for the INGOs.

Table 4 : Ethnolinguistic Family Representation at National Level Versus in Aid Agencies

	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	No Data	Sino-Tibetan
Percentage national level	8.5%	64.9%	22.6%		2.8%
Percentage in INGOs	8.6%	78.7%	9.4%	0.2%	3.0%
Percentage in National CSOs/ NPAs	4.8%	90.5%	4.8%		

The table above displays the percentages of staff per ethnolinguistic family both for National CSOs/ NPAs, INGOs and on the national level. Lao-Tai staffs are over-represented; they account for 64.9% of the population, but for 78.7% of INGO staffs and 90.5% of the National CSOs staffs. Hmong-Mien makes up almost both the same percentage on national percentage and as INGO staffs (8.5% and 8.6%) but half less as National CSO staffs (4.8%). Mon-Khmer is underrepresented in aid agencies as they account for 22.6% of the national population but only 9.4% of INGO staffs and 4.8% of National CSO staffs.

Ethnicity in Aid Agencies

The ethnic Lao represent 75.6% of all staffs (N=561) and work in all aid agencies involved in the survey, far in front of the Hmong (8.2%; they work in 8/17 AA) and the Khmu (3.7%; they also work in 8 AA). The Talieng (they work for 1 AA) and the Makong (they work for 3 AA), both account for 1.6% of the sample. In the case of 19 ethnic groups, they work for only one NGO.

Table 5 : Ethnicity in Aid Agencies

Ethnic group	ARMI	CARE	CCL	CIDSE	CKSA	CRF	GAPE	GDA	HEIVETAS	HI	JVC	MDM	NCA	PLAN	SAEDA	VFI	WR	Grand Total
Brao							1											1
J'rou							1											1
Akha		1											3				1	5
Chinese/ Lao												1						1
Hmong		3			1			2	11	2				9		2	16	46
Hor			3						1									4
Katang	1																	1
Katu		1																1
Khmu	1	6							3	3			1	3	1		3	21
Khmu/ Akha																	1	1
Lao	37	64	8	6		12	3	7	27	59	6	17	53	64	7	35	19	424
Leu			2			1											1	4
Makong										1	4					4		9
Mien														1				1
Ngkriang		2																2
No Data						1												1
Nya Heuan							2											2
Phou noy			1						1					1			2	5
Phou Thai	2	1						1										4
Pouan		2				3												5
Suay												1						1
Tai Dam									1						1		2	4
Tai Deng																	2	2
Tai Neua		1																1
Tai Poun															1			1
Tai Yang															1			1
Talieng		9																9
Youan		1																1
(blank)							1											1
Grand Total	41	91	14	6	1	17	8	10	44	65	10	19	57	78	11	41	47	560

In terms of ethnic diversity in aid agencies, CARE has the most diverse workplace included in the sample with staffs from 11 different ethnic groups, followed by World Renew (9 ethnic groups). GAPE and Helvetas occupy the third rank with both staffs from 6 ethnic groups. PLAN and SAEDA come fourth with staffs from 6 ethnic groups. Each of ARMI, CCL, CRF, and HI has staffs from 5 ethnic groups.

Gender Representation in Aid Agencies

Overall, international aid agencies and CSOs have made good progress in employing women but very poor progress in hiring indigenous women. Out of 561 staff included in the study, 39.9% are women. Women account for 81.3% of the accountants, 60% of the trainers and 50% of the project volunteer and interns. Reasonably good gender balance is also displayed in the position of assistants, project officers and project managers (48.6%, 46% and 40% respectively).

Table 6 : Percentages of Women per Position in Aid Agencies

Positions	No Data	F	M	Grand Total	Percentages
Nurse		1		1	100.0%
Secretary		4		4	100.0%
Accounting		13	3	16	81.3%
Trainer		3	2	5	60.0%
Volunteer/Intern		11	11	22	50.0%
Assistant		35	37	72	48.6%
Project Officer		71	82	153	46.4%
Project Manager		23	27	50	46.0%
Community Worker/Facilitator		12	18	30	40.0%
Senior Officer		6	11	17	35.3%
Cleaner/Guard/Gardener		28	54	82	34.1%
Advisor		1	2	3	33.3%
Project Coordinator	1	9	22	32	28.1%
Director		3	9	12	25.0%
Team Leader		3	11	14	21.4%
Translator		1	4	5	20.0%
Driver			37	37	0.0%
Engineer			6	6	0.0%
Grand Total	1	224	336	561	39.9%

Gender in INGOs

Women (189/498) represent 38% of the INGO staffs. Indigenous women account for 16.4% of the women working for INGOs (31/189); half of them belong to Mon-Khmer speaking groups. Indigenous women represent 6% of the INGO staff.

Table 7 : Gender in INGOs

Positions	Hmong-Mien			Lao-Tai			Mon-Khmer			Sino-Tibetan			Grand Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Accounting				11	3	14							14
Advisor					1	1					1	1	2
Assistant	2	9	11	23	17	40	6	6	12	2	3	5	68
Cleaner/Guard/Gardener		3	3	24	42	66	2	8	10				79
Community Worker				7	7	14				1	2	3	17
Director	1		1	1	6	7					1	1	9
Driver					34	34		3	3				37
Engineer					5	5					1	1	6
Nurse				1		1							1
Project Coordinator		3	3	8	14	23		4	4				30
Project Manager		3	3	18	23	41	1	1	2				46
Project Officer	5	13	18	46	54	100	6	2	8	2	2	4	131
Secretary				4		4							4
Senior Officer				6	10	16		1	1				17
Team Leader		2	2	1	7	8		1	1				11
Trainer	1		1	2	2	4							5
Translator				1	4	5							5
Volunteer/Intern		1	1	5	4	9	2	4	6				16
Grand Total	9	34	43	158	233	392	17	30	47	5	10	15	498

Gender in CSOs/ NPAs

Among the CSOs/ NPAs, the situation is even worse than for the INGOs: Indigenous women account

Table 8 : Gender in CSOs

Positions	Hmong-Mien			Lao-Tai			Mon-Khmer			Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Accounting				2		2				2
Advisor				1		1				1
Assistant				2	2	4				4
Cleaner/Guard/Gardener				2	1	3				3
Community Worker/Facilitator				4	8	12		1	1	13
Director				1	2	3				3
Project Coordinator				1	1	2				2
Project Manager	1		1	3		3				4
Project Officer	1	1	2	11	9	20				22
Team Leader				2	1	3				3
Volunteer/Intern				3	1	4	1	1	2	6
Grand Total	2	1	3	32	25	57	1	2	3	63

for 8.6% of the women staff and 4.8% of total CSO staff. There is no woman from the Sino-Tibetan ethno-linguistic family working for any of the CSOs surveyed.

Location

Higher percentages of indigenous/ethnic minority aid agency staff are employed in the provinces where those groups form large percentages of the population. Relatively few gain positions in Vientiane, where the head offices of many agencies are located and where many of the senior staff positions are based.

As mentioned above, the aid agencies included in our sample work in 35 districts in 13 provinces. Project location is crucial in relation to the availability of indigenous staffs as for instance in Phongsaly Province, where ethnic Lao are virtually absent and the ethnic majority consists of ethnic Phunoy and the lingua franca remain Phunoy and Hor. Project staffs are at ease and confident in their contacts with communities. On the opposite, in central and Southern Laos, ethnic Lao often fear to go out in Mon-Khmer communities; they would certainly prefer quickly implementing the work and going back to the provincial capital at dark.

Table 9 : Aid Agencies Target Districts and Provinces

Province	Districts	Area
Attapeu	Sanamsay	Southern Laos
Bokeo	Houayxay, Meung, Paktha, Pha Oudom	Northern Laos
Bolikhamxay	Phakngeum	
Champassak	Laongam, Moon, Pakse, Sukuma, Bacheing Chaleunsouk, Paksong, Khong	Southern Laos
Khammouane	Boualapha, Saybouathong	Central Laos
Louangprabang	Louangprabang	Northern Laos
Phongsaly	BounTai, Gnot Ou, Mai	Northern Laos
Saravane	Laongam, Saravanh	Southern Laos
Savannakhet	Atsaphone, Phine, Kaysone Phomvihan, Nong, Saybouathong, Thapangthong, Xepone	Central Laos
Sayabouly	Hongsa, Xienghone	Northern Laos
Sekong	Dakcheung, Lamam	Southern Laos
Vientiane	Saythani, Sikhottabong, Sisattanak,	Capital

From a geographic perspective, out of 561 staffs, 29.6% work in Vientiane Capital where most of the offices of the country are located. 14.3% work in Bokeo Province in Northern Laos and 10.2% in Savannakhet in Central Laos. 8.7% of the aid agency staffs sampled work in Phongsaly Province in Northern Laos and 8.2% work in Xiengkhouang.

Table 10 : Staff Locations

Province	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	No Data	Sino-Tibetan	Grand Total	Percentages
(blank)		52	1			53	9.4%
Bokeo	8	65	3		4	80	14.3%
Borlikhamxay		1				1	0.2%
Champasak		30	1			31	5.5%
Champasak and Attapeu		3	6			9	1.6%
Khammouane		4				4	0.7%
Luangprabang		3				3	0.5%
Phongsaly	6	25	9		9	49	8.7%
Saravanh		3	5			8	1.4%
Savannakhet		49	8			57	10.2%
Sayabouly		26				26	4.6%
Sekong		16	12			28	5.0%
Vientiane	8	153	4	1		166	29.6%
Xiengkouang	24	19	1		2	46	8.2%
Grand Total	46	449	50	1	15	561	

Hmong-Mien and Sino-Tibetan staffs are both located in the northern part of the country. Sino-Tibetan staffs are found in Phongsaly and Xiengkhouang, and Hmong staffs work in Xiengkhouang, Vientiane, Phongsaly and Bokeo. Mon-Khmer are more broadly scattered around and are working in 9 provinces. 62% of the Mon-Khmer staffs, which consist of Katuic and to a lesser extent Bahnaric speakers, are found in the central and southern parts of the country, while Northern Mon-Khmer are mostly ethnic Khmu. Lao-Tai staffs are found in all of the 13 provinces included in the sample; 34% of them work in Vientiane capital.

Indigenous staffs are best represented in Champassak and Attapeu provinces (66.7%) and Saravane province (62.5%), followed by Xiengkhouang Province (58.7%), Phongsaly (49%) and Sekong (42.9%). In Bokeo, indigenous staffs account for 18.8% and 14% in Savannakhet.

Current positions

In terms of working possibilities, aid agency staffs work in 18 different positions. Lao-Tai staffs work in all of the 18 positions while Hmong-Mien and Mon-Khmer staffs work in 9 positions, compared to 6 positions for the Sino-Tibetan staffs. This means that some jobs are uniquely filled by Lao-Tai staffs including accounting, translation, and nursing.

Indigenous people are over represented in support jobs such as guards, gardeners and house cleaners; 14% of indigenous people (Hmong-mien, Mon-Khmer altogether; 20% of all Mon-Khmer) compared to 1.5% for the Lao-Tai.

Table 11 : Current Positions Among Aid Agencies

Current Positions	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	No Data	Sino-Tibetan	Grand Total
Accounting		16				16
Advisor		2			1	3
Assistant	11	44	12		5	72
Director	1	10			1	12
Driver		34	3			37
Engineer		5			1	6
Project Coordinator	3	25	4			32
project Manager	4	44	2			50
Project Officer	20	120	8	1	4	153
Secretary		4				4
Senior Officer		16	1			17
Team Leader	2	11	1			14
Trainer	1	4				5
Translator		5				5
Cleaner/Guard/ Gardener	3	69	10			82
Volunteer/Intern	1	13	8			22
Nurse		1				1
Community Worker/ Facilitator		26	1		3	30
Grand Total	46	449	50	1	15	561

Current Positions in INGOs

18 different positions are listed in the INGO table below. Out of 498 staffs, 78.7% are Lao-Tai, 9.4% are Mon-Khmer, 8.6% are Hmong-Mien and 3% are Sino-Tibetan.

Table 12 : Current Positions Among INGOs

Current Positions	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	no data	Sino-Tibetan	Grand Total
Accounting		14				14
Advisor		1			1	2
Assistant	11	40	12		5	68
Cleaner/Guard/ Gardener	3	66	10			79
Community Worker/ Facilitator		14			3	17
Director	1	7			1	9
Driver		34	3			37

Current Positions	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	no data	Sino-Tibetan	Grand Total
Engineer		5			1	6
Nurse		1				1
Project Coordinator	3	23	4			30
Project Manager	3	41	2			46
Project Officer	18	100	8	1	4	131
Secretary		4				4
Senior Officer		16	1			17
Team Leader	2	8	1			11
Trainer	1	4				5
Translator		5				5
Volunteer / Intern	1	9	6			16
Grand Total	43	392	47	1	15	498

Current Positions in CSOs/ INGOs

National CSO/ NPA staffs work in 11 different positions. Out of 63 staffs, 90.4% are Lao-Tai, and Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien represent respectively 4.8%. There is no Sino-Tibetan staff working for the Lao CSOs in our sample. Hmong-Mien staffs (project managers, project officers) are better off than the Mon-Khmer staffs (community workers/facilitators, volunteers/interns).

Table 13 : Current positions among CSOs

Current positions	Hmong-Mien	Lao-Tai	Mon-Khmer	Grand Total
Accounting		2		2
Advisor		1		1
Assistant		4		4
Cleaner/Guard/ Gardener		3		3
Community Worker/ Facilitator		12	1	13
Director		3		3
Project Coordinator		2		2
Project Manager	1	3		4
Project Officer	2	20		22
Team Leader		3		3
Volunteer /Intern		4	2	6
Grand Total	3	57	3	63

Many speak on the behalf of indigenous people and get budgets because they prepare proposals emphasizing indigenous people and knowledge issues. In fact, many do not have the human resources needed to provide a culturally competent development.

Do aid agencies in Laos have effective hiring policies for employing indigenous people and for making use of their skills and insights once they are hired?

Operational Mode, Working Approach and Staff Requirements

The programmatic approach and orientation of individual aid agencies has a major impact on their hiring priorities.

Aid agencies' operational modes and working approach directly define the types of positions and needed characteristics of staffs. For instance, agencies focused on direct support to existing structures – such as government departments and programs or general support for Civil Society Organizations – are less likely to view hiring indigenous people as a priority. Agencies working at the community level to build local capacity and engage in the issues of most concern to indigenous ethnic communities are more likely to see the hiring of indigenous staff able to work directly with those communities as a priority. The skills required for the staff located in an interface between the country head office and the local partners are different than in the case of implementation at field level in a context of interaction with local communities. It is important to take into consideration the *modus operandi* of each aid agency in the analysis of hiring policies and practices since it has a deep influence on staff composition and skills required.

Funding is a real constraint as many donors ask for registered local organization; so, INGOs are obliged to use funding accordingly. Other foundations can set their own criterions, assume their own choices and take risks compared to agencies getting financial support from foreign government; and these constraints are somehow orienting the types of working approaches and partnerships.

The relevance of ethnic and linguistic aspects or the *belonging* to a local setting is quite different if the organization works at a district level or in Vientiane Capital. Long term perspective of some of the INGOs is much more in supporting existing structures and partners, which have relations with an ethnicity, this being much different than in the case of other aid agencies. In the case of support given to local partners, a big part of the job of the staffs relates to the INGOs in their international roles, this not only within Laos national boundaries. Taking into account the capacity of access to education from indigenous people, most if the staff hired is *de facto* from Vientiane or urban areas and more likely to belong to the Lao-Tai linguistic family. Clearly, based on the competence required, there is already a selection made because of the system.

For staff based in the field and in contact with communities, ethnicity and language skills are obviously among key criterions used in the selection of staffs. But contrary to gender, which is clearly stipulated, ethnicity remains too sensitive to be openly advertised.

Lack of Formal Policy

None of the 23 aid agencies interviewed during the survey has hiring or employment policies for indigenous people.

Many organizations have policies related to gender equality, special prerogatives for disabled staffs, etc., but lack written policies regarding indigenous people. However, many agencies have general policies of non-discrimination and are using a variety of strategies to encourage the hiring of staff, including indigenous staff, at the local level. Some specify that proficiency in indigenous language is an important asset when applying for jobs at the field level. While not explicitly requiring an indigenous person, this policy has the effect of doing so because almost no ethnic Lao people learn to speak indigenous languages. Still, some agencies display an almost complete lack of interest or awareness regarding ethnic diversity issues in the country and so tend to end up hiring ethnic Lao staff almost exclusively.

Some also specify that proficiency in indigenous language is an important asset when applying for jobs at field level.

CARE – *For some position we do focus on ethnic groups, or ethnic people, because we feel this is more **sustainable** for us in the future. So we put in selection criterions that people have an advantage if they can speak an ethnic language and this also provides an opportunity for local people where we work to apply for the positions. Lately, we have been quite successful for some junior positions, and also we try to promote them in the future to improve their status at provincial level and also at institutional level. In order to keep the staff it is better to hire them from the area where they work. Since they are already living there, you can expect they will stay longer with the project. Generally, if you have someone from another province or from Vientiane, after a while they leave. It is one of the greatest challenges to keep the capacity of the staff in the field; in Vientiane it is acceptable, but more an issue in the field.*

WR – *WR has nothing written; it is more informal. Essentially, our guidelines are to try to recruit at local level. So we always try first to see at local level and put advertisement signs at provincial and district levels. Like in Xiengkhouang, most of our staffs are Hmong.*

HI – *HI does not have a policy taking into account ethnicity, but they have such for gender and disability. Nevertheless, it does integrate dimensions of language and cultural competencies in hiring local staffs for specific projects in minority areas, as these staffs from ethnic minority groups are the reference in translating messages in local languages.*

FRC – *We would directly prioritize this candidate compared to others from Vientiane, for instance. Priority is put on hiring locally first and then outside the target area. Because we do not need to pay for housing or accommodations, it is financially advantageous; then their families are likely to be based there. So there is no need to travel back and forth as they are based there. So it is quite convenient.*

Helvetas - *We have an inclusiveness policy that strictly forbids discrimination and promotes local culture, local knowledge and the preservation of local skills and traditions; it is annexed to our hiring and partnership agreements; it is said in the contract. We also have a social inclusiveness and gender policy which feeds into our HR policy and is also integrated into the Monitoring and Evaluation structure. This is a Helvetas institutional policy that has been put further for Laos, and we have developed our own code of conduct relevant to the local*

context, which stipulates favoring recruiting team members, volunteers, etc. from within the localities where we work. The code of conduct must be followed.

VFI – *Our guidelines about Child protection policy. It has been in progress for a few years and now we have just finished it. So when we hire people, no matter what project they are working for, they all must sign a child protection policy guideline. And we have other guidelines we are working on, but we do not have an explicit one regarding the hiring of indigenous people. So when we work in Samoy and Taoi districts in Saravane Province, we do start our hiring process locally. We try to find someone locally first and then provincially and then we recruit nationally. So we do that but do not have anything written down that says so in practical application; that is what we do. But that does not especially mean that we are targeting ethnic minorities, but we are targeting people that live locally, which in many cases turns out to be ethnic persons. So it is more about hiring people who want to be in the community where they are working.*

So VFI does not have any formal policy about hiring indigenous people. We do not have anything designed or written, but we do in practice. So what we do before we advertise is that we spread the word locally so we do it backwards because we do not have this policy where we have to advertise for a certain number of days. We do it the other way, which is to spread the word locally; we try to avoid hiring somebody's sister or brother, we try to avoid the nepotism side of things too. But we do start locally. And there is little or no chance that somebody in Taoi would not have seen our advertisement anyway, right! And we do not have any criterions such as having graduated from a college. So we do put a higher value on local and demonstrative capacity. Of course, we do have some positions that require higher levels of education, but if we are looking for a field officer, then certainly we start locally. Spread the word through existing staffs in the field or through government partners, so through local networks. We do not put on signs.

IFAD policies including recruiting key partners is one of the keys to enhance IFAD's development effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable, as sustainable development must be tailored to IP identities, values and cultures. IFAD's policy on engagement with indigenous peoples is also extremely relevant to implement IFAD's strategy – including for instance securing indigenous people's rights to their land and territories as part of IFAD's best practice.

IFAD – *In reality, IFAD has small country offices and all our additional people in the field are recruited by the government and work in districts and provinces. So I am not sure we would have much useful information to share with you. Those people are recruited following government procedures.*

The case of IFAD is far from being isolated; aid agencies have little or nothing to say when it comes to intervening in the selection of government staffs working with them. Furthermore, it suggest that even if some agencies do have policies and are sensible about the importance of hiring indigenous people, the project configuration may not be suitable for selecting the people involved.

MHP – *We have a special policy of giving the priority to ethnic minority first. Furthermore, we have to train staff newly graduated from school to upgrade their capacities when they start working. They initially become volunteers for a 3-month period. They learn and then they have a test to evaluate their capacities and focus on areas of improvement. In case where ethnic Lao would apply, we would recruit the best of them based on their skills and experience. But for Akha, Hmong, Khamu and other ethnic minority groups, we allow them to improve their capacities first, and once they are skilled and qualified, we hire them as staffs. We also give them a certificate of achievement after the training. This may allow them to*

find a position with other organizations. We try to have staff from the entire group targeted by our projects; currently we do have Hmong and Khamu people and are looking to recruit Hmong and Akha individuals.

Recruitment strategies

Many aid agencies have elaborated diverse strategies to recruit indigenous people staff at local level.

Care – We have diverse strategies about advertisement depending on the position. For example, for the lower positions we try to focus at the local level as much as possible. We do advertise in the meetings with our government counterparts and sometimes we post at public places like markets, post offices and any other place. Lately, we hired/recruited volunteers to work as staffs. Many of them are from ethnic groups and most can speak ethnic languages. We think that this is the way we would try to work in the future. Sometimes, we use Tolakhoum in the town to advertise for positions at the local level; sometimes also on TV, international newspapers or on Lao FAB but it depends on the positions.

WR- We advertise at the offices or at the district markets where we know people meet. We also try to put up signs in Louangprabang or in Oudomxay; so if we need people from the health sector, we put some at the nursing college in Oudomxay or for the agriculture field, at the agriculture college in Luang Prabang. So we try to get somebody from the north. We try to make contact and meet with the principal and ask if he or she would know anybody from a specific area, who would have recently graduated. For instance in Phongsaly, we work with a lot of Akha people. So the last time we asked if there was any Akha people who would have recently graduated; it is very rare to find the wanted person. So we do make these efforts to recruit ethnic staff, but there is nothing written. It is all informal.

CIDSE – We advertise in the land issues working group, in the NPA Network, with Micmacs, on LaoFab, etc. But for positions in projects working in the field, we also advertise on the radio, at provincial level, as we do not want people from Vientiane but local people to work in the field. It is more sustainable. It is hard to work away from one's family. We advertised for law staff at the faculty of law. Sometimes, there are ethnic minority people, but they do not want to work at field level as they aspire for modernity and a better life.

ARMI – We advertise positions on the 108 website, which uses SMS to advertise jobs, local radios in target areas, Tholaphab and the Vientiane Times, which may not be useful to hire field level personnel.

JVC – We tried formal things, but it appears that informal ways work much more. We tried to advertise on the Brou radio in Savannakhet province, advertisement at teacher training college and ethnic boarding school, but none of those things worked. The only things that work are connections, people who know people at village level or through staffs working for us or for other projects that are from ethnic minority groups as they are the most knowledgeable about who would be.

CCL – *In Nyot Ou district, the project has initiated working with indigenous people; now district authorities are borrowing interpreters and ethnic staffs to work with them at field level and they even plan to hire them after the project lifetime.*

HELVETAS – *In addition to launching recruitment which favor candidates from the target area, we also recruit local community facilitators and volunteers, who on repeat occasions through capacity building and on the job learning/ training with our projects, we have since hired as staff – in particular junior level field officers as an entry point into the organization. We cooperate with HJA also.*

Lack of Awareness and Commitment

Passive versus Pro-Active Approaches: Some agencies passively accept that indigenous people are less likely to have formal training and skills and are less likely to apply for positions; so they end up hiring ethnic Lao people almost exclusively. Often, they take an expedient approach that focuses on the quick and efficient implementation of specific projects. However, this justification has now been used for more than 20 years, from the era when Frank Proschan first raised the issue to the NGO community. Within the home countries of many of the agencies it would certainly not be acceptable to use such justifications to exclude minority groups from employment on a long-term continuing basis. Recognizing this, some agencies are taking a more pro-active approach. This approach includes internships and scholarships, active recruitment/outreach and the use of village facilitators, including indigenous women in their community level programs. A key to success has been a willingness to make a long-term commitment to building the capacity of indigenous people.

Some aid agencies are less committed to hiring indigenous people even if they have received funding to work in indigenous areas.

INGO 1 – We work in ethnic areas, but villagers say that now they do not need to translate; as most of the youth can speak Lao in Mahaxay and Nyumalath. In the new proposal, we designed the involvement of ethnic volunteers working with Houamjai Assassamak. But there are only 2 people who do that. So we wrote about gender and ethnicity in our proposal, but there is low commitment. We do advertise for women and indigenous people, but it is often difficult to recruit all Lao people.

INGO 2 – We do not work in remote areas so many people speak Lao anyways, at least the men. So there may not be a specific need to hire ethnic minority staffs. It seems that we are doing fine.

Some INGO representatives are also unaware of the whole ethnic issue in the Lao context. As pointed out by one INGO:

There are still people who have not learned yet and I sometimes hear about other organizations that only have Lao staffs. When you have many ethnic groups among the staff, it is good to discuss. I would call it values that we, for instance as an organization, we value; we are all people and all different and all special and I think those are things we discuss with our staffs as well. How we are different, but what unites us and I think there is a bit of opportunity there to raise awareness. I think our staff, specially our Lao staff, can be blind about these issues.

Constraints in Hiring Indigenous People

Many aid agencies express a desire to hire more indigenous people but have difficulty doing so. There are several reasons for this. Determining one's ethnicity can be challenging. Ethnicity is not officially documented and many potential recruits will play down their ethnicity and say they are Lao in order to avoid stigmatization. Many staffs from ethnic minority groups also often just say they are Lao, avoiding stigmatization and playing down their ethnicity because they may fear their ethnicity is not an asset but a constraint.

As pointed out by VFI – It is interesting because even if we ask somebody if there are lowland Lao or some other ethnic group. Often you suspect that they are an ethnic person, but they do not always want to say that. This is also something we have to deal with too in the hiring process. Because when all evidences point to the fact that they probably are, they do not want to say they are. So that is an issue. Even if we think it is a good thing, they may not think about this that way for whatever reason.

The most common constraint in hiring indigenous people relates to their formal qualifications—mainly their education level and professional experience. There is a clear link between formal education levels and ethnicity.

The Lao-Tai groups have received far more education than the other groups. Ethnic minority women (spouses) in particular lag behind. The Sino-Tibetan groups in particular seem to be less formally educated: in rural areas, 66% of the household heads and 89% of their spouses among these groups have no schooling according to the CFSVA⁴.

There are also differences between regions and ethnic groups regarding literacy. The northern provinces of Phongsaly, Luangnamtha and Oudomxay have the lowest literacy rates. While, in terms of ethnic groups, 81% of the Lao-Tai household heads report to be able to read and write simple messages in any language; this is true for only 33% of the Sino-Tibetan, 71% for the Austro-Asiatic and 60% for the Hmong-Mien groups.

While 67% of Lao-Tai spouses are literate, only 5% of Sino-Tibetan spouses report the same. This shows the limited human capital that the minority groups have at their disposal. The lack of formal education and ability to communicate through reading and writing hinder these spouses from participating in society and acquiring knowledge of ways in which to improve their livelihoods.

FRC – We see ethnic people applying for jobs; but often they are not enough qualified for requested positions. Their strength is to speak local languages but their weakness is about technical skills needed to work in the health sector.

Some aid agencies mentioned that it would be too sensitive to openly advertise that candidate from ethnic minority groups would be prioritized in the selection process. Many aid agencies do not indicate in the advertisement that they need people from a specific ethnic group (Pray of Khamu for instance); but they do indicate gender as they often have special provisions for hiring women.

⁴ Lao PDR Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA), December 2007, WFP Lao PDR. Vulnerability and mapping Branch.

Agencies also tend to value qualifications such as the English language, writing and computer skills more often possessed by lowland Lao people as more valuable than the skills such as ethnic minority language ability and understanding indigenous livelihood systems and cultures that might be possessed by indigenous candidates for agency positions. A related problem is that staff recruitment often relies on informal networks and is carried out by ethnic Lao staff already working in aid agency programs. In many cases, they are much more likely to encourage other ethnic Lao people — their friends, colleagues and relatives — to apply rather than to actively outreach to indigenous people.

Strategies to Ensure that Workplaces Are Diverse and Representative of the Many Ethnic Groups in the Country

None of the aid agencies interviewed have a strategy about diversity of the workplace. In no case, aid agencies have an ambition to give priority to ethnic minorities to promote a diverse workplace. This is much more obvious in the case of gender. This totally reflects a lack of consideration for ethnicity, perhaps due to political sensitivity. Nevertheless, some aid agencies have staffs from as much as 11 ethnic groups. Many do prioritize hiring staffs locally as it is seen cost-effective and sustainable.

Internship Programs and scholarships for Indigenous People

Many aid agencies do not hire indigenous people for various reasons including the difficulty to find indigenous people willing to work with them or having the relevant linguistic, educational and technical competence to do so. One alternative they have relied on involves interns or volunteers to work with them, usually at field level.

Huam jai Assassamak (HJA) is one of the most prominent National CSOs/NPAs that provides training for volunteers recruited by aid agencies. HJA prioritizes women and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged young people including those with physical disabilities. It aims at providing an opportunity for less advantaged Lao youths to actively participate and gain valuable experience in working for an organization that will also get them involved in helping their own community and society as well as developing in them a sense of volunteerism.

JVC provides internship positions for Lao staff as a way to give young Lao people (especially ethnic minority peoples) with little or no experience the chance to work in an NGO environment to gain actual project work experience. Internship positions usually last one year. After completion of an internship it will be at the discretion of JVC as to whether contracts for project staff positions are offered, and JVC will inform interns at least 45 days prior to the end of their internship as to whether or not they will be offered a position as project staff. As clarified by JVC:

It is not that we receive applications from indigenous people who would like to become volunteers or work with our projects; it is more the other way around like you have to actively go out and seek for indigenous people. The internship program forces you to go out and look for indigenous people because otherwise you never get any applicants for a job. So we have this internship program basically in order to try to find indigenous people and bring them in as interns and, for some people, they may have a chance to become permanent staff.

Scholarships

Some aid agencies also provide scholarships to indigenous youths.

VFI – We also have these teams in the communities who involve local juniors as there are several youth groups that we support. We also look at local youths that may have graduated from college that we could hire or we also sometimes support them to go to college so when they come back, sometimes they join us. So there are three distinct youth groups that we support; each of our programs have a youth group component... that works on community outreach, theater and those kinds of things. So we like to look at these young people as potential candidates and we also support scholarships; one kid from Taoi just got scholarship for Australia. He worked 3 years for us and we supported him through college. He got a scholarship support. He went to NUOL. So these youth groups are a kind of training ground in a way; we do look for youths to enter these youth groups. As people leave, we fill those spots as we have a limited number of youth members we can support. Then we have this ethnic minority scholarship fund that supports our youths from the youth groups.

An Alternative to the Difficulty of Finding Indigenous Staffs: Hiring Villagers

CCL Recruitment: Firstly we look for the sought after personnel in our target villages and then in Bounneua at the Ethnic Boarding School in Phongsaly. We have very little difficulty; sometimes we must recruit village heads or even teachers who can speak the Lao language at a fair level. The project also often relies on volunteers/animators at community level, including many indigenous women, who get a per diem.

Long term commitment to building capacities of indigenous people is a key, and some aid agencies are involved in long term as they have realized that it is better to hire indigenous people and have them slowly growing up and getting new skills and confidence sometimes over a 10-year period.

Networking

Networking: There has been very little development of or participation in networks that might help address some of these issues.

Networking has the potential of creating opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region. However, there has not been any effort made by aid groups to try to facilitate such networks within the country. Few organizations participate in, or even seem to be aware of the existence of wider regional networks such as Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) or Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP). Some agencies are involved in various types of networks such as Land Issues Working Group (LIWG), Gender Development Association (GDA) that somehow also relates ethnic issues.

Domestic Network

IKAP-CKSA

Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) is a regional network of IKAP Country Networks Indigenous communities throughout Mainland Montane Southeast Asia (MMSEA). IKAPs primary goal is to protect, promote and enhance the practice of indigenous knowledge by providing multi-faceted leadership and capacity development trainings, by creating space for exchange and the sharing of indigenous knowledge and by promoting self-defined indigenous identity and positive representations of Indigenous Peoples (IPs). IKAP has national networks in six countries: Burma, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Southwest China, Thailand and Vietnam.

Community Knowledge Support Association (CKSA) was created in 2006 as the IKAP coordination body for Laos PDR. CKSA aims at promoting traditional knowledge and strengthening the vulnerable and poorest communities in Lao PDR such as community livelihood improvement and income generation. CKSA is an organization that aims at building capacities on ecologically and socially sustainable foundations by utilizing the communities' traditional knowledge and skills. CKSA envisions a harmonious Lao PDR with the society values, the existing ethnic and cultural diversity, self-determination, and active participation in sustainable development of ethnic communities.

Gender and Development Association, Rural Research Development and Training Centre (RRDTC), Community Association for Mobilization of Knowledge and Integrated Development (CAMKID) and Global Association for People and Environment (GAPE) are among the most active members of the network in the country. Still, CKSA lacks exposure and leadership and many INGOS are even not aware of its existence.

Regional Network

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is a regional organization founded in 1988 by indigenous peoples' movements. AIPP is committed to the cause of promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights and human rights and articulating issues of relevance to indigenous peoples. At present, AIPP has 47 members from 14 countries in Asia with 14 National Formations, 15 Sub-national Formations and 18 Local Formations. Of this number, 6 are Indigenous Women's Organizations and 4 are Indigenous Youth Organizations.

AIPP strengthens the solidarity, cooperation and capacities of indigenous peoples in Asia to promote and protect their rights, cultures and identities, and their sustainable resource management systems for their development and self-determination.

AIPP's goals

1. To empower Indigenous peoples in Asia to promote and defend their human rights and fundamental freedoms and claim legal recognition to their identities, collective rights under UNDRIP and other international human rights instruments.
2. To build the broadest solidarity and cooperation of indigenous peoples in Asia to strengthen indigenous movements.
3. To promote and protect the integrity of the environment and enhance the sustainable resource management systems of indigenous peoples including their traditional knowledge,

food security and biodiversity by having full control over their land, territories and resources.

4. To attain full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women and youth at all levels of decision-making.
5. To strengthen solidarity and cooperation with other social movements towards achieving equality, peace, democracy and justice.

Organizations and movements wishing to become members of the AIPP are required to apply in writing to the Executive Council who will decide on the application. Endorsement of the membership will be done by the General Assembly. In Laos, there are currently two CSO members of the AIPP: Community knowledge Support Association (CKSA) and Gender and Development Organization (GDA). Membership to AIPP is open to all indigenous people's organizations or movements who subscribe to the aims and objectives of the AIPP⁵.

Knowledge of Ethnicity/Indigenous People Issues in Program/Project/ Target Areas

Knowledge about ethnicity and sensitivity: Generally speaking, many Lao staffs of aid agencies are insensitive at best, and in some cases clearly biased against, indigenous people and cultures. Most of the informants were not even aware of the large number of ethnic groups found in the country or the name of the main ethnic groups found in their target areas. Very few aid agencies appear to have taken any steps to promote real ethnic sensitivity and understanding among their staff.

Fortunately, the survey allowed raising awareness about the importance of having orientation sessions on ethnic issues, ethnic sensitivity, indigenous knowledge, etc. As one INGO country representative explained:

In the last couple of years, we have quickly grown, like we doubled in size. And what happened was that, and what we are trying to deal with right now is that we hired a lot of people that are not development people. Some have technical skills like IEC development material or people who run the resource center, and simply speaking, some are not development people at all. So they probably spend most of their time in the night clubs during the week and the week-end, and then come and do their job and get their salary. So we have quickly grown but the level of human resource capacity is very low out there. So you kind of take people in if they have the skill, but they may not really be committed to development or village development. So we diluted the strength of our organization by growing so fast.

Some INGOs mentioned the sensitivity of the relationship between ethnic Lao and indigenous staffs.

INGO 1 – Lao staff, not seriously but often essentially racially, abuse of ethnic minority staff making derogatory comments and generally looking down on indigenous people and culture. Some aid agencies realize that this is a serious issue and that they should provide awareness to ethnic Lao staff about the value of indigenous people and culture. Solutions could consist of a non-discrimination policy, a code of conduct and raising ethnic awareness, but it is not so easy to find trainers. Agencies are busy with their projects. Nevertheless, training is something many aid agencies want to have at some stage.

⁵ <http://www.aippnet.org/index.php/about-us/members>

INGO 2 – *I have heard complaints three years ago when we were giving salary increases and one of the Lao staff said CRWRC was giving favoritism to ethnic minorities because they had a larger salary increase than him. But it was just based on a salary scale and it was only a misunderstanding. But that was this man's interpretation that we were showing favoritism, and I had to go back and explain to him.*

INGO 3 – *I was just reading over an evaluation of one of the staff; he is a Lao Loum employee; he works with a minority person and it is a female. In an interview, he was complaining that she was not a good Lao person because she could not sing the national anthem (song). We still have a lot of work to do with some of our staff in terms of raising ethnic awareness.*

INGO 4 – *We had a Hmong hired as project officer, but we had issues regarding the quality of his work. In other cases, there were no problems in Feuang and Maet districts. In Vientiane province for instance, there are Hmong communities. In that case, being Hmong was an added-value to their technical competence. But in Southern Laos, there is no Hmong population and somehow this resulted in conflicts in terms of working approach with the other staffs and local government partners. We had comments from our provincial and district partners about the quality of this man's work. The difficult thing was to find out if it was simply a matter of work performance or if there were underlying biases or racism.*

Many indigenous staff themselves appear self-conscious or embarrassed about their ethnic backgrounds. They have never been exposed to any indigenous rights issues or efforts to maintain pride and respect for their own cultures. Instead, they have only been exposed to Lao political doctrine stigmatizing ethnic minority livelihoods and cultures as backwards. Many act as if they were ethnic Lao; some are not confident and have grown up with oppression and are pretending to be Lao. In some cases, indigenous employees themselves have adopted ethnic Lao biases against indigenous cultures and knowledge. This impacts the way they work at the community level. Just because some employees are from a particular ethnic minority background does not mean they are culturally competent or able to avoid the same mistakes ethnic Lao people make when working with indigenous communities. In Savannakhet, one ethnic minority staff refused to speak Brou because she was simply embarrassed to be Brou. So we observe complex identity issues.

Difficult Transition for Indigenous People once the Project Is Finished.

Many indigenous people experience difficult transitions once the specific projects they are hired to work on are completed. They may have acquired new skills and technical expertise but still find it hard to integrate into the ethnic Lao-dominated labour market and almost impossible to be hired by government departments. Many return to their traditional livelihoods.

In Phongsaly, the Nyot Ou Health district has asked CCL indigenous staffs to accompany them on a vaccination campaign at field level in remote communities bordering China. In some rural areas of Northern Laos, even government departments find it extremely difficult to recruit suitable indigenous staffs. This is due to the lack of access to formal education/poor education and literacy status for Hmong-Mien and Sino-Tibetan groups. NGOs can fill the gap, train indigenous staff and

raise their level of work experience, and when the project is finished, they may be able to work with government.

But the fact is that many indigenous people working for aid agencies find themselves unemployed at the end of projects. If many have acquired new skills and technical expertise, they find it hard to integrate the labor market and almost impossible to be hired by government departments. Many return to their traditional livelihood. This is the case of Malaythong; she is a Harak woman who worked as development worker for CARE in Sekong Province for three years. Now she is unemployed and farms a small paddy field behind her house. Every morning, she takes her cast net and goes fishing in the Sekong River; she also spends time in the forest to collect food. Despite her tremendous skills in facilitation and experience in community outreach, food security, training, and so on, she lacks the networking and exposure to make herself known to projects coming to work in Sekong. Malaythong's case is unfortunately not isolated; many indigenous people (Khmu, Makong, Katang, Hmong, Akha, Talieng, etc.) are forgotten and return to customary livelihood once the projects are finished.

Recommendations

- 1. International aid agencies and CSOs/NPAs need to increase their focus and the priority they give to these issues — especially those working with indigenous communities. A start would be to agree upon a joint Commitment to Achieving Ethnic Equity** (along the lines first proposed by Frank Proschan) that would highlight key principles and best hiring practices and elaborate a code of conduct for aid agencies working in Laos. The INGO Network would be an appropriate institution to lead such an effort together with the Learning House for Development (LHD)/ NPA Network. However, it is also important that these initiatives include both larger multi-lateral/bi-lateral development organizations.
- 2. Aid Agencies need to do a much better job at learning about the cultures and livelihood systems of the communities with whom they are proposing to work.** This needs to happen at the time of initial baseline or Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) data collection activities. Collaborating with district or provincial Lao Front for National Construction is also a strategic option that can allow to inventory ethnicity of rural communities.
- 3. Organizations need to do a much better job at providing training in ethnic and cultural sensitivity for to their own staff and counterparts.** The goals would be to reduce discrimination and negative stereotypes towards indigenous people, livelihoods and knowledge, and to better work with indigenous/ethnic minority communities. A shift of attitude is needed—from suspicion and distrust toward embracing and appreciating cultural identity, cultural performance, songs, taboos, customary practices and customary authority structures.
- 4. Agencies need to improve their hiring practices in ways that allow for the increased participation of indigenous people, especially women, and to refrain from the same excuses and explanations that have long been used to justify their lack of progress to date.** There are both short-term and longer-term actions that can be taken to address this long-standing injustice. Short-term practices may include improving outreach to indigenous people in the recruitment process, recruiting directly from local communities, better valuing

the skills and knowledge indigenous people in communities already have, taking advantage of existing opportunities such as the *Huamjai Asasamak* Association volunteer internship program, and providing financial incentives for staff able to speak minority languages. Longer-term initiatives may involve support for internships and scholarship programs focused on promising indigenous people, especially women without formal education and previous working experience.

- 5. Agencies should do much more to facilitate and participate in local and regional networks.** The development of one or more networks of indigenous/ethnic minority staff working in INGOs, for example, might need an initial push or facilitation by interested INGOs. Organizations could also promote better linkages with regional international network by inviting groups like AIPP to present to INGO and CSO networks, to conduct trainings for indigenous staff and sensitivity training for non-indigenous staff. Agencies might also link with projects and academics that support research on indigenous people, languages, livelihoods, etc.

Conclusions

While there has been an increase in awareness about issues around ethnic equity and sensitivity in Laos over the last twenty years, the overall situation is still of great concern. Given the progress that has been made in recognizing indigenous rights and promoting ethnic and cultural appreciation and sensitivity in other parts of the world, Laos, and many of the international agencies and internationally funded National CSOs operating there, appear to be far behind the times. Only a small number of organizations have really made these issues a priority. Without a better appreciation of indigenous cultures and livelihood systems- informed by indigenous people themselves- outside efforts to ‘develop’ these people and communities will continue to fall short.

II. Do aid agencies in Laos have effective hiring policies for employing indigenous people and for making use of their skills and insights once they are hired?

2.1 Do you have a hiring policy related to indigenous people? What criteria have been used in your hiring practices?

2.2 Does your organisation have a strategy to ensure that your workplaces are diverse and representative of the many ethnic groups in the country?

2.3 What efforts have been made to include indigenous peoples as staff (examples: when advertising, advertising at the village and district levels, recruiting through ethnic schools) (and at what levels—field staff, junior or senior management, domestic help)?

2.4 Do you conduct recruitment/selection processes internally to ensure conformity with your organizational policies and core values?

2.5 Has your organization made the addressing of these imbalances a critical priority? If not, why not?

2.6 How is the cultural understanding of indigenous people brought into your organization, and are they encouraged to express indigenous ideas and perspectives?

2.7 Have Lao staff received any training and preparation from your organization on how to work with indigenous staff and include and utilize their cultural skills?

2.8 Do you support the capacity building of indigenous people? Is this different from Lao staff? Please explain how.

2.9 Do you have an internship program for indigenous people?

2.10 Is there a budget for capacity building targeting indigenous people working for your organization?

2.11 What would you suggest would be the best practices of recruitment procedures to ensure commitment in hiring indigenous people?

2.12 Do you have any preferential treatment of indigenous persons (meaning: Giving them priority in decisions on employment matters such as hiring, promoting, training and laying-off? It can include measures such as opening competitions only to indigenous people).

III. To create opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region.

3.1 Is your organization involved in national/regional network promoting opportunities for indigenous people?

3.2 Do you know AIPP? What is AIPP?

3.3 Are you involved in the IKAP network? What is IKAP?

3.4 Can you further describe your involvement in those networks?

3.5 Is there any other indigenous network your agency is member of?

3.6 Have indigenous people working for your organization ever been sent to participate in activities organized by those networks? Which ones?

IV. Knowledge about ethnicity/indigenous people issues in programs/projects/target areas?

4.1 What ethnic groups are located in the areas targeted by your project?

4.2 Are there representatives from these groups hired as staffs in your organization?

4.3 To what degree were the specific needs and constraints of ethnic groups integrated into the planning process?

4.4 How effective were the program's working processes in interacting with different ethnic groups?

4.5 How do you integrate research on indigenous knowledge in the project planning, design, and implementation?

4.6 Have you ever involved customary authorities (council of elders, clan leaders) in the project design and activities?

4.7 Are there mechanisms/monitoring capacities to ensure that in multiethnic communities special attention is given to ensure that indigenous people are involved?

4.8 Are indigenous languages used and promoted as much as possible during activities at the field level and during capacity building or project activities/implementation/monitoring/evaluation in order to ensure beneficiaries' understanding and involvement?

4.9 Did you produce/adapt or made available any material or manuals, project information and documentation in local languages?

4.10 In what ways does your organization try to incorporate indigenous women into participation in project activities?

4.11 Did your project planning and activities implementation take into consideration agrarian and ritual calendar to avoid disturbing communities in peak labor demands such as cutting the forest, planting and harvesting?

4.12 What broad lessons can be learned from your experience that will be of use to other local and international aid agencies?

Letter to INGO Network Members

Vientiane, March 18th, 2013

To: Members of the INGO Network

Object: Research on Aid Agencies and hiring policies and practices

My name is Steeve Daviau, anthropologist. I am conducting an inquiry on international agencies and aid agencies (including INGOS, CSOs, and bilateral cooperation) and their hiring policies and practices.

The research intends to address the issue of equality and representation of indigenous peoples in aid agencies and examine what efforts have been made by aid agencies in Laos to include indigenous peoples as staff, at what levels (field staff, junior or senior management, domestic help), what criteria has been used in their hiring practices and how their presence has informed (or lack of presence has misinformed) underlying development concepts and philosophies, biases, and priorities held by those organizations.

The overall goal of the proposed research is to assist aid organizations in Laos to critically assess and improve their stated values, attitudes and actual progress in becoming inclusive and diverse workplaces in order to better serve and represent the interests of indigenous people and communities.

The objectives of the research are:

1. To identify and quantify the number of indigenous people employed by aid organizations and in what roles.
2. To learn if aid agencies in Laos have effective hiring policies for employing indigenous people.
3. To open a dialogue amongst aid agencies on the topic of workplace diversity and the hiring of indigenous people.
4. To create opportunities for indigenous peoples working in aid agencies to better dialogue and network among themselves and improve their capacity to engage in wider networking opportunities in the region.

The results will be presented at a national level meeting attended by aid agencies, civil society organizations and government representatives. The research is funded by the Japanese International Volunteer Center (JVC).

I would like to meet with key representatives of your organization and discuss about your NGO's hiring policies and practices. If you are interested and would like to meet or to receive further details, I can send you the concept note and TOR for the proposed research.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kindest personal regards,

Steeve Daviau
Anthropologist
Vientiane, Lao PDR
daviausteeve@gmail.com
Mobile: 856 20 55 66 91 00

List of 79 INGOs Invited to Participate in the Survey

Nb	INGO Name	Acronym	Contact	Email
1		AAR	Okayama, Noriyasu	aarlaos@laopdr.com
2	Action for Lao Children	ALC	Viravong, Soulaphy	alclao@laotel.com
3		ADRA	Scott Rawson	scott@adrالاos.org
4		AFESIP	Cohen, Stephanie	country.director@afesiplaos.org
5	Agrisud International		Kieffer, Claire	ckieffer@agrisud.org
6	Aide et Action		Ounheuane Saphaky	ounheuane.saphakdy@aide-et-action.org
7	Aide Ondontologique International	AOI	Chounlamountry, Kongkeo	kpharm99@gmail.com
8	OXFAM Novib	ON	Antonino Faibene	Antonino.Faibene@oxfamnovib.nl
9		APHEDA	Siharath, Khampasong	ksiharath1@apheda.org.au
10	Asia Foundation	TAF	Gretchen Kunze	gkunze@asiafound.org
11	Austrian Red Cross	ARC	Kerstin Grimm	Kerstin.Grimm@redcross.at
12	Basic Needs	BN	Choulamany, Chantharavady	chantharavady.choulamany@basicneeds.org
13	Big Brother Mouse	BBM	Alyson, Sasha	Sasha@BigBrotherMouse.com
14	BORDA		Moller, Tobias R.	t.moeller@borda-sea.org
15	Burnett Institute	BI	Chanlivong, Niramonh	niramonh@burnet.edu.au
16	Care International	CI	Bond, Glenn	glenn.bond@careint.org
17	Caritas - Foundation Caritas Luxembourg	FCL	CHANGNAKHAM, Phaivanh	phaivanh.changnakham@carluxlao.org
18	Catholic Relief Service-Lao PDR	CRS	Staigers, Lupe	phetdavone.keosomphoumy@crs.org
19	Cesvi Cooperazione e Sviluppo	Cesvi	Campisi, Marco	laos@cesviverseas.org
20	Child Fund	CF	Mastaglio, Chris	chrism@childfund.org.la
21	Church World Service	CWS	DANGERS, William H	cwslao@laotel.com
22		CIDSE	Douangvila, Khankham	cidseint@cidselao.org

Nb	INGO Name	Acronym	Contact	Email
23	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos	CCL	Vorachak, Manivone	cclmani@laopdr.com
24	Community Learning International	CLI	Anderson, Robert	clirobert@gmail.com
25		CORD	Ken, Lisa Lim Ah	lisal@cordlaos.org
26	Croix-Rouge Française	CRF	BOISSON, David	hod-lao.frc@croix-rouge.fr
27	Canadian University Service Overseas / Volunteer Service Overseas	CUSO / VSO	Tim Cook	Tim.Cook@vsoint.org
28	Danish Red Cross	DRC	Shepherd, Mark	masd@drk.dk
29	East Meets West Foundation	EMW	Den Berk, Kees van	keesvandenberk@hotmail.com
30	Family Health International	FHI	Sivongxay, Viengsavanh	VSivongxay@fhi360.org
31	Fred Hollows Foundation	FHF	Phommalad, Bouahome	bouahome@yahoo.com
32	Friends International	FI	Adams, Kristi Philanphanet, Ketsone	kristi@friends-international.org ketsone@friends-international.org
33	German Agro Action	GAA	Wendy	Wendy.Zavala@welthungerhilfe.de
34	GAPE		Daley, Darren	darrenjdaley@gmail.com
35	German Agro Action	GAA	Warning, Christina	Christina.warning@welthungerhilfe.de
36	Good Neighbors	GN	Moon, Sung Won	passionmoon@gni.kr
37	Great Peace in Lao PDR	GPL	Woo, Youngdeok	yeluwoo@taiwhafound.org
38	Professionals for Fair Development	GRET	Jean-Francois Kibler	kibler@gret.org
39	Handicap International Belgium	HIB	Rouve, Anne Khiev	direction@laos.handicap.be
40	Health Care and Hope Alliance	HHA	Oh, Kyunglim (Kay)	kayoh@hhakorea.org
41	Health Frontiers	HF	Esmaili, Emily	healthfrontierslaos@gmail.com
42	Health Poverty Action	HPA	Wang, Bangyuan	bangyuan.wang@gmail.com
43	HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation	HELVETAS	Agnieszka Kroskowska Celestine Kroeschell	agnieszka.kroskowska@helvetas.org (former Deputy Country Director) celestine.kroeschell@helvetas.org (Country Director) Rakesh.Munankami@helvetas.org (Current Deputy Country Director)

Nb	INGO Name	Acronym	Contact	Email
			Rakesh Munankami	
44	Humana People to People	HPP	Damkjaer, Inger	ingerd@humana.org
45	IV-Japan		Tominaga, Sachiko	ivjapan.vte@gmail.com
46	Japan International Volunteer Center	JVC	Hunt, Glenn	ghunt@ngo-jvc.net
47	Kenan Institute Asia	KI	Silva, John da	johnd@kiasia.org
48	Land Issue Working Group	LIWG	Hanna	hanna@laolandissues.org
49	Lutheran World Federation	LWF	Vongphanchan, Vongmany	vongmany.n@gmail.com
50	Médecins du Monde	MdM	Decout, Isabelle	genco.laos@medecinsdumonde.net
51	Médecins Sans Frontières	MSF	GOOSSENS, Sylvie	msff-vientiane-hom@paris.msf.org
52	Mennonite Central Committee (Laos)	MCC	Martin, Wendy	LaosRep@mcc.org
53	Mines Advisory Group	MAG	Horrocks, David	david.horrocks@maglaos.org
54	Norwegian Church Aid	NCA	Schmith, Henrick	Henrik.schmith@nca.no
55	Norwegian People's Aid	NPA	Karlsen, Atle	atlek@npaid.org
56	Oxfam	O	der Borgh, t, Dominique Vand	dominique@osb.org.vn
57	Oxfam Australia	OA	Suyavong, Manivanh	manivanhs@oxfam.org.au
58	Oxfam Belgium	OB	Munsayaphom, Bong	oxfamsol@laopdr.com
59	Oxfam Hong Kong	OHK	Souvannanethy, Ratsamy	ratsamys@oxfam.org.hk
60	Pestalozzi Children's Foundation	PCF	Souksavanh, Ounkham	o.souksavanh@pestalozzi.ch
61	Plan International Laos	PI	Girgis, Mona	Mona.Girgis@plan-international.org
62	Population Services International/Laos	PSI	Gray, Robert	robgray@psilaos.org
63	Power International	PW	Carroll Mike Songsamayvong,	mikecarrollpowerint@yahoo.com keolabthavongs@yahoo.com

Nb	INGO Name	Acronym	Contact	Email
			Keolabthavong	
64	Room to Read	RTR	Shrestha, Dinesh	dinesh.shrestha@roomtoread.org
65	Save the Children International	SCI	Franchi, Olivier	olivier.franchi@savethechildren.org
66	Service Fraternel d'Entraide	SFE	Schildknecht, Nathanael	nathanael.schildknecht@sfe-laos.org
67	Shanti Volunteer Association	SVA	ITO, Tokiko	tokiko-ito@sva.or.jp
68	SNV Netherlands Development Organization	SNV	Ritchie, Megan	mritchie@snvworld.org
69	Swiss Red Cross	SRC	THOME, Jean-Marc	jmthome@laopdr.com
70	The Humpty Dumpty Institute	HDI	Sparks, Stephanie	stephanie.sparks@thehdi.org
71	Triangle Génération Humanitaire	TGH	Rouveirolles, Quentin	cdp1.laos@trianglegh.org
72	Village Focus International	VFI	Reece, Richard L.	rickr@villagefocus.org
73	Water Aid Australia	WAA	George, Alana Stelmach, Tanya	Alana.george@wateraid.org.au tanya.stelmach@wateraid.org.au
74	World Concern in Lao PDR	WC		wclaos@wcasia.org
75	World Education	WE	Gorman, Mark	markcarringtongorman@gmail.com
76	World Concern	WC		
77	World Renew	WR	Fennema, Mike	mfennema@worldrenew.net
78	World Vision	WV	Merrick, Amelia	amelia_merrick@wvi.org
79	World Wildlife Fund-Laos	WWF	Bouasavahn, Somphone	somphone.bouasavanh@wwfgreatermekong.org

Frank Prochan's Letter to Members of the NGO Community in Laos

Frank Prochan

April 29, 1992

[Very lightly revised and updated in 1995]

To Members of the NGO community in Laos

Dear NGO representative:

As an anthropologist and folklorist in the kmhmu (Khmu, Kammu) ethnic group, I have spent twelve months or so in Laos over the last four years. I have met many NGO staff from a number of organizations, and we have discussed different aspects of your Programs. As I prepare to leave Laos in a few days, I want to raise with all of you a very important but often invisible issue: *equity in the provision of services to Laos's ethnic minority citizens, and equity in the employment of minority staff*. I had hoped to have the opportunity to present this problem for discussion at one of the monthly NGO Forum meetings, but my schedule of time in Vientiane has not coincided with a forum meeting.

It is my hope that the following remarks initiate a productive discussion within your organization and among NGOs in general about how to increase minority participation overall, a disappointing record of achieving ethnic equity, it is not my intention to point fingers or lay blame. No person or organization can solve all of the world's problems at once, and each of you has chosen certain priorities to guide your programs, each of you faces certain requirements in filling staff positions. The substantial accomplishments of NGOs in Laos, both individually and collectively, are not diminished by the fact that *the problem of ethnic minority equity remains unsolved—and in some cases unconsidered*. I would be happy to be proved wrong, but I would estimate that out of 100 or 150 Lao national staff working for NGOs, the number of minority members is fewer than ten — a discouragingly low percentage. It is my belief that this issue should be one of the highest priorities and urgencies for all NGOs, not just a few who have long attached great importance to this problem.

What do I mean when I say "in the particular context of Laos?" Simply put, I think that *at least 50% of your services and resources should be directed to minority citizens, and at least 50% of*

your national staff should be members of ethnic minorities. These percentages are not arbitrary conjured from thin air: the demographic reality of Laos is that Lao ethnic group represents barely 50.5% of the total population, and the remainder is made up of some 45 or so other ethnic groups. The principle of ethnic equity (or ethnic parity) means that, to the greatest extent possible, you commit yourselves and your organizations to reflect those demographic realities in the allocation of resources, the design of programs, the provision of services, and the hiring and professional development of national staff. Many of you have, implicitly or explicitly, committed yourselves to the goal of gender equity or parity, and NGOs in Laos have pioneered in providing professional opportunities for Lao women. *NGOs should take the same pioneering role in increasing opportunities for members of ethnic minorities.*

For your consideration, I have drafted a preliminary set of *principles of Ethnic Equity*.

(Attachment I). As you will see, these principles refer to the Constitution and the longstanding policies of the P. D. R. with regard to equality for all citizens within the multiethnic Lao community. It is imperative that these principles be framed in such a way that Lao officials readily recognize their continuity with longstanding policy and their convergence with the goals of party and state. In conversations on this topic with government officials, I have noted an implicit assumption that special attention to one or another ethnic minority or to ethnic minorities in general may somehow create disharmony and threaten national unity. It cannot be overemphasized that *increasing the opportunities and the civil participation of members of ethnic groups will surely increase multiethnic solidarity* and that failure to do so will inevitably undermine that solidarity. Only if the issue is properly framed and sensitively communicated can some of the implementing strategies for achieving equity be carried out.

In this regard, there are two rhetorical strategies that may be helpful. The first is to point to the experience in our own multiethnic nations. Many of us come from countries where recent years have seen various kinds of affirmative action programs. In the U.S., for example, virtually every university offers scholarships earmarked for members of disadvantaged minorities. Many public private agencies give hiring preference to ethnic minority members. In the Smithsonian Institution, where I was [in 1992] a research collaborator, before a white male can be hired to fill any mid or high-level professional position, the hiring office must first demonstrate that they have made every effort to identify and recruit minority candidates and have not succeeded. It may be useful to remind our Lao colleagues that many other countries are also multiethnic, and that in many cases minorities are disadvantaged, and experience elsewhere has shown that in only aggressive measures can begin to correct these longstanding disparities.

The second argument you may find useful is to offer comparisons to the issue of gender equity. The party and government have long recognized that special efforts are needed to address the needs and concerns of women, and that the goal of equality between women and men is an

important one. I think no Lao official would bat an eyelash if you said you were going to direct 50% of your programs to women, or you were establishing a scholarship program for women, or you were recruiting female staff. Such affirmative initiatives to address the status of women do not threaten to undermine the solidarity between women and men or subvert the stability of the family. Neither do affirmative initiatives to increase ethnic minority opportunities pose any risk to multiethnic solidarity. The problem of ethnic inequality is precisely similar to the problem of gender inequality, and rhetorical comparisons can be useful in increasing consciousness of the issues. It is important to explain and to reemphasize that *preference offered to the historically disadvantaged dose not in any way constitute discrimination against the historically privileged.*

The counterpart of the principles is a second draft document, *Commitments to Achieving Ethnic Equity* (attachment 2). These take the form of several concrete objectives that NGOs will pledge to implement in their programs in order to approach the overall goal of equity. Because some details of these may be controversial or problematic, I discuss a few of them below, and offer some specific examples of programs you may wish to consider. You may find it useful to review the draft Commitments before continuing to the detailed discussion below.

As noted above, the figure of 50% is not an arbitrary one but reflects the demographic realities of Laos. I have said at least 50% in the draft Commitments because it is my personal belief that *until parity has been achieved, a much higher percentage of resources and opportunities should be allocated to ethnic minorities.* For example, if you have been operating in Laos for six years and have spent \$ 300,000 over that time, but only \$ 60,000 provided direct benefits to ethnic minorities, even if you were to allocate 50% of future budgets to minority programs it would be many years before the total funds directed to ethnic minorities achieved parity. In such a case, I believe that *your budgets for the next few years should be directed predominantly or even exclusively to ethnic minority programs until you have achieved overall parity.* Similarly with employment: if you have a staff of three and none of them are members of ethnic minorities, I believe that *you should hire only ethnic minorities until your staff reaches the level the of 50% minority.* This extends beyond your individual NGO to the larger NGO community: if you are newly established and hiring only one Lao national staff member, I believe that person should be minority (in view of the under representation of minorities in the NGO community in general).

You will note that the draft Commitments are not quite this specific, and I understand that you may feel more comfortable pledging yourself to long-range goal of ethnic equity without adopting such drastic corrective measures. I would urge you, though, to give such strategies your most serious consideration even if you ultimately decide to adopt more gradual measures. Experience in the U. S. has shown that general commitments to equity goals usually fail to make much impact, and only aggressive, affirmative, programs can begin to redress historical imbalances. These drastic measures may even produce what seem to be new imbalances in favor of women or ethnic minorities, but most people recognize these as temporary exigencies that are necessary if

progress is to be made. To offer my own example as a white male, I am virtually unemployable in my chosen career of university professor at this time. Despite the personal hardship this causes me, I readily (even if unenthusiastically) acknowledge the compelling necessity of such programs.

With regard to identifying and recruiting ethnic minority staff, there are a number of aspects to the problem. The most immediate obstacle is where and how to find minority candidates. I think it is pretty clear at present that unless (and how to find minority international organizations) you start requiring that employees be members of ethnic minorities (or perhaps, more neutrally, “be fluent in an ethnic minority language”), *Diplomatic Services will rarely if ever send you an ethnic minority candidate*. My minority friends tell me that they face discrimination because they are minorities and because they have no influential relatives; they virtually cannot get in the door at Diplomatic Services. One approach then is to be *certain that your position descriptions or recruiting requests to Diplomatic Services clearly identify ethnic minority background or fluency in a minority language as a requirement* — and refuse to hire anyone who does not meet that requirement. Make it an advantage rather than a handicap to be a member of an ethnic minority. Diplomatic Services will then be obliged to be more responsive to minority members who seek registration and referral. And if they are not able to identify and refer minority candidates when you require some, this helps to establish very clearly the need for some other programs and efforts to recruit and develop minority staff.

One such program is to offer scholarships of ethnic minority background. Ethnic minorities face particular problems pursuing higher education—beyond the most obvious ones of inadequate village schools, limited ability to speak Lao, and economic obstacles to continuing education outside of the village. The concentration of educational institution in Vientiane means that rural people in general and ethnic minorities in particular encounter special hardships in gaining an education. Where students from Vientiane can live with their families, those from afar are lodged in austere dormitories with very meagre stipends to cover food and clothing. More critically, they have no networks of family nearby to assist them in case of sickness or emergency. Thus in many cases they are forced to withdraw from school and terminate their education with what would be a minor problem for someone with family in Vientiane. Depending on the priorities and focus of your programs, you may wish to subsidize one or more scholarships for minority students at Dong Dok, the Medical School, the Pharmacy School, the Polytechnic University, the Forestry College, or at a provincial teacher’s college.

This might be an effort especially appropriate for concerted action by the NGO Forum or by a consortium of interested NGOs. *Each participating NGO would agree to subsidize a certain number of scholarships at more designated schools*. The consortium would then publicize all of the scholarships, develop application forms, review applications (perhaps with a committee including some prominent Lao government officials of minority background), and administer the monthly disbursements. For efficiency in communication and ease of administration, these scholarships could be directed to students in their second and successive years — that is, competition would be open each

spring to those already enrolled in a school, to support their continuation and conclusion. Practically, this seems more realistic than trying to reach high school students in remote areas (although admittedly the latter would be preferable if it were possible). And in many cases, it is not the first year but the successive years that are most difficult for minority students.

A second program which can be expected to produce even more immediate results would be to establish a similar program of internships. Even the best student finishes school with very little practical experience and often with only the most rudimentary office skills. Short-term working internships would provide minority graduates with an opportunity to *gain on-the-job experience, to acquaint themselves with the work and philosophy of NGOs, and to make themselves known to prospective employers through informal NGO networks*. The NGO forum could administer a competition open to graduating students. Each participating NGO would agree to provide a six-month intern who would work in your office, gaining work experience while providing assistance to you in operating your programs. Ideally, one or more NGOs would also provide funds to support an Internship Coordinator who could organize training activities for all of the interns (so that the entire burden of training the intern does not fall on you). Two mornings per week, the interns could meet together for workshops, field trips, computer training and meetings with NGO staff and international organizations, etc. At the conclusion of the internship, the intern would be assisted in seeking regular employment, whether with you, another NGO, a government office, or an international organization.

These scholarship and internship programs would clearly require careful discussion with the Department of International Organizations, the Ministry of Education, and other government offices. It might be especially useful to have a committee to review applications for both programs that would include some prominent minority persons. Possible participants might include Maichantan Sengmany (Lue), Chaleun Yiapaoheu (Hmong), Ms. Pani Yathongtou (Hmong), Ngi Singpaseut (Khmhu) Asang Laoli (Akha), and so on. Regarding the internships, it would seem critical to negotiate with the government a waiver of the minimum wage and other labor laws applying to foreign organizations and Lao national staff. The intern is not a regular employee, need not be compensated at the same level as a regular employee, and need not receive the same health and other benefits. This would need to be spelled out clearly.

A final strategy for identifying and recruiting ethnic minority employees is to make use of the informal networks of minority cadre, officials, and students. If you are looking, for example, for a Khmhu worker — trained as a doctor or a nurse, bilingual in French or English, computer-literate, committed to serving the needs of his or her community—contact Vice-Minister Ngi at Social Welfare, or Souksavang at the Institute for Cultural Research at the Ministry of Culture, Sinsay at the Lao Front, or Douangtha at Lao National Radio, or Soumountha at the Quakers. Tell them what skills you need and they can find someone who meets your requirements. If you are looking for a Hmong worker, contact Chaleun at the Supreme Peoples Assembly, or Khamsao at the National Front, or

Somthone at the Institute for Cultural Research, or Sirivanh at Quakers. For other ethnic groups, do a little digging and you can find a teacher at Dong Dok, an employee in another NGO, or an official in one or another ministry who knows other members of his or her community who might meet your needs.

In closing, let me offer some suggestions of how to continue consideration of these issues. First I would urge you to consider and discuss these draft documents and suggestions within your own organization. Then perhaps the NGO Forum would wish to schedule some formal discussions of collective strategies. It seems that it would be very useful to translate the draft statements of Principles and Commitments into Lao, invite ethnic minority representatives (including current NGO minority staff) to participate with you in discussions both on content and strategy. With those discussions, you may agree that it would be useful to formally ratify such documents (once revised); the revised documents could then be signed by those organizations who agree with them in their final form. Perhaps a working group could be constituted to develop plans for scholarship or internship programs, and to begin discussions with the appropriate government offices. Perhaps there is even one or more NGOs willing to commit funds to establish a coordinating office to work on this issue.

In any case, even if the process of coordinated action among NGOs is likely to be a lengthy one, *there is nothing to prevent you from embracing these principles and commitments in your own work, and initiating your own strategies and measures to address the problem of ethnic equity.* I would strongly urge you to do so.

I would be very gratified to hear of your responses to these suggestions, and to receive any criticisms or ideas you may have. I look forward to hearing from you about this issue, and wish you the best of success with your important work.

DRAFT

Principles of Ethnic Equity for NGOs in the Lao P. D. R.

1. One of the historical strengths and most important attributes of the Lao nation has been its character as a multiethnic community. Laos has a rich cultural heritage and a proud history that reflect the contributions of its many ethnic groups. The Constitution of the Lao P.D.R. provides that the state shall “pursue the policy of program unity and equality among all ethnic groups.” Non-Governmental Organizations in the Lao P.D.R. share that two-pronged commitment to multiethnic unity and equality.

2. In view of longstanding historical circumstances, members of many ethnic groups in the Lao P.D.R. do not today enjoy the same level of economy, culture, social welfare as other citizens do. The Constitution provides that the state shall “implement every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the levels of socioeconomic standards of all ethnic groups”; NGOs recognize a special responsibility to assist in improving the conditions of life for historically disadvantaged persons, especially members of ethnic minorities.

3. The Constitution provides that “Lao citizens irrespective of their gender, social status, education, faith, and ethnic group all are all equal before the law.” NGOs believe that in order to achieve this paramount principle of equality, it is urgently necessary to provide special attention, consideration, and assistance to disadvantaged persons in order to redress historical inequalities.

4. The national unity and solidarity of the multiethnic Lao people must be preserved and reinforced. NGOs believe that improving the living conditions of ethnic minorities, increasing their opportunities to participate in the life of the nation, and providing special assistance to redress historical inequalities will all contribute to multiethnic solidarity, harmony, and the prosperity of the nation. By contrast, failing to achieve ethnic equity would pose the greatest threat to multiethnic solidarity.

5. NGOs are committed to achieving equity among ethnic groups in the allocation of their resources, the provision of their services, and the employment of national staff. NGOs will use certain concrete means, both short-term and long-term, to achieve equity in their programs. These will include targeting material assistance programs to ethnic minority villages and regions, increasing the opportunities and the effectiveness of training and capacity-building programs for members of ethnic minorities, and adopting affirmative action hiring procedures for national staff, both in Vientiane and local levels.

6. NGOs are convinced that providing effective development assistance to ethnic minority communities requires that members of the affected communities must be involved in defining needs, determining priorities, and designing programs. This process should involve all concerned sectors of community, particularly women and elders, many of whom are not fluent in the Lao national language. Oftentimes this community participation can be achieved only by using the

minority language. NGOs believe that ethnic minority staffs are required to successfully carry out community development programs. Ethnic minorities should not be involved merely as interpreters but must be part of professional development teams.

7. NGOs recognize a special responsibility to assist in the professional development of ethnic minority members and in building the capacities of ethnic communities, through such programs as scholarships, internships and training programs targeted toward them. These are intended to prepare ethnic minority members to work within the NGO sector, with international organizations, and within the Lao government.

8. NGOs believe that the goal of achieving ethnic equity is both long-term and urgent: success may be slow in coming but the efforts cannot be delayed. In the short-term, measures such as targeting assistance programs to ethnic minority areas and adopting affirmative action employment measures that give hiring preference to ethnic minority members may seem to produce a temporary imbalance in favour of ethnic minorities. Such short-term imbalances will be phased out as soon as NGOs have achieved the goal of ethnic equity

DRAFT

Commitments to Achieving Ethnic Equity

1. We are committed to ethnic equity in the allocation of our resources. We pledge to allocate at least 50% of our funds and resources to programs that directly benefit members of ethnic minority communities.

2. We are committed to ethnic equity in the provision of services. We pledge to take effective measures to ensure that members of ethnic minorities can benefit most fully from all of our programs, and especially those targeted directly to them. We will take special care to ensure that those who may not speak Lao fluently (e.g., women, elders, and young children) will be effectively served.

3. We are committed to ethnic equity in the employment of Lao national staff. We attain parity in our staffing, with the goal that at least 50% of our staff (both professional and supporting, both national and local) shall be members of ethnic minorities. To achieve this goal, we will implement affirmative action hiring procedures, provide or support scholarships for ethnic minority students, and operate or support internships of members of ethnic minorities.

4. We are committed to increasing the awareness and understanding of ethnic equity issues among our national counterparts and collaborating ministries and agencies. We pledge to incorporate ethnic equity concerns within our program proposals, cooperative agreements and work plans. When our assistance takes the form of grants or credit to national or local government agencies, we will seek to ensure that funds will be spent in such ways as to increase ethnic equity.

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