



Mekong RBM IEC Project News

April 2005



The wet season is approaching. In Lao PDR; it has started to rain on and off. Rain brings coolness to the earth and gives life to the soil. Farmers start their planting season. Some of them will move the whole family out to the fields until all the planting and harvesting is done. This is also time that people starting getting malaria. "Where there is water, there are mosquitos", say villagers.

In this issue, Dr Soudsady, Deputy Head of IEC Unit, CMPE, Lao PDR tells us what she has found related to malaria prevention while conducting a study for the School Health Project in Udomxay, a northern province of the Lao PDR. Dr Soudsady and the team members from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education went to 35 primary schools in 3 districts to conduct a survey. The preliminary result shows that the majority of grade 5 students have little knowledge of malaria. This could be because there is only one malaria lesson for the whole primary school curriculum and teachers lack appropriate educational tools. As part of the School Health Project, a box containing educational materials on various health issues, including malaria, will be used to increase children's knowledge and to encourage them to deliver health messages they have learned in class to their families and communities. The educational materials will strengthen teachers' capacity to teach health issues effectively and make learning enjoyable for children.

Dr Soudsady also visited Ban Viengkham and Ban Tangkok, remote villages in Xay District, where a malaria control programme supported by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was conducted a few years ago. Dr Soudsady found that people in those villages had good knowledge on malaria transmission and prevention. From her observation, it seems that people use bednets, as she saw bednets hung over their sleeping places, but there were not enough bednets for every member of the family. Mr Thongvanh, Head of Viengkham village, told Dr Soudsady that since the malaria control programme was introduced, the number of people with malaria had reduced considerably. According to Mr Thongvanh, hardly anyone had died from malaria in his village and fewer people had malaria-like symptoms.

In the February issue we reported on the Lao IEC team's visit to Salavanh, Xekong and Attapeu provinces for discussions with provincial malaria officers on how to use malaria pictorial cards to educate people on malaria prevention. We have received an update from those 3 provinces. All of them received the malaria pictorial card sets early March 2005. Salavanh has distributed the material to every village in Lao-ngam, Sa-moua and Ta-oy Districts. In the rest of the districts, only district health mobile teams will use the materials to educate people.

Dr Tongsavanh, Deputy Chief Provincial Malaria Station, has mobilized the district health out-reach teams to distribute the malaria cards and to conduct training for village volunteers. They should finish distributing and training soon.

Mr Pany, Chief of Xekong malaria station said they are distributing the malaria cards to every village in all four districts, at least two sets per village. Village health workers and village volunteers will be trained by the health out-reach teams in how to use the cards. Besides distributing to villages, the provincial malaria station plans to work with mass organizations and various NGOs to use the malaria cards. Picture: Mr Pany discusses with Dr Soudsady how to distribute the malaria pictorial card sets and to train village volunteers to use them.



Attapeu has also been distributing the cards to every village and training village volunteers to use them. They will also work with primary school teachers to use the malaria cards with their students. During the pre-testing of the materials last year, the team found that these card sets could be

used well in a school setting and should encourage children to take malaria prevention messages to their parents and friends. All the provincial health and malaria staff are eager to use these malaria pictorial card sets. They are quite easy to use and it does not take long to train people to use them. Without money to support the training, all the provincial staff have found ways to train district health out-reach teams and village volunteers.

The Lao IEC team has achieved good results due to the methodology they used, i.e. a participatory approach, to engage various partners in the process of the development and to consult them before distributing the materials.

There is an article posted on the Communication Initiative (Drumbeat) website "Communication for Isolated & Marginalized Groups: Blending the Old & the New" by Silvia Balit, published by the Food and Agriculture



Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This paper asks the question: "Why is it that after so many years of experience there are still few participatory communication processes in programs to alleviate poverty and improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups?" Balit recognizes that ICTs (information and communication technologies) are important to addressing the needs of the poor but argues that by no means should they replace traditional dialogue and existing indigenous communication systems. She advocates a blending of these two approaches as a means of improving the sustainability of participatory communication processes in international development.

Here are a few paragraphs from the executive summary:

International development goals now place high priority on addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor, and with the advent of the Information Age, communication is increasingly recognized as essential to achieving these goals. However, information, communication and knowledge are essential but not sufficient elements to address poverty. Marginal communities do not exist in isolation from wider contexts of social, political and economic forces and unequal power structures. These constraints need to be taken into account, and it must be recognized that information and communication cannot substitute for structural changes.

There have been many changes since the discipline of communication for development began some 50 years ago. Business as usual is no longer possible. There is need for new directions to respond to a changing environment, the effects of globalization, new social actors and the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies. At the same time, there is a wealth of lessons learned from years of experience working with disadvantaged groups, and a variety of participatory approaches developed in the past are still valid. The paper suggests that there is need to blend the old with the new.

Although there are no- one size fits all – rules, based on what has worked in the past, the paper describes some principles which are still valid as guidelines on how participatory communication can best be used to work with isolated and marginalized groups . The paper also analyses different media and approaches, which are suitable for working at community level. It analyses the potential and limitations of new information and communication technologies for working with the poor and identifies areas for improving local access and appropriation by marginal groups. It concludes that communication practitioners must learn to adapt to the new information age, and select the most appropriate communication channels, making use of all the tools in their toolbox. An essential element for successful and sustainable efforts with the disadvantaged will continue to be dialogue, ownership on the part of communities and integration with existing indigenous communication systems.

You can download the full paper from the webpage below:

<http://www.cominit.com/strategicthinking/st2004/thinking-592.html>

