

Welcome to the second edition of the Focus Newsletter, which will keep you up-to-date with all of the exciting work that Village Focus is doing. Every other month, we will highlight new programs, announce events, introduce new staff members, and feature accomplishments in the field. Frankly speaking, we want to capture your imagination and convince you to be a regular VFI donor. If you are already, we want you to increase support and recruit friends and colleagues.

To learn more about VFI, visit our website <http://www.villagefocus.org> or email us at info@villagefocus.org with questions.

DONATE NOW

Anti-Trafficking initiative

As part of VFI's Child Protection and Empowerment Program, we are in discussion with Terre Des Hommes – Netherlands about establishing a Shelter in southern Laos for returning victims of trafficking. Thousands of young men and women leave Laos for Thailand and other countries each year in search of employment opportunities, and many become victims of abuse and exploitation. This initiative will focus on support young women, providing protection and health, social and educational services in an effort to help them reintegrate into Lao society. VFI will pay particular attention to the push factors that encouraged them to leave in the first place – poverty and lack of opportunity – by offering vocational training, linkages to employment opportunities, follow-up support, access to micro-credit, and a host of other support services, in order to help these young people succeed and flourish at home. This exciting project is still under development but we hope that it will be underway by mid 2008!

For more information about VFI's Campaign Against Trafficking in Children, VFI's participation in writing and translating the Draft Guidelines for the Protection of the Rights of Children Against Trafficking in Southeast Asia, and to view VFI's (as yet unfunded) Legal Advocacy & Victim Support proposal work in general, please visit our [website](#).

Finally, please see our profile of Kongseng Sirivath below, our Child Protection and Empowerment Program Coordinator and a dynamic young leader in Laos.

Village Focus Southern Laos

The central tenet of VFI has always been investment in and empowerment of local people. Through the short life of VFI key staff members have increasingly taken on responsibility and leadership, with Dr. Boualaphet Chounthavong assuming the role of Country Manager in 2007. Now, VFI will take another bold step by establishing Village Focus Southern Laos, a soon-to-be semi-independent body that will have full implementation autonomy for the Health, Education, Agriculture and Leadership project. While we are still working on the practical details of this initiative, VFI and Village Focus Southern Laos (VFSL) will continue to work closely together, sharing common resources (training centers, etc.) and complimenting one another. VFI will continue to raise funds for, provide accounting and administrative services to, and backstop VFSL in other ways, but will cede project decision-making authority to the local level. This is our form of decentralization, and we are both excited and nervous about it.



Stop Child Trafficking



For more information about the HEAL project, please visit our [website](#). For information about development in Laos in general, Please visit [UNDP](#) website. Please see below for Chanthala Bounthavong's (Nyai) profile, the HEAL Project Coordinator and a key leader of Village Focus Southern Laos.

Green Earth Farm and Research Center



Our Green Earth Farm and Research Center will be completed by June 2008! This exciting training center is 38 hectares (93 acres) in size, is located on the northern edge of the fertile Bolovens Plateau and is halfway between the international market city of Pakse (on the Mekong River and along the border with Thailand) and the villages of upland southern Laos in which VFI currently operates. Among other things, VFI plans to conduct agricultural training, research, production and marketing to directly support local farmers and government officials. We will address annual food insecurity, encourage local agricultural entrepreneurs, introduce appropriate technologies, enable networks with other NGOs and government extension efforts, and improve living conditions for thousands of farmers in southern Laos.

The communities of southern Laos, like most areas of the country, suffer from an almost complete lack of financial and technical support for agricultural improvement. Farmers have very little information and support about domestic markets and almost no information about packaging and marketing to the two international markets (Thailand and Vietnam) on their doorstep. Access to research on new, interesting and profitable agricultural techniques are totally absent and leaves Lao farmers at an insurmountable disadvantage in growing and marketing agricultural products.

For more information about VFI's agricultural marketing plans, please click on "[MarketLINK Lao: Village conservation LINKED to small scale agro-enterprise development in the uplands of southern Laos](#)," as well as on the VFI profile for the [CIAT](#) and [NAFRI](#)-sponsored Agro-economic Development project.

Phnong Coffeshop and Information Centre



In January VFI opened a coffee shop and information centre in Sen Monorom, Mondulkiri province. The function of the coffee shop is four fold. Firstly to provide a place where Phnong people can meet and for nursing mothers, many women walk tens of kilometres each day to sell produce, they are welcome to come and nurse children and rest before they take the long journey to their village, to act as an information centre point where Phnong cultural information can be collected and shared among young Phnong people, and to act as a retail outlet for drinks and snacks, handicrafts and trips for visitors to the area, and finally a meeting place for locals and expatriates.

Handicrafts in the form of scarves, hand-bags, and bookmarks are made in the café, and at the VFI Phnong weaving project which we have recently taken on. Coffee is grown and roasted locally in Mondulkiri. The coffee shop is staffed by Phnong students from the Sen Monorom boarding house which is another VFI project. The boarding house provides board and lodgings for Phnong secondary school students, who would find it impossible to travel each day to school from their village. Boarding house students have proven to be top achievers in the local high school.



We would like to welcome you to...
Several staff members and volunteers in the Village Focus offices in Cambodia and Laos...

Mr. Heng Khim has been with VFI for almost two years now. He is working on ECOSORN project as the project Co-coordinator, and he is main contact for the contractors, writing reports, and project plans. His future goal is to contribute his skills and effort working in Cambodia, where vulnerable people exist. He wants to see Cambodian people live in happiness and dignity.



Jitske Wildschut recently joined the VFI Cambodia team. She is a Netherlands citizen, with an academic background in Politics and Journalism. She is profoundly drawn to the importance and effectiveness of intercultural dialogue between today's young people keen to contribute to tomorrow's international arena. Her passions for the grassroots, and her experience with the non-profit organizations will raise VFI to a new level. She is busily working on a new initiative, the VFI Fellowship program, and also preparing for the yearly Angkor Wat Bike Race and Rally that will be held on December 6th of this year.

Ms. Chanthala Boutthavong (Nyai) has been with VFI since the beginning, even before Village Focus International was created. Nyai is the HEAL Project Coordinator, and will be one of the key leaders of Village Focus Southern Laos. She loves to help people achieve higher education; it brings her joy to see smiles on the faces of children when they know that they are getting a new school, a place where they can learn without having to move when it's raining, a place that keeps the sun out of their faces during the school hour, and a place for a future.



Mrs. Kongseng Sirivath has been with VFI for more than 7 years. She is a young Lao woman who dedicates her energies and skills to the development sector. She is the VFI Lao Office Manager, and also a focal point for regional network for Asia Against Child Trafficking (Asia ACTs) since 2004. Soon, she will resume a full responsibility coordinating a new VFI Anti-Trafficking project in Pakse.

She thanks VFI for always giving her opportunities to explore her abilities and her interests. She is thrilled about the Anti-Trafficking project because she wants to help Lao youth and women that are being exploited by society.

Updates

India

VFI provides support to several local Indian people's organizations by linking them to sources of funding and technical support. In the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, VFI received funding from a Hong Kong donor to support SAVE, SEED, and Subiksha, three organizations working to prevent child labor, exploitation of women, and other related issues. VFI will continue provide assistance to these and other organizations as the opportunity arises.

Upcoming date

*Angkor Wat Bike Race and Rally: Dec. 6th, 2008

I am only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
But still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.
- Edward Everett Hale

Thank you for your continuing support to VFI!!

