



Launch of Juth Pakai

Opening remarks

Finn Reske-Nielsen, UN Resident Co-ordinator

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Excellencies, Mr. Samsanouk Mixay, Mr. Houmphann Rattanaavong, representatives from the government, Distinguished Guests, ambassadors, colleagues, members of the press and friends.

Thank you for attending this launch today.

Promoting empowerment is the first – and most crucial step that needs to be taken if we are to ever begin seriously alleviating poverty in this country – empowerment for both for the people in international and local institutions – and indeed villagers on the ground.

And one of the simplest ways of promoting empowerment is to promote and encourage the flow of knowledge.

I am very happy to see any step towards promoting knowledge and information sharing – particularly in the field of development.

I am therefore happy to share with you this UN initiative – a development journal for Laos - the first – and I hope – not the last bilingual academic journal that discusses the important area of development in this country.

It has taken close to a year to develop the concept – which will not only be used to facilitate knowledge sharing and debate – but will in a broad sense also promote the millennium development goals, which every country in the world, including this one – has agreed to reach by the year 2015.

Juth Pakai, which will be published three times a year, joins a long list of academic development-related publications from around the world – but I am particularly proud that this document is specifically about Lao PDR – released in Lao PDR – and coming out in both English and the Lao language.

It provides a real opportunity for development practitioners, government – and even people in villages to participate in the debate about development – and add their opinions.

Although Juth Pakai was set up with support from the United Nations, it is not meant to espouse the UN “party line” if you like and it offers a viewpoint independent of the government.

It doesn't just have Lao people as subjects of projects aimed at development – but includes Lao nationals as contributors. Juth Pakai will evolve with each issue and will – I am sure - improve as it grows. A particular challenge has been translating the first contributions into Lao, and we hope that the audience understands that errors will sometimes occur in the process of adapting the original articles to a printed Lao journal. In the future – I hope we see even more contributions from Lao people – particularly if they are acting as researchers, are working in the government – or are part of the academic community.

Having a forum for the sharing of information and of experiences is very important for us as development practitioners. There is a lot of knowledge in this field, but very little is shared in a broader sense. This journal is a way of making sure that experiences from development interventions and research type activities are disseminated and shared by different development stakeholders and the public in general.

The ideas and opinions in this document do not necessarily have to be accepted by everyone that reads it. It is not written to garner consensus – but promote debate. It is a bulletin board. If you disagree with something said in here – I urge you to respond. Put a case forward and write a letter to the editor. Your opinions are just as welcome as anyone else's.

That is how ideas get debated, how the development community can learn, and how Lao people will see that progress comes from sharing ideas and forming opinions.

This issue, which from today will be available on -line at UN website, contains three articles. Future issues could contain more.

- Jutha Kran discusses dietary changes taking place in upland areas of Laos. This will be of obvious interest to anyone dealing with Laos's poorest community – ethnic minorities.
- Anneke de Rouw, Keoudone Kadsachac and Isabelle Gay discuss the comparative benefits of different farming systems used in Luang Prabang, which again will be interesting for all agencies involved in rural development, not just in Luang Prabang, but all of Laos.
- And Sarah Wood discusses the ways that villages in Laos cope with various types of ongoing hazards – an article of obvious interest to anyone concerned with disaster management.

My hope is that these articles are steps toward boosting the culture of debate and knowledge sharing in the development community. They are intended as steps towards fostering an understanding of the issues faced by ordinary people in Lao PDR, not just for the people here – but for ordinary villagers in Laos. And dare I say – for anyone involved in development work in this country, they are a good read.

I thank you.

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