

THREE WISE WOMEN

COUNTRY: LAOS

AREA OF IMPACT: COMMUNITY HEALTH



PLEASE PRAY:

Lord, bless these three women and the many others like them who are doing all they can to ensure the health and safety of their families.

Houay Lai is a small village in Laos nestled in the mountains near the Vietnamese border. For those who visit, it takes an adventure just to reach the village—hiking through hilly mountain trails and forging across rivers.

It's in this remote location where World Renew staff recently facilitated a process called Community Led Total Sanitation. The goal of the process is to set a foundation that leads towards all families in the village wanting to replace their open defecation practice (using the surrounding forest for lack of designated facilities) with the use of latrines they construct themselves. The purpose of the shift is to reduce the spread of fecal borne diseases, which are prevalent in areas that use open defecation.

At the end of a meeting to discuss the project, three women came forward holding out their hands, ready to hand over 150,000 kip (about \$15 USD), the contribution that the project requested toward the costs of latrine materials. Money is normally not collected until a later meeting, but Mrs. Soumany, Mrs. Ting, and Mrs. Tou were very eager to pay right away. Mrs. Tou shared that she had recently sold a pig, so she had some extra money; her husband is a drug addict, and she worried if she didn't contribute now she may not have money left at the next meeting. Though each had her own reasons, all three women wanted to contribute what they could to take the first step in ensuring that their families stayed healthy.

April 2021

COUNTRY UPDATES

The long awaited good news is that the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Government of Laos for the new project targeting 16 villages in Phonthong district of Luang Prabang province was approved and the agreement signed on February 5. The project name in short is GROW, which stands for Growing Resilience, Ownership and Wellbeing.



During the presentation at this special event, I (Mike) reflected on our hope to partner with communities towards the goal of their being "resilient." What does this word mean? I showed a picture of a tree, planted by the water, which, when the tough times come, continues to bear fruit because its roots are deep. It's a beautiful picture of a 'resilient community', with deep roots, a strong foundation. The staffing picture has also been falling into place. 5 new staff contracts were signed, and the district identified 10 government staff to work part time with the project. 5 staff were already in place from our previous work in Xieng Khouang. Thus, a total team of about 20 people joined the orientation process. The new team has also been busy with preparing the office we recently rented. The community entry process will get underway soon and into April as we begin to connect with the community and plan for next steps together.

We have two new expat staff beginning to work with us. Ms. Karen Gainer will be the project advisor based in Mai district, Phongsaly province. We are hoping she will be able to travel to Laos, if we can get all the required approvals, at the end of March and have an intensive language study in April with travel to the project in early May. Ms. Helen Catton will be the project advisor for the World Renew work in Phonthong. She has been working in Laos for the past 6 years and officially started working with us on March 8. We will provide a longer introduction to both of them in future updates. Please pray as they go through the orientation process with us and get started on this exciting journey with World Renew in Laos.

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PERSONAL NEWS

Monica completes her university studies in just over one month. Please pray for clarity and direction for the next steps in her journey. Moe Moe and Matthew participated in a special breast cancer awareness raising event on March 8 which was well attended. While Mike was traveling to the projects for two weeks in early Feb, Moe Moe, Matthew and Maria took part in the 2nd annual VIS Triathlon. Congratulations! Matthew will be finishing grade 11 soon and thus we had been hoping to visit Canada this summer in order for him to explore universities and colleges that he is interested in to help him make a decision about where to study after he graduates from Grade 12. Within the current situation around the world, we are not sure about moving forward with those travel plans. We would appreciate your prayers regarding decision making on possible travel plans, as well as for Matthew regarding what and where to continue his education journey. Please pray for the situation in Myanmar. We are concerned for the country and for our family members there.

WHAT'S THAT FOR?

Take a close look at this photo (right). What could this be used for? Don't hesitate or be shy, but send your best guess to Mike at fivemfamily@gmail.com. The mystery will be revealed in the next newsletter!

Your guesses on the January mystery item (below) were:

- roots of the plants nearby laid out to dry in the sun before sent to market
- a farmer clearing a patch of land to plant something
- a bird trap



And the correct answer is: Recently harvested cassava out in the field to dry before being sent for further processing and export. There is a lot of cassava grown in southern Laos.

THANK YOU FOR BRINGING HOPE!

Mike Fennema

World Renew Laos
laos@worldrenew.net