

# Happold Foundation/Rural Funds Management Progress Report



## Overview (for 3 months)

- 1757 more people now accessing safe water
- 289 filters installed across 7 provinces in Laos
- 8 agents promoting and selling filters
- Development of business plan with local Lao partner
- On the ground mentoring of agents and partner
- Training a Lao Project Manager

## Activities

The project began with the identification of villages where we could see the highest level of impact. We were looking for villages where the supply of drinking water is poor or sporadic but also where people would be receptive to new technology and willing to invest. Working with our local partners, ACTD, we met with connection they have in the targeted villages. This facilitated meeting with village chiefs who were one of the key gate keepers to these new markets. Having secured the support of the chiefs we identified 13 villages. Demonstration filters were installed and the most viable potential agents were selected. These agents accompanied ACTD staff who showed them how to promote filters. They were mentored during the early phases learning how to select potential customers, how to talk about the filter and how to answer customers' questions. They can earn 15,000 Kip for each filter they sell while being mentored, this rises to 30,000 Kip as they promote filters by themselves. Long term we want to support these agents to become full vendors who can make a profit 100,000 Kip per filter but would have to take on some of the financial liability and be prepared to invest in filters and materials.

During this process we have been working with ACTD to develop their understanding of this business approach. For ACTD, as with many Lao organisations this is a new approach involving a change in mind set and style from a top down very paternalistic approach to a customer or people focused approach. It is also key to change how they approach the management of their organisation. During this time we have worked with them on how to manage time and resources effectively, how to set targets that are achievable and reach a realistic profit margin.

The other key new market developed was in Louang Prabang. Here we used the novel approach of promoting to students. We are partnering with an English language school who serve students from the rural areas around the town. Students from villages with poor water supply were invited to participate in the promotional event. They had an opportunity to listen to Abundant Water staff explain manufacture, installation and promotion of the filters and ask questions. They were offered filters at half price. These filters will act as demonstrations in the rural villages. We have already seen



demand creation through this approach with over 40 filters sold. The next stage will be to select and mentored agents to promote the filters further.

We have engaged 3 other potential partners to work with over this period all of which have started demonstrating filters in their project areas. This has given us a large geographical reach across Laos. We will use the two models developed during this project to replicate and scale up the work.

### **Impact**

In a country where lack of access to improved water sources and improved sanitation impacts hugely on health outcomes and poverty levels, this project has brought about practical, affordable and sustainable solutions to achieve lasting change. The project has improved health outcomes in some of rural Laos's poorest communities by providing access to safe, reliable sources of drinking.

This project allowed Abundant Water to install demonstration filters across 8 Provinces in Laos and two major program partnerships were initiated through this project. This project set the foundation for a vendor project, where small scale village level business are now selling 120 filters a month.

### **Training a Lao Project Manager**

Sou Chang started working for Abundant Water in 2016 after graduating from University. He has been learning many new skills particularly making filters, overseeing filter testing and going to the field to help start new projects. Recently, with the support of the Happold Foundation Sou Chang has begun actively training as a local Project Manager. We have also worked with him on his English Language skills to a point where we now translates during team meetings. He is now grown in confidence from a shy student to a confident member of staff able to promote filters in the rural areas and assist in conducting training.

Sou Chang is from the Hmong ethnic group. Hmong are a distinct ethnicity, with a unique written and spoken language, culture, and religion. Many Hmong live in highland areas of Laos far from access to a main road, healthcare and other essential amenities. Representative from 5 Hmong communities from Saisomboun Province travelled to meet the Abundant Water team and learn about our water filter technology. These representatives included village chiefs, vice chiefs, health workers as well as Lao Government representatives from the local area. The participants spent the day with the Abundant Water team learning about how to make filters, how to install them and how to promote them in the community. The training was a great opportunity for Sou Chang to develop his public speaking and technical training skills. Giving the participants the opportunity to hear about the technology in their own language gave them the confidence to engage more in the training and ask more questions.

The support from the Happold Foundation has not only helped Sou Chang grow professionally and begin training as a Project Manager but also has allowed Abundant Water to meet the needs of the most rural and poorest Hmong communities in Laos.



Sou Chang (in the red shirt) leading training