



CARRYING LAO SILK WEAVERS' UNIQUE HERITAGE TO THE WORLD



EXPORT-LED POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE

Replicating the experience of the EPRP's silk project in Cambodia, the Lao EPRP project was launched in 2007. It enables poor rural weavers to enhance production and marketing of high quality silk products, meet foreign market requirements and increase their income (MDG 1). Together with a national partner, the Lao Handicraft Association (LHA), EPRP works with four pilot weaver communities South of Pakse: Pier Fier, Ban Sapay, Lac Kou and Champassak, all of whom already produce quite remarkable products. Once markets are secured, the project will be extended to additional weaver communities with lower initial production capacities, to reach out to more poor families.

THE CONTEXT

Weaving and wearing silk are still expressions of the deeply rooted cultural and social traditions in Lao PDR. The weavers, mostly women, produce scarves, table runners, handbags and cushion covers. However, the lack of marketing knowledge has left producers poor, with only a small proportion of the profit their products could potentially generate.

ACTIVITIES

Training in community building and modern weaving techniques, product finishing, natural dyes and use of artisanal silk yarn is given to the weavers. A "market link", Varitha Handicraft Silk & Cotton, a private company acting as project partner, has been identified to supervise production, organize the training for the weavers and act as intermediary. Marketing tools such as a catalogue and brochures are produced in collaboration with Varitha. In the Spring of 2008, Varitha also participated in test marketing and learning purposes at the EPRP stand at the internationally renowned Ambiente Fair in Germany. The results of the test marketing have been analyzed and design and production adapted accordingly. Workshops in creativity and design, modern production techniques, costing and pricing, marketing and quality management are organized for both, the weavers and the "market link".

RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

The four pilot weaver communities have been structured as efficient producer communities. A "Member Chart" has been agreed upon and signed by each of the weavers. Three new sales outlets have been opened: one at the project partner's site, one in one of the biggest hotels in the region (Pakse Hotel) and one in the transit area of Pakse airport. Based on Lao weaving techniques and capacities, first designs have been created by an international designer and the prototypes produced. The innovative products are currently test marketed in all three outlets. A study tour for the project partner to a successful contemporary silk processing and marketing organization in Siem Reap, Cambodia has been organized for selected weavers and the project partner.

IMPACT ON THE POOR

It is expected that the income of the project's first 50 weaver families will increase by 50% within the next year. The project will be expanded to more communities in the near future. Furthermore, women's self-confidence will continue to rise through community building, and the silk heritage will be preserved.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE INTERVENTION

The capacity of regional trade promotion organizations like the Provincial Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Provincial Department of Industry and Commerce in Pakse will be enhanced to enable them to provide more efficient trade promotion services to small handicraft exporters. Linkages to the Lao Handicraft Association, based in Vientiane, will be strengthened with the aim of enabling the association to replicate the EPRP pilot project to other regions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT



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