


**AGRICULTURE FOR NUTRITION**

Stories from Lao PDR | 2021



A photograph of three children standing on a dirt path in a rural, hilly area. The child on the left is a girl wearing a red and blue striped shirt and a blue skirt. The child in the middle is a boy wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and dark shorts. The child on the right is a boy wearing a blue t-shirt and camouflage shorts, holding a water bottle. The background is a lush green hillside.

# AGRICULTURE FOR NUTRITION (AFN) PROJECT

Dietary diversity is a big problem in Northern Laos. Many rural families regularly consume only 4 out of 10 major food groups, with rice often forming the majority of the meal. Despite eating local, leafy vegetables themselves, mothers rarely feed these to their young children, leading to high levels of stunting as well as micronutrient deficiencies.

As such, AFN, a 38.8 million USD project mostly funded by GAFSP, seeks to tackle malnutrition and rural poverty by providing nutrition education coupled with agricultural training to improve and diversify food production for household consumption, as well as creating stronger market linkages so that families can earn extra income.

# AFN IN A NUTSHELL

## 2016 – 2022

### KEY ACTIVITIES

1. **Participatory Village Development and Infrastructure Planning** to build better roads, irrigation and community markets
2. **Farmer Nutrition Schools** for pregnant women and mothers with children under 2
3. **Garden grants** (120 USD) to support homegardens and livestock for household consumption
4. Establishment of **Agricultural Production Groups** who receive grants to raise fish, pigs, poultry, goats or grow vegetables, fodder, cardamom and more
5. **Farmer-to-farmer Extension Activities** including demo sites, trainings and peer-to-peer exchange
6. **Training of local service providers** such as Village Facilitators and Lead Farmers
7. **Value chains** developed through co-investments with lead enterprises

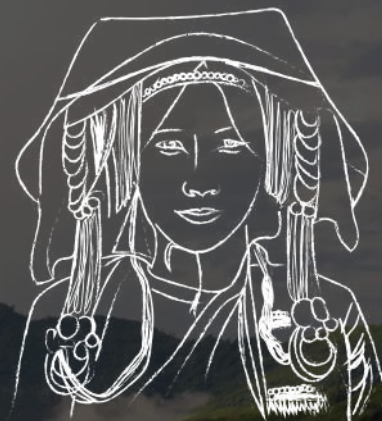


# NORTHERN LAOS

A region of mountains and dense forests, Northern Laos is home to dozens of ethnic minorities including the Hmong, the Khmu and the Akha.

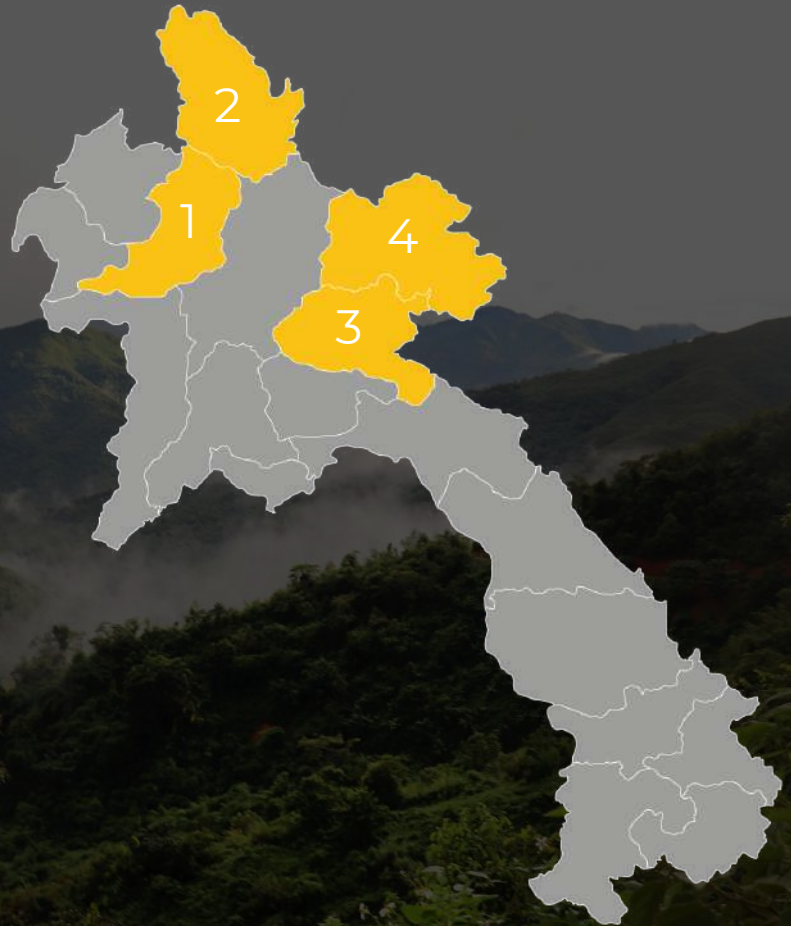
The region's cultural diversity and remoteness make it both intriguing and hard to reach in terms of infrastructure and government services. 90% of its inhabitants are farmers, mostly surviving on subsistence rather than markets. They are also one of the largest groups affected by Unexploded Ordinances (UXO) leftover from the Vietnam War.

The majority of the population in AFN districts belong to ethnic minorities, including the Akha, Khmu, Hmong, Lao, Lao Loum, Lao Tai, Lue, Phong, Phou Noi and Phou Tai.



The AFN project is implemented in approximately 400 villages in 12 districts of Northern Laos, including:

1. **Oudomxai province:**  
Namor and Lah districts
2. **Phongsaly province:**  
Mai, Boun-tai, Samphan and Khua districts
3. **Xieng Khouang province:**  
Kham and Nonghet districts
4. **Houaphan province:**  
Huamuang, Xam-tai, Kuan and Xon districts



# AFN IMPACT SO FAR\*

The project aims to reach **34,000** rural households with its interventions and lift **21,000** households out of poverty

14,983

households above poverty line  
(USD 289 income per capita)

22,300

women daily consuming  
at least 5 out of 10 food groups

25,000

food secure households

34,000

households trained in agricultural  
production and/or nutrition

\*as of Jan 2021





# 12,769

Garden Grants (GG) provided  
to women

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# 688

Agricultural Production Group  
(APG) grants disbursed

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# 400

villages with established  
Village Development Plans



# MRS SENGPHET

## VILLAGE:

Long Peau, Kham district  
Xieng Khouang province

## ETHNIC GROUP:

Lao Loum

## AFN ACTIVITIES:

- Farmer Nutrition School
- Garden Grant
- APG Grant – Pig Raising Group
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)





A farmer for many years, Mrs Sengphet was exposed to the AFN programme in 2018 through the Farmer Nutrition School when she was pregnant with her 3rd child.

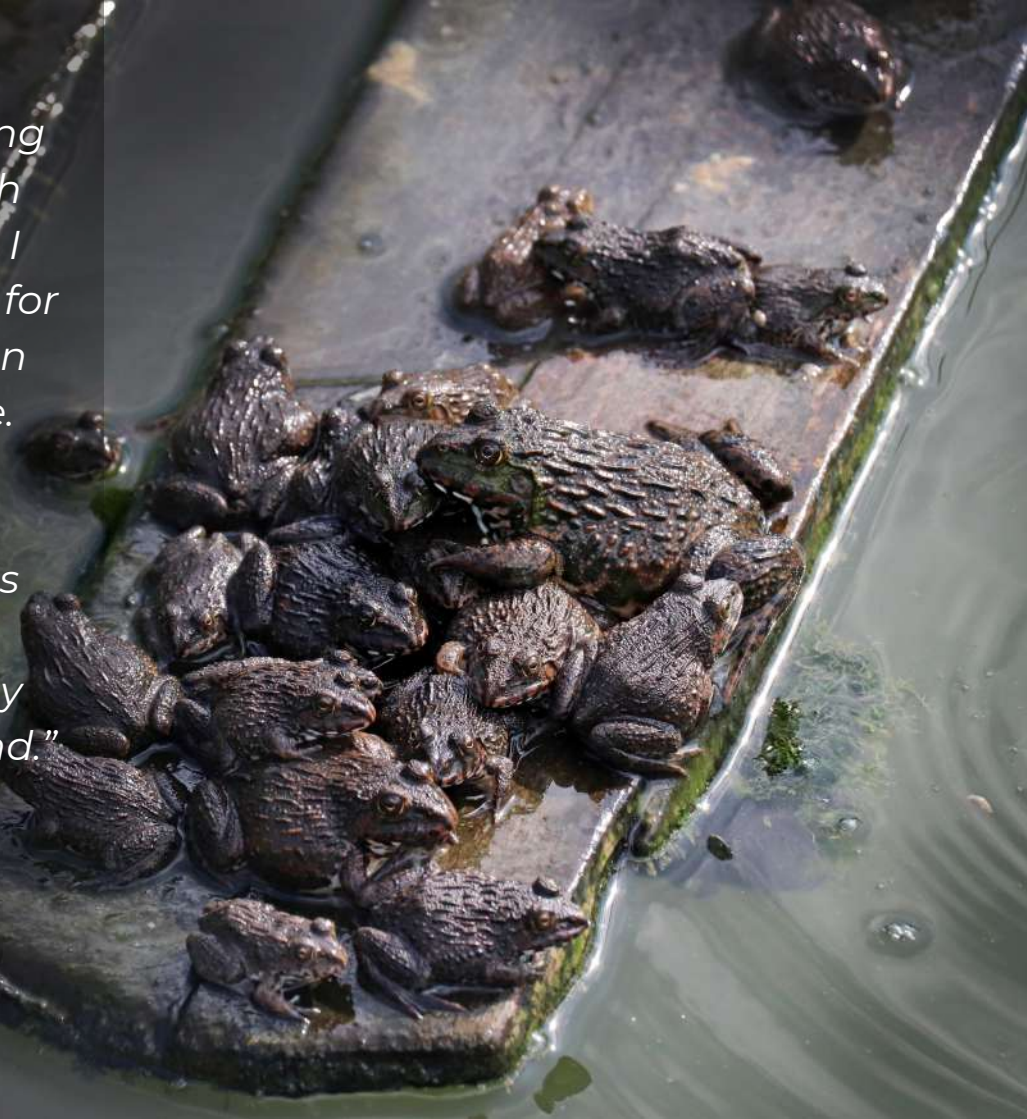
She was already raising various livestock at the time but received a Garden Grant worth one million kip (120 USD) which helped her buy 10 chickens, chicken feed and seeds to start a Home Garden. Since March 2018, she has managed to sell over 40 chickens and 200 eggs worth 3.5 million kip (420 USD).

Being quite the entrepreneur, Mrs Sengphet reinvested her income into growing garlic and raising fish, frogs and crickets. With training support from NAFRI (a project partner), she has now set up a hatchery for fish fingerlings, froglets and chicks which she supplies to farmers in nearby villages.

Her farm is also a demo site for farmer-to-farmer extension sessions to share chicken raising techniques, and she leads one of the project's Agricultural Production Groups in pig raising.



*"I don't get tired of doing all these activities. With my additional income, I have been able to pay for my children's education and build a new house. I have learned how to give medicine and vaccines to my animals and I am now part of making decisions in my house with my husband."*



Mrs Sengphet currently earns up to 2 million kip per month (240 USD) and aims to reach 3.5 million kip per month (420 USD) by the end of 2021.



# MR BO VA & MRS PAINEAU

## VILLAGE:

Phoutom, Namor district

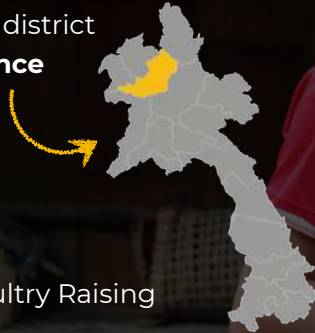
Oudomxay province

## ETHNIC GROUP:

Hmong

## AFN ACTIVITY:

- APG Grant – Poultry Raising Group



A young couple in their early 20s, Bo and Paineau always shared a common interest in raising poultry. When they heard about AFN interventions in their village, they thought it would be a great opportunity to reignite their idea and joined a poultry raising group with 13 other households.

As duck meat has been gaining popularity over the last few years, they decided to try raising ducks instead of chickens. With a grant of 2.2 million kip (260 USD), they bought 14 ducks, duck feed, watering cans, vaccines, a weighing machine, wire netting and built a wooden shelter for their flock.

With improved access to the village due to a new road supported by AFN, they managed to sell 10 ducks out of their flock of 70 at 40,000 kip per kg (4.8 USD) in their first year, making about 800,000 kip (96 USD). Sadly, COVID-19 hit soon after and they haven't been able to sell much in 2020. They're not disheartened however and plan to focus on increasing their flock to sell in bulk when the time is right.





*“I never thought that our dream of raising poultry would become a reality, but with AFN’s support we plan to continue and expand this activity so that we can build our own house and invest in cattle raising and maybe even setting up a rubber plantation.”*

Once Mr Bo and Mrs Paineau have about 100 ducks, they plan to sell them in the district market where they can earn up to 10 million kip (1200 USD) in one go.



# MR DUANG

## VILLAGE:

Houay Sang, Lah district

**Oudomxay province**

## ETHNIC GROUP:

Khmu

## AFN ACTIVITY:

- APG Grant – Goat Raising Group





Mr Duang has truly shown what one can achieve with hard work and perseverance. Born into rice farming, Mr Duang's family often suffered from food shortages until he started working as a labourer and managed to earn enough money to buy 2 goats.

By the time AFN arrived, he had been village head for over 10 years and applied for the goat raising group grant as a leader of 10 households. With 3.2 million kip (380 USD), he bought roofing material, vaccines and 2 big goats to add to his herd of 6. Since October 2018, he has sold 23 goats, earning over 20 million kip (2400 USD).

Mr Duang conducts group meetings every month to discuss challenges and provide guidance to his fellow group members. With AFN, he has learned about vaccinations and common disease treatments to add to his own traditional remedies.

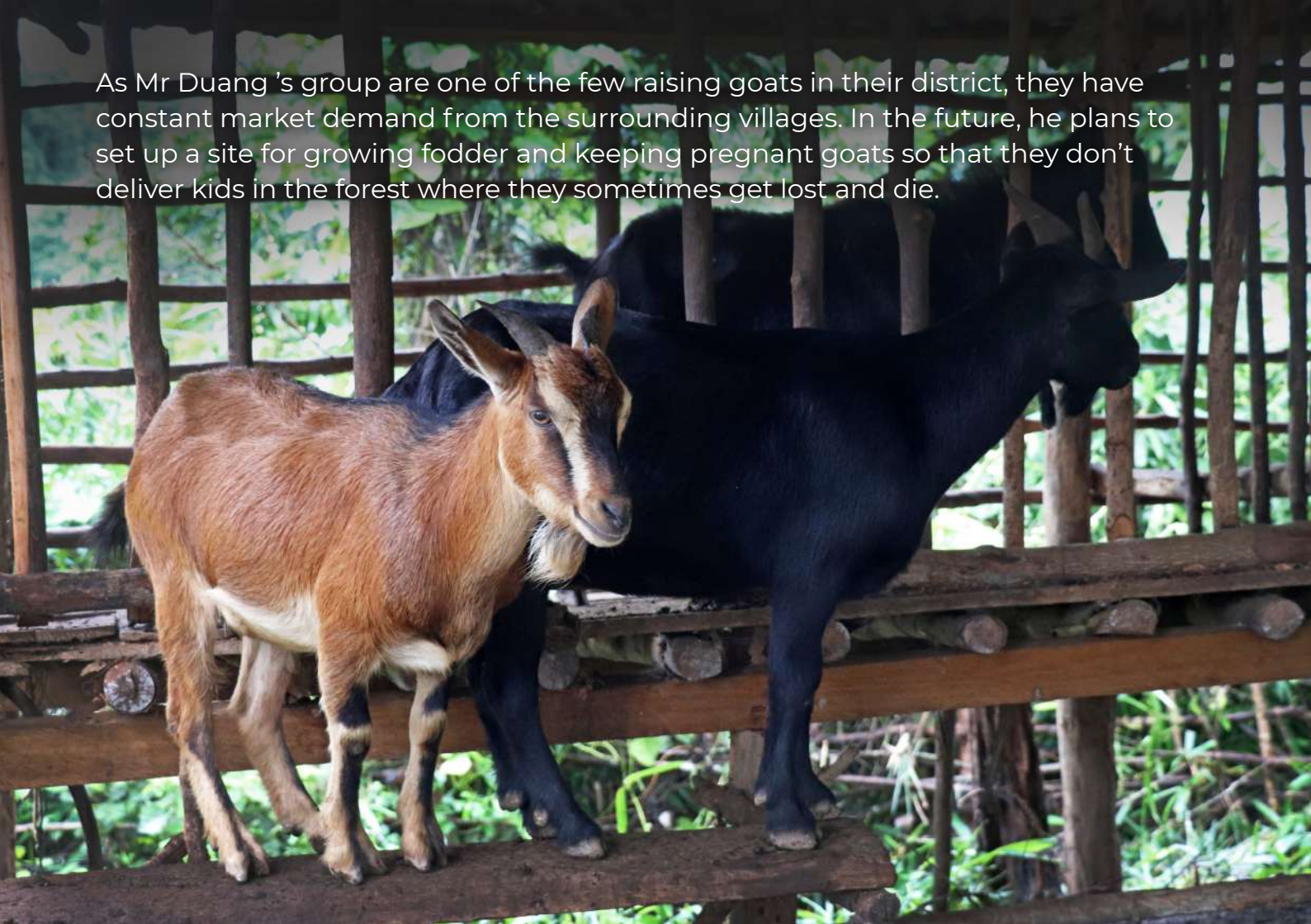
Unfortunately two members in his group have had goats stolen in the past and he hopes to build a central goat shed for everyone to prevent this from happening again.





*“With the money I have earned I have managed to buy a motorbike for 14 million kip (1680 USD) and use it to sell goats directly at the district market for a higher price. I’ve also started to renovate my temporary house into a strong, concrete one and hope to finish it soon.”*

As Mr Duang 's group are one of the few raising goats in their district, they have constant market demand from the surrounding villages. In the future, he plans to set up a site for growing fodder and keeping pregnant goats so that they don't deliver kids in the forest where they sometimes get lost and die.



# MRS SAO LEE

## VILLAGE:

Korthong, Nonghet district  
Xieng Khouang province

## ETHNIC GROUP:

Hmong

## AFN ACTIVITIES:

- Farmer Nutrition School
- Garden Grant



Growing up in Vientiane, Mrs Sao Lee is one of our more well-to-do farmers with a university diploma and a husband who works in the district centre. They met on a field research trip to Korthong and after getting married decided to return and start a farm where they grow maize and raise cattle, poultry and pigs.

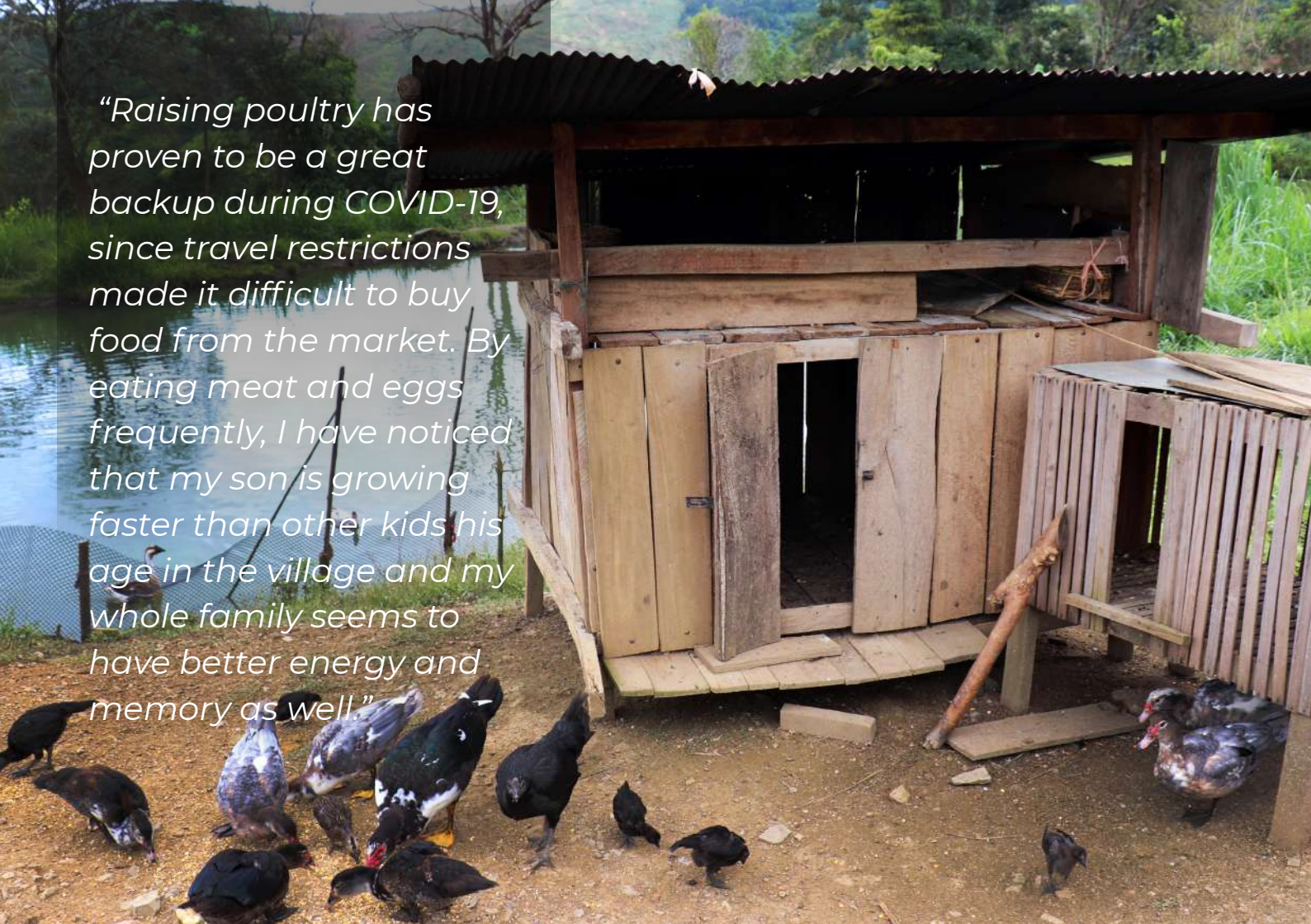
She got involved with AFN when she was pregnant with her first child and took part in the Farmer Nutrition School. The programme consists of four modules focused on the first 1000 days (from pregnancy until a child is 2 years old).

By attending sessions once a month, Sao Lee learned how to grow local vegetables in her home garden and simple poultry raising techniques, as well as how to prepare and cook nutritious foods for herself and her baby.

In late 2019, she was awarded a Garden Grant and decided to raise poultry for household consumption. She now has a flock of 60 chickens and 35 ducks on her farm.



*“Raising poultry has proven to be a great backup during COVID-19, since travel restrictions made it difficult to buy food from the market. By eating meat and eggs frequently, I have noticed that my son is growing faster than other kids his age in the village and my whole family seems to have better energy and memory as well.”*



Mrs Sao Lee plans to start selling her poultry when she has a flock of at least 150 birds so that she has enough both for household consumption and surplus sale.



# MRS PHENG

## VILLAGE:

Sobsan, Xam Tai district  
Houaphan province

## ETHNIC GROUP:

Lao Loum

## AFN ACTIVITIES:

- APG Grant – Pig Raising Group





Mrs Pheng has always raised pigs but in the past, she only had a few and they were often underweight due to a lack of technical knowhow to fatten them up for sale.

In March 2018, she led a group of 14 households to be part of AFN's Pig Raising Activity. With the 3.5 million kip (420 USD) grant she personally received, Mrs Pheng bought 3 native pigs weighing between 25–30 kg each. Her strategy was to fatten up and breed these pigs so that she could sell them at a good price.

Since then, she has sold 17 pigs weighing from 50–80 kg to a trader who comes directly to her farm gate, and has earned 34 million kip (~4000 USD) which she reinvested in her farm and household.

Unfortunately in 2019, there were cases of African Swine Fever in her village and to protect her pigs, she had to put breeding on hold. The situation has since improved and she now has 15 pigs fattening up for sale.



*“Not only am I able to earn a stable income from selling these pigs but we are able to eat more pork at home and this has been good for my family’s health and nutrition. We have been able to increase the size of the pig pens, pay our electricity bills and buy many household items just through pig sales.”*





Mrs Pheng plans to sell her pigs directly at the village and district markets next time so that she can earn 5–10,000 kip (0.6–1.2 USD) more per kilo than from her gate.

# VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

## VILLAGE:

Nam Lee, Samphan district,  
Phongsaly province

## ETHNIC GROUPS:

Akha, Khmu,  
Lao Loum & Phou Noi

## AFN ACTIVITIES:

- Village Development  
& Infrastructure Planning  
(Access Road)



The road to the rice fields used to be extremely hard to reach in Nam Lee village. At only 1.5m wide, farmers could only travel by foot to their planting areas. Even motorbikes were not an option as its vicinity to the river made the soil too moist and loose.

As such, when the villagers took part in Village Development Planning (VDP) sessions with the AFN project, building a better access road was on the top of their list. With a 176 million kip grant (~20,000 USD), they were able to construct a 4m wide road running 4km from the village to their production area in just two months. This road can now be used by tractors and trucks to transport produce to markets.

Another recommendation of the project was to start growing cash crops rather than just upland rice, so that farmers could generate more income by selling galangal, cardamom and job's tear — a type of millet.

With the improved road and increase in crop sales, all 215 households are now planting in the area compared to 155 in the past, increasing the plantation from 100 hectares to 180 hectares.





*“Now with the access road, more and more villagers are interested in planting in this area and we are trying to find extra land to increase our production. We meet regularly twice a month to make sure every household is pulling their weight and contributing to the effort.”*

*— Mr Laoma, Village Head*



By the end of January 2021, each household was earning an income of more than 300 million kip (36,000 USD) per year.

# LOOKING AHEAD

By early 2021, the project has managed to reach the majority of its targets.

Moving forward, there are plans to draft 25 more Village Development Plans, disburse 100 more grants to Agricultural Production Groups, continue Farmer Nutrition School activities and award 10,000 more Garden Grants. Demos will continue to be conducted in 50 villages.

Seven public private community partnerships (PPCPs) have already been signed with local agri-enterprises and farmers will start selling produce this coming harvest season.





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