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***The Experiences of Development Practitioners and
Challenges in Community Engagement in Laos***

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Abstract

Poverty alleviation is a top priority of the global development agenda. Laos is still on the list of Least Developed Countries as measured by the United Nations. Poverty in the Lao context is socially and culturally unique. The Government of Laos works collaboratively with development partners and non-governmental organisations to overcome poverty through development programmes throughout the country. However, the universal development and poverty definitions, including the development and poverty interventions which are influenced by such definitions, do not necessarily match the local contexts and practices.

This thesis examines development practice and community engagement in the Lao context through exploring experiences and perspectives of development practitioners who have worked in and engaged with community development in Laos. The thesis adopts a qualitative approach, drawing upon a social constructivist epistemology and a postcolonial framework. Semi-structured interviews, a form of qualitative methodologies, were employed for data collection. The interviews involved thirteen participants from both governmental and non-governmental organisations, and included both local development workers and expatriates. The focus of interviews was to investigate experiences of and opinions about their development practice and community engagement in Laos.

The findings reveal that development practice in Laos requires sufficient time to understand and learn about communities and their actual problems. Development discourses have conceptualised understandings associated with development and this has shaped how governments, donors, development partners, policymakers and development practitioners perceive mainstream development. The conceptualisation was mainly influenced by Western ideologies and was undeniably a legacy of

colonialism. Participatory development approaches have been recommended by all research participants as one of the most effective approaches to bring about success and long-term sustainability. The findings also suggest that participation is required from the beginning of the development process, including in problem analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluating stages. In short, a sense of belonging and ownership needs to be present throughout the entire process of development. Furthermore, it is important for development practitioners to thoughtfully recognise and reflect critically on their roles as to whether they are insiders or outsiders when working on the ground. This can determine development outcomes. This research recommends local people be employed more to work as part of development projects in their own communities. By using these approaches, community development can be more effective and meaningful in a sustainable manner and truly respond to the real needs of communities. This can also contribute to a new phase of participatory development practice.

Keywords: development practice; participation; community development; community engagement; experience; development approach; insiders; outsiders, poverty.

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Acronyms and Initialisms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LCD	Least Developed Countries
LECS	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRA	Participatory Development Approach
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UN-OHRLLS United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least
Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and
Small Island Developing States

WB World Bank

Terms and Definitions

Community engagement	The way development practitioners engage or work with communities on the ground. It involves collaboration in respect of work processes with communities in addressing problems or issues that affect livelihood and quality of life of people in a community.
<i>Farang</i>	Westerner or Westerners
Free help	Assistance from outside parties that provide for a community and are free. According to the interviews, development practitioners contend that development projects are usually seen as free assistance from development organisations. Moreover, the project is usually seen as a source of money and it is commonly assumed that if the project comes, the money will come.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Laos is a developing country as defined by established measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Laos has received a significant amount of development and assistance, mostly from the Global North for many years. However, this has created both desirable and undesirable development outcomes. Whilst some development interventions have been effectively implemented, some have failed to achieve the development goals. Of course, a myriad of factors are behind those successes and failures. One of the success stories that is usually referred to is the progress of poverty alleviation. According to UNDP (2015), even though the national poverty rates have dropped significantly over the past two decades from 46% in 1992 to 23% in 2015, the gap between the rich and the poor is still large and remains challenging. A recent study by the World Bank summarised some of the reasons constituting unsatisfactory development outcomes – noting strong traditional control from the central government, a fragile institutional environment, insufficient monitoring and evaluation, and the challenges of introducing new approaches associated with poverty alleviation like capacity building for sustainable development at the grassroots level (World Bank, 2013).

Development practice in the Lao context can be difficult and challenging for both local and foreign development workers. One reason is due to the fact that the country is very culturally and ethnically diverse (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016). Development practitioners would ideally learn about the specific cultural context as it may affect the effectiveness of the practice. Moreover, accessibility can be a problem for development since the country is surrounded by mountains and the majority of the population reside in rural areas (ibid). In practice, the success and effectiveness of development programmes require collaboration from all concerned stakeholders. Key responsibilities

do not only lie with the government, but also with development partners and local communities.

Learning from the real experiences of development practitioners who work on the ground is vitally important because it can help us reflect on what is effective and ineffective in development practice. This will also benefit new practitioners and enable them to better understand various context-based issues, including strategies to cope with those issues (Kumar & Leonard, 2012). According to the World Bank (n.d.), learning from real and practical experience is essential because it can help inform better practice. The World Bank further claims that government officials and development practitioners, who work at the national level, are eager to learn from each other's experiences in order to inform more effective plans, approaches and practices. As a result, the World Bank has promoted the concept of South-to-South Knowledge Exchange which aims at enhancing the connections between officials and practitioners. This initiative is important because it will allow planners, policymakers, and especially development professionals to identify what works and what does not work in practice. In addition, the exchange will increase the ability of practitioners to be more adaptable when working on the ground. Adaptability has been a central concern of the global discussion regarding dealing with the challenges in local contexts (Crawford, Morris, Thomas, & Winter, 2006).

In association with the importance of learning from real experience and the differences of development practice in the Lao context, this study aims to explore the experiences and challenges of both local and international development practitioners who work on the ground in Laos. In other words, the focus is on the experiences of development practitioners who have worked or engaged with Lao communities. The study will include perspectives of both domestic and international development

practitioners regarding their experiences of, and the challenges they have encountered in, development practice. The study will then seek strategies for dealing with highlighted issues.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this research is to explore the experiences of development practitioners who have engaged in community development in Laos. It examines the experiences of both local and foreign development workers from both government and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sectors. The research aims to learn from experiences of real practice in community engagement.

In order to respond to the key objective, the central research question was developed: *'What are the experiences and challenges of development practitioners who work on the ground in Lao PDR?'.* This is supported by the following four sub-questions:

- 1) How are the experiences and challenges of the local and international development practitioners different?
- 2) How have development practitioners dealt with challenges and difficulties encountered in their development practice?
- 3) What have been the most challenging and significant issues when practising development in Laos?
- 4) What preconceptions did international development practitioners have before working in Laos? How have their ideas changed after working on the ground?

1.3 Research Location

This research was conducted in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. I selected Laos for my research location because my study focuses on the real experiences and

perspectives of development practitioners who have worked in and engaged with communities in Laos. I hope that the study outcomes will benefit my home country. I selected Vientiane because it is the centre of government and also where the national headquarters of NGOs are located, meaning that I could approach my research participants easily and target participants from different backgrounds and organisations.

Figure 1.1 Research Location

Source: Emapsworld (n.d.)

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 outlines significant literature and related studies about experiences of and challenges in community engagement in development practice. The chapter begins by describing general studies about global development frameworks regarding development practice and aid effectiveness. The chapter then explores development perceptions and effective development practice in various contexts.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology and framework used in this research. It provides details about how the research was carried out, the research location, participant recruitment, data collection methods, and the processes of analysis. Moreover, it also reflects on the importance of human ethics considerations and positionality.

Chapter 4 provides information in regard to the Lao context. It begins by giving an overall picture of the country, then specifically discusses development matters including poverty issues, development procedures and the cultures.

Chapter 5, the key results chapter, provides extracts from interviews as categorised by themes, and responds to the research questions. It explains how development practitioners work in Laos, including challenges and difficulties they have encountered. Furthermore, it provides participants' different perspectives of development strategies and perceptions in regard to development.

Chapter 6 brings in key themes from Chapter 5 in order to analyse and discuss the results based on the theoretical framework of the study, literature and relevant studies presented in the previous chapters. It explores and discusses: experiences of development practitioners; effective practice; community participation; ownership; and

the concept of insiders and outsiders. The chapter also provides discussion around challenges in community engagement in the context of Laos.

Chapter 7 summarises key findings and the previous discussion. It makes conclusions from the research and clarifies how this study has responded to the research questions. It then provides recommendations and identifies some limitations of the research and areas that can be further investigated.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on the discussion and current studies associated with the challenges in community engagement and the experiences of development practitioners who work on the ground. The chapter begins by describing general studies about global development frameworks, perceptions and effective practice in community development.

2.2 International Development Agendas

There have been a number of global development agendas produced, agreed on and committed to by the leaders of both developed and developing countries. However, in regard to development practice, this chapter will explore three main and crucial development frameworks which are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The latter, as particularly relevant for Laos, is the focus of this research.

The SDGs are a set of 17 goals with 169 targets which centrally emphasise poverty elimination, sustainability and prosperity for all across social, economic, and environmental domains. The SDGs aim to complete the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which ended in 2015, but taking a broader scope (Griggs, et al., 2013). The United Nations Member States have committed to accomplishing the SDGs by 2030. They form a blueprint of development practice globally. The goals, however, have been criticised by many academics and experts for being too ambitious with unclear targets and having too many goals of which some seem to overlap (ibid).

The Paris Declaration is considered to be a key development framework for aid effectiveness. It also forms an agreement between donor (developed) and recipient (developing) countries in an effort to tackle poverty (Silaphet, 2008). The declaration was endorsed in 2005 and committed to seeking better results and management of aid

delivery through five key domains: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, managing for results and mutual accountability (World Bank, 2006). It includes a set of indicators to measure performance and ensure progress meets targets. In order to ensure the localisation of the Paris Declaration, the Vientiane Declaration committed Laos to decentralisation and local participation (The National Round Table Process, 2007). The Lao government and development partners have agreed on activities and programmes to help the Lao government achieve the goals and exit from the list of least developed countries by 2020 through a commitment to aid effectiveness.

The Vientiane Declaration focuses on five key principles of the Paris Declaration. According to Silaphet (2008), the Lao government aims to increase the country's ownership of the development process by integrating development plans of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and global development initiatives into its national development plans and policies. This is integrated with the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES). The second principle, alignment, is aimed at improvement by regularly monitoring the implementation and management of development projects. This is to ensure that the programmes are aligned with the government's development plans. Regarding the harmonisation principle, the government will simplify development procedures and programmes of development partners. The Lao government's Department of International Cooperation will be responsible for effective resource use in order to ensure the forth principle – managing for results. The last principle is the responsibility of both the government and development partners; to mutually and accountably report on development progress (ibid).

However, there are a number of critiques regarding the Paris Declaration. It is believed that its conception of aid distribution was designed to serve the policy of the developed countries rather than the beneficiary countries (Buiter, 2007).

Conditionalities that come with development aid by the donors usually have significant influences that can directly or indirectly affect change of policy in the recipient countries (Mountfort, 2013). Mountfort also argues that conditionalities will allow the donors to exercise their power by expressing their preferences to the recipients. Most recipient governments have no choice but to willingly accept even if the conditionalities do not really fit with their national development agendas, due to the need for financial assistance in development (Feyissa, 2011). According to Page (2003), it is difficult for recipient countries to make changes and meaningful decisions in the process of aid negotiation unless there is a shift of the real balance of power. This has led to provocative questions such as, 'How independent are colonised (recipient) countries?' These questions are usually raised and discussed from postcolonial perspectives. It seems like most of the countries that were once colonised are still powerfully influenced by the Global North through a new form of colonisation which is known as neo-colonialism. Even though the countries are formally independent, forms of neo-imperial or neo-colonial power are still exercised through aid, assistance and cooperation that usually come along with conditionalities.

Moreover, it seems like the focus on 'harmonisation' has implications for the focus on 'ownership'. In the development industry, harmonisation is considered a buzz word (Eyben, 2007). Eyben claims that even though the term sounds attractive in development theory, in the aid world harmonisation refers to an attempt of development partners and donors to promote common programmes and procedures. As a result, the recipients have to communicate with just a single set of financial agencies:

Whilst it is an attractive idea in theory, as long as donors do not recognise and address the operations of power in the aid relationship, harmonisation is likely to be counterproductive in promoting locally initiated responses to development challenges.

(Eyben, 2007, p. 1)

Even though there are a number of development initiatives and declarations that can be employed as a tools to improving aid coordination and development, it is still difficult and challenging in practice. Critiques have suggested that those efforts need to be carefully translated and brought into practice and that hidden agendas may come along with donors through their development programmes and processes (Feyissa, 2011; Mountfort, 2013; Page, 2003). In those development programmes and processes, jargon and discourses have been embraced and used universally. This has influenced conceptualisations and understandings regarding development and its practices (Harris, 2013).

2.3 Development Perceptions

In association with the aforementioned global development frameworks, the term development is understood and interpreted in many ways, and this influences the perceptions of development practitioners. ‘What is development?’ is a controversial and debatable question that has been broadly discussed worldwide. The term ‘development’ can be understood and interpreted in many ways depending on the purposes of both donor and recipient. Lundgren and Peacock (2010) claim that the concept of development emerged after the Second World War in the wake of decolonisation. The phrase ‘development discourse’ has increasingly been discussed and questioned regarding its validity with the argument that it is mainly influenced by Western ideologies (ibid).

The famous speech of President Truman in 1949 is considered as critically influential and powerful in terms of creating an understanding and conception around the concept of development (Lundgren & Peacock, 2010). Many significant terms within development discourses originated in his speech, including the way he divided the world into two separate parts, namely the Global-Developed-North and the Global-Underdeveloped-South. Whilst the Global North is perceived as civilised, educated,

rich, knowledgeable and developed, the Global South is defined in the opposite way (Lundgren & Peacock, 2010). Harris (2013) asserts that such conceptualisations of development have greatly influenced the perceptions of development practitioners, including their practice. In development practice, practitioners from different backgrounds have different understandings and perceptions in regard to development. In addition, the majority of global development practitioners come from developed countries.

McEwan (2008) views these dominant development discourses as problematic. Postcolonial theory is seeking to destabilise the dominant discourses of development which are unconsciously ethnocentric and mainly affected by Western imperialism. According to McEwan, the discourses tend to be insensitive to the values and practices of other cultures. Responding to these views, McEwan (as in Desai and Potter, 2014), through a postcolonial approach focusing on history and a critique of the legacies of colonialism, show how colonialism has influenced and shaped development and how dominant Western concepts impact the world view and perspectives of development agents. In other words, McEwan's 2014 analysis presents a powerful critique of the so-called 'Western-centric' development. In terms of development practice, Keough (1998) also suggests that development practitioners often encounter the problem of bridging the gap between ideals and what is possible in practice. Keough also found that international (usually Western) development workers usually bring cultural gulfs and colonial legacies which are hard to break, but instead these affect and determine development practice and how the issues or conditions in the local developing contexts are perceived.

As mentioned above, development discourse can be problematic for development practice. Traditional development discourse originated from dominant Western-centric ideologies, but is applied universally. I use two key extracts to illustrate this point. The

first is from the aforementioned speech given by President Truman in 1949, and the other one is a quote from Rist written in his 2002 book, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. The powerful speech given by Truman has become very influential in the development era. It significantly affects the way people understand development and perceive that our world has two distinctive parts – the developed (*We*) and the underdeveloped (*They*), where the first one has almost everything, and the other one is deficient and has almost nothing. In the quote below, the phrases and narratives describing the developed world (highlighted in ***Bold Italic*** characters) are absolutely beautiful, ideal and desirable, but the descriptions for the other are completely full of negative connotations (highlighted in **Underlined Bold Italic** characters):

*We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of ***our scientific advances and industrial progress*** available for the improvement and growth of **underdeveloped areas**. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching **misery**. Their food is **inadequate**. ***They*** are **victims of disease**. Their economic life is **primitive and stagnant**. Their poverty is a **handicap** and a **threat** both to them and to ***more prosperous areas***. For the first time in history, ***humanity*** possesses the ***knowledge and skill*** to relieve suffering of these people.... ***[W]e*** should foster capital investment in **areas needing development**. ...***Greater production*** is the key to ***prosperity and peace***. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of ***modern scientific and technical knowledge***.*

Harry Truman's inaugural address as US president (January 1949)

The influence of development discourse has shaped the way people understand development and its practice. Underdeveloped countries have been the main focus of development and assistance. However, this discourse is somehow misleading development practice because this traditional development concept focuses on what

they (underdeveloped countries) lack measured by Western standards and overlooks what they have like local knowledge. The below statement succinctly highlights how powerful development discourse is:

The strength of development discourse comes of its power to seduce, in every sense of the term: to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming, but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive.

(Rist, 2002, p. 1)

In summary, development discourse is created by the Global North and then applied in the Global South – the underdeveloped countries. People in the Global South are usually defined as poor and insufficient even before a development intervention arrives.

2.4 Effective Development Practice

Traditional understandings of development have influenced development practice. It can be challenging for development practitioners who work on the ground to follow the priorities of the development partners if this is different from what is really needed in the local community. In other words, what has been prioritised by development partners may not necessarily match with local needs. Keough (1998) claims that this is the heart of the challenge in development practice for practitioners. Development outcomes are also affected. Development practice can become a conflict between how to meet the standards and priorities of the development organisations and how to meet and address real local requirements if these are different. McGee (2010), a development project manager, shares her experiences and difficulties whilst working in Colombia within a traditional development framework. The main challenge she found was the disjuncture and mismatch between what was prioritised by her home organisation and what should be prioritised and addressed in the local context. She struggled to adhere to

theoretical principles, organisational ideologies, and to meet the true needs grounded in local reality.

Understanding the local community is vitally important (Chambers, 1997). People in communities, especially the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised, should be able to communicate their needs and raise their voices in the development process. In Chambers' 1997 book *'Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last'* he argues that in order to bring about development, professionals need to listen and learn from the community. He suggests that in traditional development business, development practitioners usually feel important and like to tell people what to do. To bring about success, this attitude needs to be changed. Development workers have to put themselves, who are usually considered as the first, last, and put the local community, usually considered as the last, first. In doing so, it will make development projects more effective (ibid).

In the early 1990s, Robert Chambers introduced a couple of participatory development methodologies (Chambers, 2008). The models are called Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). Even though these two models are interrelated, PRA is considered more inclusive. PRA is considered as a 'family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate' (Chambers, 1997, p. 102). It is also essential to take into account local voices and participation, especially of the poor and the marginalised (Chambers, 1983). Chambers argues that the poor should be the first priority to take into account in the process of development because the poor have usually been ignored. However, how to truly identify the poor is still challenging as is having true and inclusive participation. Boer (1998) states that even though Chambers' 1997 book seems to be very interesting, many people put it aside as it is considered as too ideological.

McEwan (2008) also says that in order to succeed it is crucial that development practice encourages the voices of the marginalised, indigenous, and other disadvantaged groups. This is important because it can really help identify the real problems in the local context faced by these disadvantaged groups. Keough's 1998 study *'Participatory Development Principles and Practice: Reflections of a Western Development worker'* focused on the experiences of development practitioners using a participatory development framework. It studied the perspectives of mainstream Western practitioners in practice. The study highlighted that development practitioners often encountered a problem of bridging the gap between ideals and what is possible in practice. This is similar to the study of Harris (2013) which found that different perceptions and understandings about the way 'development' is interpreted can influence development practitioners' personal conceptions and their ways of practising. It can also influence the participation process.

Pretty (1995) categorises types of participation in development projects and programmes (Table 2.1). He shows seven different levels of participation with descriptions on how each level works and influential factors associated with each type of participation:

Table 2.1 Typology of Participation

Typology	Characteristics of each type
1. Manipulative participation	Participation is a pretence. People who are represented on official boards have no power and are not elected.
2. Passive participation	People participate by being told what will happen or what has happened. Projects belong to external agencies.
3. Participation by consultation	People are consulted and their views are listened to. Problems and solutions are defined by external agencies.
4. Participation for material	People are involved by providing resources (i.e. labour) in return for material incentives (i.e. food). People have no stake

incentives	to continue change when the incentives end.
5. Functional participation	People meet in groups to discuss objectives and can assist in the direction of the project but are still dependent on external agents. People are often involved in the latter part of projects.
6. Interactive participation	People are involved in joint analysis. Action plans and new local structures are developed. The groups take control over local decisions and have a stake in maintaining the projects.
7. Self-mobilisation	People, in groups, take independent initiatives to change systems. People have full ownership of projects. External agencies are retained for resources and technical advice.

Source: Adjusted from Pretty (1995, p. 1252)

In development practice, in order to achieve true participation from local communities, understanding local contexts is vitally important. Local contexts are unique and distinctive. The development framework cannot be fixed as one model to be applied in all contexts. It is important to empower development practitioners to be adaptable to different situations and contexts. Working across cultures is crucially important and requires a lot of attention to the nuances of cultural difference including sensitive issues. Cultures are diverse and each has a uniqueness which cannot be easily understood by people from different cultural backgrounds (Ember, Ember & Peregrine, 1998). Being adaptable to different contexts is believed to considerably help prepare development practitioners to be ready and work effectively on the ground. Crawford, Morris, Thomas, and Winter (2006) identify key challenges for development practitioners and suggest that development practitioners who work in the field should be well trained to be reflexive along with having the ability to learn from day-to-day practice in different circumstances. Sultana (2007) argues that development practitioners are required to be reflexive of their positionality, which may affect power

relations when working with local communities. Another important feature of development practice was suggested by Rodriguez-Garcia and White in 2005. They claim that self-assessment is important for development practitioners because reflexive practitioners can reflect on knowledge, decision-making and approaches to manage expected development outcomes.

In addition, Moseley conducted research in Africa in 2007 to explore what is usually conceptualised and what actually happens in reality in order to improve collaboration between development practitioners, academia and local communities. Through a process of critical reflection on power dynamics and positionality, the research found that social and cultural differences can shape the relationships established in local communities. In short, both researchers and development practitioners should be aware of power dynamics and positionalities shaping development interactions.

In the study of McArdle in 2012, she used a case study of a project in the North of Scotland and put the main emphasis on the definition of success in rural regeneration partnerships from the perspective of development practitioners and concerned partners. The notions of culture, ethos, inclusion and engagement were highlighted as important success factors because these indicate effectiveness and achievement in practice. However, the study only focused on success measurement, and it did not mention the challenges that development practitioners and other partners experienced. In addition, Westoby and van Blerk (2012) highlight the importance of training for community development workers – because it does not only help provide understanding associated with working in different contexts, but also helps develop and enhance relationships between the outsider and local development practitioners.

In addition, McKinnon's 2007 study '*Postdevelopment, Professionalism, and the Politics of Participation*' reviewed development practice in Northern Thailand. She claims that development is usually seen as a project of hope and this is the case with development in Thailand as well. She points out that, in the first place, the project she studied ignored local knowledge and expertise and this meant that the project failed to identify appropriate livelihood improvement pathways for the villagers. The development workers who worked in this project recognised the failures and attempted to look for a better way to practice and a participatory approach was encouraged. Even though the approach was adopted, it was still challenging in practice. McKinnon claims that participatory discourse seems to be applied universally, but when putting it into practice there are still many issues to be concerned about based on local contexts.

2.5 Summary

To summarise, according to the existing current literature, when discussing the failure of development projects, the focus is placed on the ineffectiveness of the systems, including management, governance, planning, and policy making. Not many studies have thoroughly examined the challenges from the perspectives of development practitioners who work on the ground, particularly in Southeast Asia and Laos. Additionally, there have been some studies about the barriers and difficulties that development practitioners have faced on the ground, however few studies have compared the challenges experienced by national and international practitioners. Therefore, this study will investigate the experiences of development practitioners who have worked in Laos, especially those who have engaged and worked with the community on the ground, and then make a comparison between the experiences encountered by local development workers and those encountered by foreign development workers.

This chapter reviewed relevant literature and showed how global development frameworks and initiatives have conceptualised development perceptions, processes and practices in various ways that emphasise the importance of community engagement. This literature will be integrated and returned to in chapter 6 together with the research findings. Before that, the next chapter will outline and describe key methodologies, the processes of analysis, and the analytical frameworks used in this research, including essential considerations concerning research conduct.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research approach that was adopted for this research. It starts by describing the social constructivist epistemology that informs the research. The chapter then describes qualitative methods used including semi-structured interviews, which were the main means for data collection. Next, it presents research processes including the selection of research participants and location, interviewing, and the process of data analysis. Finally, it discusses ethical issues, positionality and reflexivity concerning this research.

3.2 Social Constructivist Epistemology

Epistemology is considered as a branch of philosophy which come from two Greek words ‘episteme’ and ‘logos’ and it refers to knowledge and explanation. Stone (2008) contends that epistemology explores the nature of knowledge, including its meaning and how the knowledge is obtained. It is associated with the justification of beliefs and truths through philosophical scrutiny (Hofer, 2001; Hull, 2015). Furthermore, according to O’Leary (2007), the study of knowledge can inform its legitimacy, including required rules to construct knowledge.

This research drew upon social constructivism as it perceives reality as being socially constructed through context and language (Burr, 2003; Dowling, 2005). This means that reality is created through social processes in which the interaction in a certain context is acknowledged. I consider myself a social constructivist who understands that the meaning of the world is actively and socially constructed through experiences and perceptions. Taking on board this social constructivist approach, I strived to integrate the meaning of phenomena as perceived from the viewpoints of my research participants with my literature analysis and my professional experiences (Creswell, 2014). This approach values and takes into account my subjective experience

of community engagement during the research. As a result, it allowed me to make informed decisions regarding my research methods.

3.3 Qualitative and Ethnographic Methodologies

Enlightened by social constructivist epistemology, this research employed qualitative methodology and some elements of ethnographic research. The chosen methodology allowed research participants to freely and openly articulate their world view perspectives and share their thoughts and acquired experiences in a deep and detailed manner regarding the issues (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods typically use open-ended, semi-structured interviewing. This type of interviewing effectively established the space to examine the questions underpinning my study between myself and my research participants (Crang & Cook, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

In short, the research methodology enabled an understanding of how things are socially constructed. This approach allows researchers to explore not only the questions of what, where and when, but also why and how, which are essential to understand the investigated phenomena (Silverman, 2003). Further, Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative research focuses on words or narratives rather than numbers or statistics. This approach helped me explore and understand insightful opinions, perceptions and perspectives of my research participants. Moreover, aligned with what Creswell mentions, I could focus on learning the real meanings of what the participants tried to convey in regard to the issues. Furthermore, the ethnographic design helped me seek to understand the way people think, believe and behave through a context-specific lens (Creswell, 2014). This study reflected upon the real experiences of development practitioners who have lived and worked on the ground. Consequently, this methodology enabled me to closely investigate and gain an in-depth understanding in relation to development practice in Laos.

3.4 Postcolonial Framework

A postcolonial framework was also employed to help investigate and analyse the issues in this study. This was because the study was focusing on the experiences of both international and local development practitioners. The postcolonial framework helped me to analyse and understand the influences of social, cultural and colonial backgrounds on development practice. Desai and Potter (2008) contend that a postcolonial framework focuses on the history and criticises the legacies of colonialism. As a result, this framework helped understand how colonialism has influenced and shaped development and how dominant ‘Western’ concepts impact the world view and practice of development agents.

3.5 Research Participants and Locations

3.5.1 Research Participants

In order to identify participants, a snowballing technique was used. This technique is also known as chain referral sampling which is a method that has been broadly used in qualitative research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). According to Biernacki and Waldorf, and Atkinson and Flint (2001), this method provides samples by research participants referring or suggesting other potential research participants who have some characteristics of relevance to the research and could be subsequent research participants. I also chose the snowballing technique because the term ‘development practitioner’ is still ambiguous in the Lao context, so it is difficult to approach them directly. Whilst some identify themselves as development practitioners, some are uncertain about calling themselves, or reluctant to call themselves, development practitioners. This technique was, thus, the best way to start; from a person who the researcher knows about first. Besides, the technique also effectively helps reduce sample bias, maintain confidentiality and enhance the validity of the results (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Snowballing helped to identify the right research targets and also helped build initial trust and relationships between myself and those who were referred.

This study interviewed thirteen development practitioners from different organisations and working backgrounds including both governmental and non-governmental agencies. In the beginning, I started by purposively choosing to send a letter to some governmental organisations given their relevance to the research topic. This was because I realised that it could take a while to hear back and get approval from the chosen organisations. I then decided to start my interviews with a couple of NGO development practitioners who I knew from my social and professional network. They then introduced other potential development practitioners who could become my research participants. I followed their advice and got in touch with those recommended and finally had some of them participate in my research. As mentioned when describing the snowballing technique above, I kept gaining further referrals which I followed up to recruit my participants and it worked very well. Eventually, I managed to interview twelve development workers from a range of organisations and specialised backgrounds. In between, I also heard back from two governmental organisations. However, one of them replied that they mainly focus on high-level consultations and policy implementation. As a consequence, they did not have any development workers in their organisation who had directly engaged with local communities. Fortunately, the other state organisation allowed me to interview a development worker in their organisation which added up to the total number of my participants being thirteen. Two of them were *Farang* (Westerners) who had worked in Laos for more than twenty years and had families in Laos. All research participants were engaged in community development work in Laos. The table below shows basic information about the research participants.

Table 3.1 Research participants

Code	Position	Organisation	Local or expatriate	Length of involvement with community development work
Informant 1	Education Advisor	Child Fund	Local	15 years
Informant 2		GIZ	Local	21 years
Informant 3	Education Advisor	Plan International	Local	17 years
Informant 4		BEQUAL Project	Local	15 years
Informant 5	Manager	Life Skill Association & Child Fund	Local	10 years
Informant 6	Officer	Poverty Reduction Funds	Local	13 years
Informant 7		Australian Embassy	Local	10 years
Informant 8	Education Specialist	World Bank Lao PDR	Local	17 years
Informant 9	Freelance Consultant		Local	6 years
Informant 10	President	Life Skill Association	Local	30 years
Informant 11	Freelance Consultant		Local	10 years
Informant 12		Helvetas	Expatriate	20 years
Informant 13	Freelance Consultant		Expatriate	24 years

3.5.2 Research Location

The research was mainly conducted in Vientiane. It is the capital city where most head offices of both national and international organisations are located. I chose

this location because this study mainly focused on the real experiences of development practitioners who have worked in and engaged with communities in Laos. Therefore, it was easier and more convenient to be based in Vientiane to conduct my interviews with targeted development workers as well as stay closely in touch with the selected organisations.

3.6 Key Research Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews

In qualitative research, there are many methods of data collection such as interviews, focus groups and participant observation. This study employed semi-structured interviewing, a common method in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), as the main tool for data collection. The semi-structured interviews were used to identify different perspectives of participants in regard to the research questions. This type of interview combines some forms of structure with flexibilities which allowed me, as a researcher, to have a series of questions in the general form of an interview guide (Silverman, 2003). The sequence of questions could be varied, and I had freedom to ask further questions to help clarify or explain any significant issues identified during the interviews.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) argue that this method is considered to be effective in exploring and understanding phenomena. It allowed interviewees to develop ideas and speak widely on the topics raised by the researcher in an open-ended manner (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Creswell (2003) contends that open-ended questions are crucial for a social constructivist approach because the research participants can communicate their perspectives from their particular cultural context. Moreover, the interviews straightforwardly and spontaneously established channels to communicate and share knowledge, information and experience between researchers and participants (Mikkelsen, 2005). For this reason, the researchers usually meet face-to-face with the participants in order to casually carry out interactive interviews (Creswell, 2014;

Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative interviews also allow researchers to interpret the meaning of a certain phenomenon by integrating personal experience and existing literature (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Overall, open-ended questions enabled the participants to convey their thoughts and experiences and the researcher to seek further opinions and clarifications of certain points by asking additional questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this regard, this method allowed me to adjust my interview questions so that they were suitable for a particular context and situation in order to obtain the best possible in-depth information from the participants.

Interviews required consent forms and an information sheet developed in both English and Lao versions. All interviews were conducted in the semi-structured manner and most of them were in casual settings. Alongside this, I took notes during all interviews and tried to record every single interview. Even though most participants allowed me to record the interviews, a few of them refused to have their voice recorded. They gave the reasons why they would feel uncomfortable with the recording. All recorded interviews were recorded by an audio recorder and a voice recorder on a mobile phone. I learnt so many things and discovered new ideas through this research method which led to some adaptations to my questions for the following interviews.

3.7 Data Coding, Analysis and Interpretation

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) claim that there is not a particular way to analyse and interpret qualitative and ethnographic data. However, it can begin by coding data or making sense of the collected data and then sorting these data into interrelated themes. Data coding is a tool to categorise and classify data based on themes and sub-themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The collected data was quite diverse as it was collected from free-flowing interviews with development practitioners of various working backgrounds. Bryman (2008) states that coding data

can help with organising as well as generating the meaning of textual data in a logical manner. I therefore organised and analysed my collected data following six steps which I adapted from Creswell (2014), and which are shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Processes of Data Analysis

As shown in the figure above, I started by preparing and organising the collected data which involved interview transcription. Then I read through all data and reflected on its overall meaning in order to get a general sense of the pattern of the information and also to see the tone of my participants' ideas. After that I began to code data by highlighting and writing a word to represent each category in order to help me identify and categorise key themes based on my research questions in the next step. After I had all the themes categorised, I looked for connections before interpreting and integrating them into my research findings. In the process of theme interrelation, I had to compare and contrast them with one another in order to select the most interesting and outstanding ones in regard to the research questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The last stage in the analysis process was to interpret all the key themes which were identified. The interpretation not only emphasised and reflected on what actually

happened on the ground, but it also drew upon and was influenced by the theoretical framework and epistemology employed in the study. Ultimately, the key concepts were arranged by themes in association with the research questions. The identified central themes are shown in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2 Key Themes in this Research

Key themes	Sub-themes
Development Perceptions	Understanding of Development Development Needs and Priorities
Community Development Strategies and Approaches	Effective and Ineffective Strategies Community Approach Techniques Mainstream Development Versus the Alternatives
Challenges in Development Practice	Expectations Barriers Participation Culture
Concept of Insiders and Outsiders	Local Versus Expatriate Perspectives Negotiation Process
Sustainability and Ownership	Maintenance of Development Projects Sense of Community Ownership

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Walliman and Buckler (2008) contend that ethical issues must be taken into consideration as they ensure safety and protection for both researchers and the research participants. Respecting participants' confidentiality and minimising any potential risks are required in conducting research (Wall & Overton, 2006). Victoria University of

Wellington (VUW) is also aware of the importance of these ethical issues. I had to seek ethical approval from the VUW Human Ethics Committee prior my research fieldwork. In going through the process of application, I fully reviewed and understood all ethical requirements and policies related to the VUW Human Ethics Policy 2016.

I had to be always aware of ethical issues, not only during the data collection but through the entire process of my research. This is because the main purpose of this research was, firstly, to cause no harm, but secondly to seek to improve development practice. The first and foremost issue that I took into my consideration was ‘informed consent’ because I needed to have permission from the participants before proceeding with my research. This consent was not only to get their agreement before the interview, but also informed them of the purpose of the study including letting them know how the given information was going to be treated (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The next ethical issue was the identification of development practitioners. As mentioned earlier, the term ‘development practitioner’ is still ambiguous in the Lao context, so not every development practitioner identifies themselves as such. Another point that I took into consideration was that I was interviewing highly knowledgeable and skilled participants. This was important because these participants could influence and control the way they responded to the questions. So, I had to be observant and find appropriate ways to deal with this issue when conducting interviews depending on the case.

3.9 Positionality

It is believed that cultures are diverse and have a uniqueness which cannot be easily understood by people from different cultural backgrounds (Ember, Ember & Peregrine, 1998). This is why it is important to recognise cultural difference. In relation to ethical considerations, positionality is crucial. This is because positionality can have a great influence on the process and product of the research; as well as influence power relations in local communities (Sultana, 2007). According to Chacko (2004),

positionality refers to different dimensions of our identities like race, gender, sexuality and class that determine or influence our ways of positioning and forms of relational positions in society. Researchers are required to persistently bear in mind and consider their positionality whilst undertaking fieldwork (Kindon, 2012).

The issues associated with positionality have been widely focused on in social sciences and humanities disciplines over the past few decades (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009; Moser, 2008). Chacko (2004) argues that positionality is a crucial factor that frames both social and professional relationships. It can set the tone of the research, including its outcomes. Sultana (2007) suggests that it can affect power relations in research fieldwork and can even lead to other exploitation and unethical issues within the research framework. Like Chacko, Merriam et al. (2001) also believe that positionality is characterised by the point where researchers stand in relation to the participants. Furthermore, England (1994) contends that the positions of researchers who are working across cultures are usually shaped by their attributes and identities and these may enable or preclude specific fieldwork methods of their research.

Hopkins (2007) claims that positionality can influence how people perceive ethical practices in regard to their research. Researchers can be positioned as outsiders or insiders. This positioning can shape interactions with participants, which can influence research results and outcomes (Pain, 2009; Sultana, 2007). Although I conducted this research in my home country, I realised that my participants are from different backgrounds.

My positionality is also very important and I am aware that it can influence the research findings. Even though I have some experience associated with community development and practices on the ground, I always recognised my role and my position as a researcher throughout the entire research process. It is also true that I came into this research with some ideas, understandings, and hypotheses, including the way I view

development. Also, as mentioned above I was both insider and outsider. However, as a researcher and academic I had to reposition the way I interviewed my participants in order to reduce bias and prejudice as much as possible. I realised that the responses to the problems that I was exploring must purely come from the experiences and perspectives of my participants without being influenced by my own positionality or biases.

Throughout the process of my research, I always recognised the importance of positionality and realised that learning from the experiences of others is beneficial. I was also considered that positionality can set the tone of the research and affect the findings. Even though there is no best way to present one's positionality, I always realised that it is crucial to be adaptable in my positioning. Also, it was highly important to consider my positionality because it could influence the process of interviewing and data collection.

3.10 Reflexivity

In the research process, reflexivity refers to individual critical reflection which is included in the process of research design, data collection and interpretation (Sultana, 2007). It is a process whereby individuals in a particular research context have to simultaneously respond to what they have experienced and plan for further stages. The process enables researchers to comprehend how knowledge is constructed and how it is related to power (ibid).

In this research, reflexivity was employed as a means to help understand the acquisition, organisation and interpretation of knowledge (Pillow, 2003). It assisted me to learn that knowledge is constructed based on how I frame and interpret the information. It is also consistently associated with social constructivism which sees that knowledge is created by groups of people (participants) who come from different social,

cultural and historical backgrounds. As a consequence, reflexivity allowed me to validate my research information more accurately.

3.11 Summary

This chapter explored the research methodology applied in this research. It also outlined how the research was designed and carried out including its analytical framework, research participants, location and analysis process. Apart from that, it discussed other associated considerations regarding conducting this research. The discussed considerations involved human ethics, positionality and reflexivity. The information provided in this chapter is very helpful for the next chapters as the research findings, discussion and conclusion draw upon the methodology and necessary framework for this research. This chapter covered the fundamental methodologies and principles in relation to this research process. The next chapter will provide important information, features and circumstances of Laos, the country where this research conducted. It will also draw an overall development picture of the country.

Chapter 4 Lao Context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses geographical, political and sociocultural facts about Laos in relation to development practice in the country. The discussion of these particular contextual aspects is crucial before research results are presented in the next chapter. The discussion also provides understanding of what development practice is like and how it is influenced by relevant stakeholders within the Lao context. More importantly, it provides insight into what is supportive and what has hindered development in Laos.

4.1.1 Geographic and Demographic Contexts

Laos, formally known as the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), is the only landlocked country in the Southeast Asian region (UN-OHRLLS, 2016). It shares borders five countries, namely Vietnam to the east, Thailand to the west, Cambodia to the south, and China and Myanmar to the north. The land surface of the country is 236,800 square kilometres, but three-quarters of this is covered by mountains and plateaus (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016). As the country has been limited by lack of territorial access to the sea, it encounters more difficulties in terms of development and access to global markets (UN-OHRLLS, 2016; World Bank, 1996). Being landlocked has constrained development; for example, by limiting the prospects for a huge number of commodities. The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) (2016) further claims that unemployment rates in landlocked countries are high whilst productivity is low, and notes that countries could have been more developed by approximately 20 per cent if they were not landlocked.

Figure 4.1 Map of Laos: The Landlocked Country

According to the World Bank (2005), the population in Laos is characterised as small and sparse. The distribution of the population in the country is uneven and the vast majority of residents live in rural areas, which is about 67 per cent of the total population (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016). As mentioned above, geographically the country is typically surrounded by ragged and mountainous terrains which become major barriers for accessibility and development across the country. Even though the government has put in efforts to address this difficulty by improving infrastructure including roads in many remote areas, recent statistics point out that 8 per cent of rural dwellers still have no road access (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016).

Figure 4.2 Population Distribution and Province Accessibility

Source: Lao Government (2005)

The statistics also point out that a large proportion of poor people are in rural areas which suggests that development in rural areas should be heavily focused on, invested in and prioritised as the government aims to reduce poverty and graduate from Least Developed Countries status by 2020 (MPI & UNDP, 2017). In 2017, the country was still on the list of the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as defined by the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UNCDP, 2017). According to the United Nations Human Development Index 2015 (UNDP, 2016), Laos is categorised as having Medium Human Development and ranked 138 among 188 countries.

Table 4.1 Ethnolinguistic Families and Ethnic Groups

Ethnolinguistic families	Ethnolinguistic categories	Ethnic groups
Lao-Tai (Tai-Kadai)	1. Lao	Lao
	2. Tai-Thai	Phou Thai; Tai; Nyouan; Lue; Yang; Sek; Tai Neua; Lao (in Houaphanh, Xiengkhuang, Borikhamxay, Vientiane Province, and Hinboun District in Khammouane)
Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic)	3. Khmuic	Khmu; Pray; Ksing Moul (Sing Moun); Phong in Houaphanh, Xiengkhuang, and Vientiane Province; Thène; Oe Dou; Kri (Xayabury)
	4. Palaungic	Lamet; Bit; Sam Tao
	5. Katuic	Katang; Makong; Tri; Ta Oy; Katu; Kriang; Souay; Pacoh
	6. Bahnaric Khmer	Jrou (Laven); Triang; Yè; Brao; Halak; Oy; Cheng; Sadang; Nya; Heun; Lavi; Khmer
	7. Vietic	Toum; Ngouan; Meuang; Kri (except Kri in Xayabury); Phong (except Phong assigned to Khmuic)
Sino-Tibetan	8. Tibeto-Burman	Akha; Singsily; Lahu; Sila; Hanyi; Lolo; Ho
Hmong-Mien	9. Hmong	Hmong
	10. Mien	Iu Mien

Source: Adjusted from Messerli et al. (2008, p. 81).

In Laos there is a diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages (King & van de Walle, 2012). Pholsena (2002) asserts that there are 49 small ethnic groups within four wider but distinctive ethnolinguistic groups; namely Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Iu Mien, and Chinese-Tibetan (see Table 4.1). The ethnic groups are diversely distributed across the country (see Figure 4.3). The locations where the four ethnolinguistic groups have chosen to settle seem to influence their cultures and ways of living. Lao-Tai is the biggest group in the nation which mainly resides in lowland areas stretching throughout the country. They prefer to live along the river bank because their main livelihood activities are more associated with wetland farming and trade (Hatsadong, Douangsila & Gibson, 2006). The majority of the Mon-Khmer group tends to reside in upland areas in the northern part of Laos as their livelihoods are more connected with upland agricultural systems (Simana & Preisig, 2006). According to Sengxua (2006), the Hmong-Iu Mien group usually reside in highland areas and have scattered from the northern to the central areas of the country. Their livelihoods also mainly depend on farming like breeding livestock and plants.

Overall the ethnic and cultural diversity is significant in Laos. In short, different groups of people in different regions have different characteristics. Thus, working with Lao communities is a challenging job. This is not just because of the language barriers, but also the diverse cultures and life styles. This also suggests that the processes of development should be thoroughly and thoughtfully considered to ensure that all policies and plans are inclusive and suitable for all.

Figure 4.3 Ethnolinguistic Distribution

Source: Lao Government (2005)

4.1.2 Poverty in the Lao Context

In the context of Laos, poverty is referred to as, ‘the lack of ability to fulfil basic human needs such as not having enough food, lacking adequate clothing, not having permanent housing and lacking access to health, education and transportation services’ (Lao Government, 2004, p. 4). Poverty in Laos is, however, a complex issue which can be conceptualised and interpreted from different perspectives. For instance, the poverty in rural areas may be different from the poverty in urban areas. The Lao Government (2004) further contends that the term ‘poverty’ has a specific meaning for some ethnic cultures in Laos. For example, the impoverished families can be referred to as having bad luck or being the poorest in the community. Some of them have low human capital which is the main factor leading them to live in poverty (MPI & UNDP, 2009; World

Bank, 2014). Another example is concerned with the so-called poverty line. Some rural families in Laos may live below the global poverty line by earning less than \$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2015), but it does not always mean that they are in poverty because they still have farms and livestock for their daily living.

The Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys (LECS) (Pimhidzai, Fenton, Souksavath & Sisoulath, 2014) reveal that poverty differs significantly between rural and urban areas. In 1997/98, the poverty level in urban areas was 27 per cent in comparison with 41 per cent in rural areas. Furthermore, it was reported that the poverty level in urban areas decreased much more than in rural areas. However, it also noted that there are some urban people facing difficulty and some of them have to mainly rely on cash for their basic living and some have a low level of education and/or are unemployed which increases their vulnerability. However, the Lao Government (2004) claims that a nationwide study on urban poverty has never been conducted; rather studies have only been conducted around Vientiane municipality.

Figure 4.4 Poverty Incidence

Source: Lao Government (2005)

In Lao PDR, the measurement of poverty is still in its incipient stages and mainly drawn from the LECS, which have been conducted every five years since 1992/93 (Lao Government, 2004). Based on the Prime Ministerial Instruction No. 10 on poverty reduction, there should be systematic accounting of poverty levels at the village and district level in Laos (ibid). Poverty is assessed in both quantitative and qualitative measurements. The quantitative measurement is based on poverty lines which result from the joint efforts of the National Statistics Centre, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank. The first line usually provides a marker for a lack of food security, whereas the second line refers to a combined lack of food and non-food necessities (Lao Government, 2004).

The qualitative measurement commenced with the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) in 2000, which focused on the causes and understandings of poverty throughout the populace from different ethnic groups (Lao Government, 2004). The PPA approach was to record people's experiences and concerns in order to find out about and launch suitable actions to reduce poverty. The qualitative assessment was completed by having a combination of information on poverty, which includes statistical, cultural, economic aspects and so forth, and an understanding of poor people's perspectives (Lao Government, 2004).

4.2 Development Action Plans

The first and foremost development priority of the Lao Government is to break the cycle of poverty in the country (Lao Government, 2004). The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), which is the Lao Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)¹, was developed and published in 2004

¹ 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are prepared by the member countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders as well as development partners, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.' International Monetary Fund (2016).

Alongside NGPES, the government also has the 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) (2016-2020). The NSEDP is a series of plans that act as a means to strategically assist government to frame, implement and keep track of their development agendas towards their targeted goals. The eighth NSEDP is crucial because it does not only emphasise what is still needed to be achieved from the previous plan, but it also aims to formulate a new foundation for Laos to become an upper middle-income nation by 2030 (MPI & UNDP, 2016). The plans will continue reflecting the government's Socio-economic Development Strategy until 2025 which is the next NSEDP. Interestingly, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2016) claims that the Eighth NSEDP resulted from a breakthrough in mindset by the government as it is based on the results of close research. It is, therefore, set up with lucid development outcomes and outputs connecting to other sectors and local-level plans. This is to ensure harmonisation in the plan as it connects to all available funding sources including budget from the government, grants, loans and so forth.

Over the past two decades, the poverty rate has halved from 46 per cent in 1992/1993 to 23 per cent in 2012/2013 (UNDP, 2015). However, poverty is still high among minority ethnic groups and people who live in remote, isolated, and highland areas of Laos (Coulombe, Epprecht, Pimhidzai & Sisoulath, 2016). Thus, the understanding of 'poverty' in the Lao culture must be taken into consideration when developing development plans, policies and programmes for eradicating poverty. The government is also aware of the improvement in livelihoods as it has a series of manifestations to crucially identify strategic approaches to poverty eradication. For this reason, the government focuses on a participatory development approach which is people-centred. The concepts of

people-centred and participatory development are considered as socially mobilising and are recognised and practised in all sectors of society, not just to help those who are identified as poor (Lao Government, 2004).

4.3 Development Partners and Processes

4.3.1 Aid and Development Partners

Laos depends considerably on foreign aid which has remarkably contributed to the growth of the Lao economy over the past decades (DFAT, 2014). The funding and assistance have been distributed through Official Development Assistance (ODA). It is reported in the World Bank's World Development Report 2015 that the assistance from ODA to Laos was USD 421 million in 2013, which is the equivalent of USD 62 per capita, or around twice as high as the low-income country average (World Bank, 2015). The ODA has been allocated to many different sectors, with the education sector being the most aid-dependent. The sources of ODA are various and have widened since the collapse of the former Soviet Union (Tekala & Piattoeva, 2012, as cited in Saengouthay, 2016). Some comes from bilateral governments, some from multilateral organisations, and some from NGOs (Saengouthay, 2016). Now, the government has opened the door to receive more support and assistance from the western world and international agencies whilst still maintaining strong and healthy relationships with neighbouring socialist countries like Vietnam and China (Lam, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, Laos has the NGPES as a local version of PSRPs. The government of Laos, together with the development partners, always attempt to work collaboratively to achieve a new level of the NGPES (MPI & UNDP, 2017). In the process of consultation regarding NGPES, the development partners as well as national stakeholders will usually get extensively involved at all levels.

MPI and UNDP (2017) outline that in order to encourage voices and discussion from the local level, NGPES will be distributed broadly. Moreover, the NGPES also has responsible parties to be in charge of monitoring progress which is tasked to the Committee for Planning and Investment, whilst the new Roundtable Steering Committee is responsible for the implementation coordination process. The key task of the Lao government is to completely guarantee the implementation of the NGPES in the best possible way so as to realise achieving the country's goal by 2020.

Furthermore, in recent years, Laos has had opportunities to host many international meetings and events which have enabled the country to develop more understanding about, and enhance relationships with, development partners and other stakeholders (MPI & UNDP, 2017). These opportunities have also allowed the partners to explore development potential in the country and provide comprehensive international cooperation.

4.3.2 Development Procedure

Since the adoption of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2006, the perception of development partners in Laos has moved from a concept of 'donorship' to a form of partnership agreement (Noonan, Phommalangsy & Petsiriseng, 2013). This is in order to respond to criticisms over aid effectiveness and improve coordination procedures. With this shift, a Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) has been introduced in the process of aid coordination with an adaptation to make it suitable for the Lao context (Phommalangsy, 2013). The SWAp requires development partners to enhance harmonisation and improve alignment with government policies. In other words, it helps promote accountability through the process of aid coordination. In terms of capacity advancement, the government received support from Swedish aid to help with setting the SWAp in

place (Sida, 2004). Overall, the harmonisation agenda forms a central part of the international aid discourse in Laos, and development partners try, and are expected to try, to align their assistance with the needs and priorities of the country.

In Laos, there are approximately 170 NGOs active in the development process and 78 of them have a representative office based in the country (LNTV, 2014). The NGOs have a range of interventions from humanitarian support to human resource development. The government and wider development partners have also recognised their important role in providing development programmes within the country (Riska, 1999). This recognition is based on their ability to efficiently and effectively reach the poor and vulnerable groups in rural areas. Over the past decades, the role of NGOs has slightly changed. The NGOs are still providing humanitarian and development interventions but are now engaged in policy advocacy. According to ADB (2011) Lao NGOs have managed to start influencing government policy, especially through the Round Table Meeting (RTM) process. The focus of RTM is to strengthen mechanisms of national and sectoral aid coordination. It is an element of a comprehensive approach to ensure the effectiveness of aid (Silaphet, 2008).

4.4 Lao culture and development

Laos has great diversity in culture and religion. The preservation of cultural identity is a cornerstone of the national development agenda (Phetsiriseng, 2009). This is in order to maintain and promote national identity. From the establishment of Laos in 1975, the concept of national identity has been promoted throughout the nation. This aims to enhance political stability and thus allow development to take place (ibid). Lao culture has also been influenced by neighbouring countries – including Vietnam, Cambodia and particularly Thailand (Waby, 2006).

F.5
ສາດສະໜາ
Religion

Buddhism plays an important role in Lao society, particularly amongst the largest ethnic group, Lao-Tai. The Lao Statistics Bureau (2016) reveals that Buddhism is practised by 65 per cent or two-thirds of the population, whilst Christianity is only practiced by about 2 per cent. A large proportion of the populace, or more than 30 per cent, claim to be animists or to have no religion (ibid). Most of the non-Buddhist citizens are ethnic minorities usually inhabiting rural areas. The practice of animism is often considered as superstition and has been somewhat discouraged by the government and wider society. In recent years, religions like Christianity and Islam have appeared which mostly have been facilitated by missionaries and NGOs. These NGOs are closely monitored by the Lao Government who attempts to ensure that accompanying development programmes have no agenda that may be perceived as contrary to development policy. Thus, the NGOs affiliated with religion will need to be monitored and scrutinised by the concerned state authorities.

In association with culture, there are still some ethnic minority groups who believe in a certain culture and feel reluctant to participate in the development programme. According to MPI and UNDP (2017), there is still a traditional belief amongst some ethnic minority groups that girls should stay at home and take care of the house chores and other traditional roles. They have often been discouraged from attending schools or pursuing higher education as it was considered inessential for them. However, the trend has changed and the situation has improved. The enrolment rate in primary schools reached 97 per cent in 2014 and there was just a little gender difference (MPI & UNDP, 2017).

4.5 Summary

Laos is a diverse multi-cultural society. The government has put a huge effort into development with the primary aim of moving towards graduation from

LCD status by 2020. With the cooperation and support from development partners and concerned stakeholders, this goal is achievable. However, several challenges remain. For example, cultural diversity brings its own set of challenges, as Laos seeks to bring development to all of its people. Therefore, providing inclusive and comprehensive understanding of all ethnic minority groups regarding development is arduous. Following national development plans, which are aligned with international development agendas, is considered to be key for development success in Laos. Moreover, these development frameworks, like SWAp, are expected to provide more effectiveness in aid coordination and development practice.

In the next chapter, research findings of this study will be presented by categorised themes in relation to their relevancy as identified in the last chapter. The findings are mainly based on the interviews conducted in Laos with both local and foreign development practitioners who are participants of this research.

Chapter 5 Community Engagement and Development Practice

5.1 Introduction

The attempt of this chapter is to address the central question of this study: *‘What are the experiences and challenges of development practitioners who work on the ground in Lao PDR?’* The sub-questions mentioned in Chapter 2 are also addressed. It draws upon the real experiences of development practitioners who have engaged in community development in Laos.

The discussion in this chapter is based on the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted during the fieldwork in Laos. The chapter begins by exploring perspectives of development practitioners with regard to community development in Laos, and is followed by analysis of the challenges and difficulties they have encountered. The chapter then outlines techniques and strategies to approach and work with communities. Moreover, by using a postcolonial framework, the chapter also examines different working experiences between locals and expatriates, including community reactions. The framework also helps to look at how people from different backgrounds understand or perceive development and its relevant issues differently.

5.2 Perceptions of Development Practitioners in Laos

5.2.1 Understanding of Development

The concept of ‘development’ is widely known to have emerged from the western world. The concept is therefore undeniably influenced by Western ideas and standards. This concept has created forms of development standards to measure development progress in other countries all over the world. These conceptualisations and standards, in turn, influence the way people understand development and help establish mainstream development models.

According to the interviews, most participants agreed that the term ‘development’ signifies Western development which refers to a form of aid, assistance, funds and projects from more developed countries to the less developed ones. Development itself is usually seen as assistance from the outside world like donors, NGOs or other developed countries. In this regard, Informant 9 comments that:

The local villagers as well as local officials view development projects as a symbol of free assistance and they believe that foreigners usually come with money and expertise (Interview, 19/08/2017)

Informant 9 said that this kind of perception is not easy to change since they have perceived it this way for a long time. This is in accord with Informant 1, who argued that the local community get used to the concept of ‘free help’ by outsiders which affects a sense of ownership and the sustainability of the project; which will be further outlined at the end of this chapter. Both informants agreed that this sort of influence is not really the community’s fault, but it actually depends on the coordinating or mediating persons. They claimed that the way local communities understand the project usually comes from the way the coordinator or mediator delivers messages. Informant 1 further contended that development is so much influenced by colonialism and the way development gets defined:

I think the perception around development is from wrong understanding from the colonialism era and the idea has been instilled since the war. An example is Laos, the country was colonised by French (who were very powerful and developed at that time) for almost a century. Moreover, it is surely about

development definitions which means they (the Westerners) are more privileged. Apart from that it is because of the power of money as they are donors. This creates such defective values or perceptions and this is why they are more superior than us.

(Interview, 10/08/2017)

From the perspective of a foreign development worker in Laos, Informant 12 confessed that, in terms of definitions around development and its buzz words, the way he understands things has changed. Before coming to work in Laos, he thought that poverty just simply referred to a lack of basic needs or personal needs, usually measured by the GDP indicator. Since working in Laos, he has learnt that it means much more than what he thought and it is even more complicated depending on the case in question. Sometimes, for example, it may just refer to clean food or just a clean toilet. He realised that happiness should be taken into consideration and there is no one size to fit all.

In association with this kind of perception, Informant 8 declared that foreigners (*Farang* or Westerners) are usually considered as being highly principled, having a high-level of knowledge and being well qualified. He further argued that this perception has influential power in decision-making processes because the *Farang* seems to have more bargaining and convincing power in development practice. All in all, this attitude can lead to the success or failure of development projects, including the way projects respond to the needs of the communities.

5.2.2 Needs and Priorities

The aforementioned perceptions have influenced development practice. Perceptions of development determine what is necessary and what is not for local target communities. The issue could not only create problems where real practice

mismatches a community's needs, but it could also affect the sense that initiatives belong to the community as well as project sustainability.

In this regard, all of the participants agreed that it is crucial to identify and address the real needs of the community, otherwise a development intervention is going to be ineffective, useless and unsustainable. Moreover, the participants insisted that the needs must truly come from the local communities not the assumptions or priorities of the NGOs or development actors. Regarding this issue, Informant 10 commented that:

In the past, there were a lot projects that just visited and built many things for communities, for instance schools, water tanks etc., without analysing or considering if those were what they needed or not. The projects just gave them without creating awareness of them. Of course, if it was not what they needed, it would never work. Sometimes, in the previous cases, the needs just came from the authority or some groups of people, not really from the villagers. It caused project failure and no participation
(Interview, 21/08/2017)

Informant 10 further argued that even though the trend of development practice now has changed, it is still challenging to identify what is really needed in the local communities. It is not easy to hear the voice of the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Apart from this, some participants asserted that there are some issues concerning problem analysis when working on the ground. The issues may include conflicts between development practitioners themselves, including both local and foreign workers. Informant 9 said that sometimes the mediator or technical assistant can cause the problem by having conflicts with the community and convincing them of their own perspective.

As mentioned earlier, most participants asserted that expatriates, especially *Farang*, usually hold higher positions than the locals as they are generally perceived as more qualified and knowledgeable. This means that they can be more influential in terms of making decisions in relation to development projects. Moreover, although the community's needs have already been identified, there is a possibility that this information will be rejected or changed by the development organisation as they have their own priorities or agenda (Interviews, 10/08/2017 & 19/08/2017). For example:

In practice, the donors or their brokers have their own development agenda so when they go to a community, they usually try to influence or frame the activities in the way they want them to be rather than asking for opinions or really getting involved in decision-making. (Interview, 10/08/2017)

The donors sometimes reply that what is needed by the community does not match with our priorities and agenda. This sometimes discourages the practice. (Interview, 19/08/2017)

In a similar way, NGOs work collaboratively with the government or policymakers in order to align their agenda and priorities. Informant 1, for example, further claimed that:

Usually each organisation has their own priorities and their priorities are usually aligned with the government development plans. Apart from that, the policymakers and local authority usually talk with the donors and attempt to influence them (to align with their development policies). This undermines community opportunity to truly say yes or no. This means that

the power of decision-making is not truly with the community. It is with them only 20 per cent, whilst the other 80 per cent is with the government and the NGOs. Within the 20 per cent, the community may sometimes only refer to a certain group of people, usually those who have power or are more advantaged in the community like the head of village and most are males. Women and children are usually speechless, especially children
(Interview, 10/08/2017)

Interviews suggested that the problems around needs do not only arise from the outside parties like the government, NGOs or local officials, but also from the local community themselves. Informant 8 stated that it is not easy to establish the right attitudes within the villagers since some of them are illiterate and some of them are not brave enough to express their opinions and clarify what they truly need. However, Informant 1 argued that this is not the community's fault but it depends on the projects and how development practitioners engage people in the process of development.

5.3 Challenges in Development Practice in Laos

Development in Laos still remains challenging. In practice, all participants strongly agreed that there are still a number of challenges in the Lao context that need to be considered and addressed. From interviews, I have categorised the challenges into four big different areas which include: culture and tradition; participation; expectations; and geographical and logistical barriers.

5.3.1 Culture and Traditions in Development Practice

5.3.1.1 Language and communication

Many participants contended that the diversity of local languages and cultures creates considerable challenges to development practice in Laos. They

explained that it is not easy to understand each other and this sometimes influences how they, as development workers, understand and motivate communities. Informant 6 emphasised, for example, that working with ethnic people is very challenging and that she does not want to have interpreters because some messages can be missing at some points throughout the process of translation. Similarly, Informant 7 also suggested that it is not just about the language but about understanding. By understanding she referred to traditions, beliefs, life styles and so on.

The language barrier is even more demanding for foreign development workers who have to not only deal with Lao language but also the dialects. Informant 12 and Informant 13 revealed, for example, that they had a hard time when they first came to work in Laos. They said that they felt uncomfortable working through interpreters as it is slow and some key messages could be lost in translation. Informant 13 explained further that, when he first started his work, language was very challenging but fortunately he knew some Thai (which is similar to Lao language) and slowly improved his Lao language. However, if he really has to communicate through an interpreter, he tries to select the most suitable one possible:

It is very important to select an interpreter as we have to consider their working and educational backgrounds, including their personalities. This can mean so much when working with communities'(Interview, 01/09/2017)

5.3.1.2 Traditional practice

From interviews, there are many issues related to traditional practice. The research participants asserted that it is important to understand the local culture and life style. This can be very influential in leading the projects to success or

failure because the development practitioners have to learn when is the best time to approach them and how. This process takes time and needs a lot of attention to detail (Interviews, 11/08/2017 & 19/08/2017).

From the perspectives of local practitioners, even though they are seen as insiders in practice, they often realise that they are not. They said that each community is unique and they have to spend a lot of time learning about that community. Informant 11 commented that the way she and the team are introduced to the community by the local coordinator is very important. If they are introduced as people coming from the city or the central area, the community will view them and treat them as outsiders. She mentioned that sometimes her clothing and accent can indicate that she is not from the community.

In terms of the foreign practitioners' perspectives, they also found it very difficult to get accustomed to the local culture and practice. One of the expatriates shared his experience about when he first came to Laos, and how even though he used to live in Thailand and realised that the cultures are not so very different, it was still not easy in practice. He sometimes asked his Thai wife to help explain.

Regarding culture, I found that Lao people drink a lot and it is not easy to decline as it is somehow considered as a drinking culture. I had to quit the job because of drinking so much and saying something inappropriate to the supervisor. Since then, I stopped drinking for 10 years. (Interview, 01/09/2017)

Informant 12 also had a similar experience. He said that he had to learn how to understand the drinking habit in Laos because he felt like it could be very

challenging when practising development in local communities.² Another issue that he had to cope with is the ‘please do not rush’ attitude. He found that people are not often punctual and had a slow pace of life.

In addition, Informant 1 gave his opinion that understanding culture is very important since it can affect problem analysis in the community. He explained that the problems can be viewed from different perspectives depending on the contexts. For the locals, they like to consider many factors like culture and traditional practice. He provided an example of a case when analysing poverty which links to many factors including culture. He explained that if the local community is much attached to traditional practice like living in the mountains, it will hinder development because it is not easy to convince them to live in lowland areas. On the other hand, he claimed that some expatriates overlook this kind of cultural factor, as they consider the public services and may conclude that the community is not reachable and has been ignored or marginalised by the state.

In terms of cultural adaptation, most local participants concurred that most expatriates are quite well-adapted to the culture and working environment in Laos. Informant 2 stated that cultural adaptation depends on the person. In most cases, expatriates are quite well prepared and eager to learn Lao culture. She further clarified that Lao people are generally not direct but that Westerners are more direct and right to the point. However, from her experience, she has seen some people who just do not really understand Lao culture. She realised that development workers have the same goals, but sometimes different perspectives.

Informant 3 expressed that the expatriates will usually learn about the culture beforehand. He said it is actually required by the office before they can go

² In Laos, it is common for local alcohol to be consumed when having development practitioners or guests visiting a community.

to work in the community. They usually have to go through an orientation and have discussions afterward. They then will have a chance to learn about working in Laos and understanding the culture.

5.3.2 Geographical and Logistical Barriers to Development

Accessibility was referred to as one of the challenges by almost half of the participants. Due to the fact that the country's terrain is rugged and mountainous, it is difficult to access, especially in the rainy season. Informant 8 said that geographical location is still challenging because many rural villages are remote and hard to access, also affecting project implementation. For example:

Another issue is about geographical challenge because most poor people in our country are living in remote areas which makes them very difficult to reach and costs so many resources (high operation costs) (Interview, 11/08/2017)

Furthermore, Informant 3 expressed his opinion that this geographical obstacle can be a serious problem for the very remote villages as well. He explained that those villages have high potential for not being selected to be targeted villages for development projects. He argued that most of the projects like to choose villages that have greater potential for success. As a result, the very poor and remote villages can be somehow ignored and marginalised.

In addition, some development practitioners face difficulty when a local coordinator or contact person has been changed. Informant 6 shared that it is not easy to work with new people all the time because she has to explain all the matters related to the development projects to them again. Sometimes this can consume much time and affect the project outcomes.

5.4 Development Expectations and Participation

5.4.1 Community Reactions and Expectations

All thirteen participants agreed that there is a difference in community reactions to a group depending on whether they are with or without *Farang*. Most of them felt that people in local communities get more excited when seeing *Farang* in the team. The community tends to actively participate in interacting with *Farang*. The participants further asserted that communities suddenly seem to have more needs when they see *Farang* coming to their communities. The local people will ask for a lot of things and usually assume that *Farang* are rich, powerful and coming with free help. The following statements are the summary of how research participants replied about this community reaction:

The reaction is surely different. Local communities usually gets more excited when they see Farang coming with the group. I'm not really sure why – is it because Farang have good questions? Is it because he is new to the place? I think I have to learn more about this. However, the reaction with Lao teams is different; the Lao team does not like to ask many questions of the community. I think it is because they assume that they know and understand the community already. (Informant 2, 11/08/2017)

The reaction is different when Farang are present and without Farang. The first thing is they (the community) feel strange when seeing Farang and happy to see them who have travelled from somewhere far away. The community also has different expectations. Some communities have higher expectations as

they see Farang as donors while the local workers are just the ones who help getting funds. (Informant 3, 11/08/2017)

From my experience - yes, it is a bit different because most targeted villages are quite familiar with Farang (from tourism). Sometimes, Farang can get more information because they know how to ask (maybe because they start from knowing nothing). Sometimes, the villagers may feel a bit nervous. In terms of expectation, the community has higher expectations with Farang groups because they see Farang as a source of finance; sometimes the villagers even try to sell their products to the Farang. (Informant 5, 12/08/2017)

The reaction is definitely different – not only with the expatriates but also with the locals who come from different areas. In terms of participation, it seems like the community participates less with expatriates and strangers. The community usually has higher expectations when seeing Farang because they think that Farang are coming to help and they like to ask for help and for many things at the end. This is also because of the way we introduce Farang to the community – like we introduce them as donors/more knowledgeable and in higher positions. (Informant 6, 17/08/2017)

The community seems to have more needs and expectations when they see Farang. So, it's better to approach a community with

just a Lao team. It's necessary to clearly articulate our purposes from the beginning. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

In addition to the theme expressed in the above interview extracts, Informant 9 and Informant 13 also explained further that, in terms of reaction, there is a difference. Groups including *Farang* get immediate and more attention from the community. Informant 13 said that this is very common; perhaps because some people like to come and talk with *Farang* with positive attitudes, and *Farang* are willing to learn about the community and spend some time engaging with them without sticking too strictly to the plan. With regard to expectations, Informant 9 argued that in most cases expectations are different depending whether *Farang* are included in the group or not. He said it is probably because of the way the local coordinators convey the message to the community when they have refusals of any projects. They like to tell the community that *Farang* are the ones who refused the project. This makes the local people understand that *Farang* have more power and they can make final decisions (Informant 9).

From the experience of Informant 11, she expressed that there is no difference in terms of cooperation or participation in respect of these two groups. However, it seems like the children are excited and like to see foreigners. Also, the working atmosphere is different because it seems more exciting for the community as local people like to tease *Farang*. In regard to expectations, it depends on the projects and how the team initially talk with and inform the communities about the concepts of the project and how it going to be conducted. If the community has good and comprehensive understanding from the beginning, the expectations will not be so very different. She further claimed that the local staff, such as mediators, together with government officials are crucial in the beginning of the process because they are the ones who are responsible for needs

assessments and project design. Thus, if there are some misunderstandings miscommunications in the process, expectations will also be affected. This not only happens with foreigners, it happens even with the locals as well. Once we inform the community that we are from the central province or the capital city, the reactions and expectations can be different.

5.4.2 Community Participation and Contribution

In terms of participation and contribution, all research participants strongly commented that these concepts are vital and essential for the success of community development projects. They claimed that they are key to implanting a sense of belonging and sustainability. Community participation and contribution differ depending on how each project approaches communities. It is crucial to make projects participatory and inclusive because then they can benefit the entire community, not just a particular group. Most participants also had similar opinions in regard to the proportion of local participation. They contended that it is very common to see local authorities who often participate on behalf of the entire community and most of them are males. In association with this, Informant 6 stated that it is not easy to get balanced participation since children, women, the disadvantaged and the marginalised are still not given the opportunity to speak publicly in many rural villages. In a similar way, Informant 8 also stressed that in most cases, the working team has to mainly rely on local leaders to help get local villagers to participate in the process. He shared that it is difficult to reach the marginalised or the disadvantaged since he and the team cannot approach them directly. If the team want this to happen, they have to be very patient. In other words, he said that ‘we can’t really understand them truly unless we are them.’ In practice, many development workers like to do the tick-box method which can

mean they do not reach all the aspirations of the project or spend a lot of time in the community.

According to Informant 13, participation is mostly dependent on facilitators and how they conduct a meeting or discussions with local people. If the team presents themselves as a boss, it will scare people. So, it is important to have someone who is knowledgeable, properly trained and really knows how to conduct consultation meetings with local people by appropriately following, for instance, the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach. He further argued that there are only some projects that realise the importance of community participation, and they will consult with the community and let local people get involved in the process of project design. However, in reality, even though there are many projects and organisations who like to claim that they are using a participatory approach, in fact rates of participation are very low (Informant 13 & Informant 1).

The effectiveness and inclusiveness of community participation usually depends on the project design and how it begins (Informant 11 & Informant 8). It is important how the frame of the project design was devised or what process was used in designing the project and how representatives from each group participated. This should be considered throughout the entire process especially when in the implementation phase. For example:

When working with a community, it is necessary to observe if they are ready. If we do not spend time with them from the beginning, it tends to not work. We have to make sure that we really have time for them and know who can help us in the community. In terms of participation, we have to see who is counted or participates and it should be gender balanced.

Moreover, it is important to make the village authority understand this. We also need to understand the circumstances of the villages, including the attitude of the people in the community. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

Informant 8 further explained that NGO projects tend to have more engagement with communities, but for the big projects, like those of UN agencies, it is not easy to have true community participation, only some representatives. More importantly, he claimed that the effectiveness of participation depends on how ‘participation’ is defined. Sometimes, in his experience, it is not easy to get full participation since most villagers have to earn a living and they do not want to come to meetings unless they are paid.

Furthermore, Informant 1 shared his experience that it is not easy to motivate local villagers; it takes time. At first, villagers do not really realise the importance of participation; or even understand the term ‘development’ which is still new for them. For this reason, it is not easy to make villagers understand and participate in the projects unless the project spends a long enough time in the community. He explained that the community lacks a sense of belonging and ownership for projects because they get used to ‘help’. So, they only desire assistance from the projects. In other words, the community perceives themselves as recipients, not as project owners.

Informant 2 shared her experience of when she first started working in community development. She said that at first she did not really understand why it is important to make the community participate in the project. She wondered why the project did not just do and provide everything for the community. She later realised that it is important to provide communities not just hardware but also

software and create a sense of belonging in order to ensure the sustainability of the projects.

5.5 Community Development Strategies and Approaches

5.5.1 Community Approach Strategies

According to development practitioners, there are many strategies and techniques that are considered effective in community development practice. All of them refer to the participatory development approach as the most effective way to work and engage with communities. More than half of the research participants confessed that they prefer to work with just a local team when going to communities. They explained that it is more efficient and effective since they have greater understanding of the local circumstances and they also do not want communities to have high expectations when they see *Farang*.

Informant 13 and Informant 4 contended that when working in the Lao context, it is crucial to build trust with the community and that takes time. Once the trust is established, the ground truths and participation will genuinely come from the community. In addition to this, Informant 8 asserted that the best time to approach them is when they are available and ready to talk. Usually the villagers will be available in the evening after finishing their work; the most appropriate time to stay and spend some time with them. Another effective way is to seek help from a local authority like a head of village, district authority or government officials or authority to help with community coordination and participation.

Informant 6 suggested that the best way to approach local communities is to use or have local people, especially when approaching ethnic groups. She explained that it is better for the locals to get involved in the entire process. This can benefit them a lot and they can rely on themselves eventually. The process not only helps build capacity but also raises a sense of belonging and ownership

amongst local people in the community. Therefore, it is important to take it into consideration from the beginning of the project, including in the way projects are introduced. She and the team always encourage the locals to participate as much as possible. The next step is to advise them how to plan for themselves and let them select their representatives to attend training in respect of the project. They then have to analyse the problems by themselves. Also, they have to manage finance by themselves, and this will make them feel that it belongs to them. After that they will have to set their own vision or five-year plan and prioritise what is needed to be done first. The villagers also have to set their own indicators for categorising poor people in their communities, otherwise they would claim that all of them are poor. Besides that, it is important to make sure that the project is not overlapping:

The strategy is to allow the local community to have their own areas and manage by themselves which means they have full rights to protect and manage their own resources. The capacity building approach is usually effective and the participatory approach usually works very well. (Informant 13, 01/09/2017)

Another case was shared by Informant 3 which is associated with his experience when he was working on an education project. He expressed that the parents in rural communities usually have a low-level of education and many of them dropped out of school. Their children are also very poor and girls are usually silent. However, when he first started the process of consultation and project design, he tried to have them participating in the process from the beginning. He then let them decide any related work to the project. For instance, letting children choose what kind of school they prefer ('dream' school). Children have a chance

to draw in separate groups, and in case they cannot draw, the team will show them pictures and let them say what kind of facilities they want their school to have.

In relation to giving scholarships awards for children in each community, Informant 3 explained that if the project wants to give scholarships, they will need to have a kind of education mapping exercise. This is done by drawing the village map, then letting the children tell who has not attended the school yet and ask them why. This is the process that gets children involved in identifying the right target. He found this technique very helpful and effective since children usually tell the truth and it can really help identify true targets. He remarked that it is vital to balance the representative groups in the process.

In addition, Informant 12 suggested that it is better to start small and try to fit the frame to where the money comes from. He argued that in terms of a log frame, a minor change is acceptable but a major change is not. He also said that *'either you want it or not, PRA has to be conducted and the simple way is to turn the problem tree into solutions'*. Apart from that, Informant 5 and Informant 10 suggested that it is necessary to walk in a community with open minded attitudes and spend some time learning about them.

Informant 1 argued that the most important thing to consider when working with a community is empowerment:

It is actually to repower the community because we (policymakers, development practitioners) have taken the power from them and assumed that it's our power. This is indicated by telling them what to do and giving them what we assume that they are supposed to have. This will be a big remarkable change if we power them, trust them and accept them even though they are just local people. They have been living so long by their own

indigenous knowledge. Please do not think that we are better or more privileged than them; give them power to make their own decisions, so that it can eventually drive true development. Furthermore, we have to realise the importance of the process more than the results. We can input the results we want but the problem is how to get that result. If we focus more on the results, the projects will not be sustainable. In reverse, if we focus on the process it is going to be more sustainable because all the decisions, mobilisations and solutions are from them. If we are thinking that we will do it for them – the development will collapse. This is what we must consider; how to let them stand and live on their own – make them understand that development does not only mean money and materialism. If they can stand or live on their own it means there is no high dependency, but if we still depend on Western assistance, it still means we are quietly their colony. (Informant 1, 12/08/2017)

5.5.2 Ineffective Strategies

The development practitioners also shared their experiences regarding ineffective approaches in community engagement. All participants agreed that forced participation does not work in the long run, and the projects that do not arise from community needs are unsustainable. They suggested that the projects that come with plans (for example, a fixed framework for the community) are unsuccessful. On this matter, Informant 10 commented that:

Do not choose activities but let it happen in communities. We have to let them analyse their own problems and plan what to do to address those. Also, please do not allow it to happen only with

the local authority, but try to make it inclusive participation. In the case of ethnic minorities, we can resolve [the issue of participation] by building capacity of village authorities and getting them participating. Do not rush and please spend sufficient time working and learning with them including their life style; also observe when they are really available.

(Informant 10, 01/09/2017)

Moreover, from the experience of Informant 3, it is better to avoid cascade training. If it is about capacity building, the kick-off training is not sufficient. In other words, providing only one block of training at first is not enough and it tends to be unsuccessful. Best is hands-on training which happens module by module and provides opportunities to learn and practise side by side.

Interestingly, Informant 9 stated that the needs or the problems of communities are quite common as they are asset based. But when talking about resource allocation, the better resources will usually be allocated to those who are more advantaged and to their connections before going to the less advantaged people. This makes the poor poorer. Sometimes, the projects or the donors also need to have, and show, satisfactory performance to their backing organisations, so they prefer to start, or choose to work, in areas that could potentially make better progress. This advantages those NGOs and those areas.

5.6 Insiders Versus Outsiders

5.6.1 Overall Perspectives

The terms ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ have been used a lot in research and development practice. In this case, as mentioned earlier, the local development practitioners accepted that they do not always consider themselves as insiders even though they are Lao. Most of them realised that they were in fact both

insiders and outsiders, although they definitely benefit from speaking the same languages in some communities. However, it does not mean that they are accepted by the local villagers due to several factors which encompass clothing, accents, positions and so forth. In regard to ethnic minority groups, the participants are aware that they are outsiders to them.

In terms of the expatriates, they are considered as outsiders and they realise this fact. Informant 12 argued that, even though he is an outsider and he has to learn so many things in Laos, he can still get some advantages as a result of being outside of the norm. He explained that being an expatriate means that the community has reduced expectations in terms of cultural appropriateness. He realised he could take this opportunity to learn more about the culture and build trust with them.

5.6.2 Negotiation and Consensus

Local development workers and the expatriates usually work together in various areas. According to the interviews, conflicts or disagreements happen sometimes. The common issue that was revealed by participants is related to the concept of insiders and outsiders. The locals are generally seen as insiders who have more understanding about culture and local context, whilst the expatriates are generally seen as outsiders who have great development knowledge, expertise and theoretical backgrounds. In practice, all research participants claim that the expatriates or Westerners usually have higher positions than the locals and sometimes are, or represent, donors which means they have more power in decision-making processes.

In real practice, when conflicts, differences of opinion or disagreements occur, most participants could handle them well. They argued that where this was the case, they would try their best to negotiate and find the best possible solutions

together. However, they were not always successful and sometimes differences caused problems between development practitioners themselves and with communities as well. In association to this, Informant 2 stated that the conflicts are undeniable and sometimes happen because they view community problems differently. This is very common because it not only happens between the locals and expatriates, but also amongst the locals themselves. If it happens, they would usually explain and give reasons. She said that most expatriates have higher positions like supervisors and she claimed that it is actually not a negotiation, but it is just a sharing of different perspectives and the final decision-making is still with them anyway. She experienced one time when the expatriate kept insisting on following his way otherwise he would not give funding. This is also similar to what Informant 7 and Informant 9 mentioned:

I found that some expatriates are quite open-minded and willing to base [their work] on local contexts. However, some of them in some organisations only insist on following what the donors want otherwise they will not give funds. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

When the conflicts happen, most of the time the locals need to listen to Farang as they usually have more power and are in higher positions. (Informant 9, 19/08/2017)

In addition, Informant 3 commented that, in case of disagreement, they have to base decisions on the contract because most of the big issues have been agreed upon early on. However, in the case of small issues, the expatriates usually listen to the locals because the locals understand the local contexts more. He emphasised that usually the expatriates will listen to Lao development workers

because they are the ones who implement the projects, and the main point is to base work on the community's needs as they are the beneficiary party. Similarly, Informant 6 also argued that:

If conflicts happen, they usually discuss the reasons together after coming back from the field. Mostly the expatriates like to follow and apply their theories and principles which may not necessarily always fit the local contexts. So, they usually listen to the locals as the locals are the implementers. (Informant 6, 17/08/2017)

Informant 4 suggested that there are two levels of conflict in respect of Lao and foreign cooperation. The first one is about power. It is because most of the decision-making power is with the foreign donors. Another one is about people's backgrounds or perceptions because the expatriates think that they are superior to the locals. He claimed that 'Western education is more like a machine using mathematics to calculate development but in reality there is no absolute formula for it.' Informant 10 also suggested that it is important to try not to let expatriates force locals and to avoid having conflicts in front of the community. If the conflicts happen in the community, it may cause failure.

Moreover, Informant 8 commented that when seeking conflict resolution or consensus in respect of different viewpoints, it depends on what roles that the locals hold at that time. He said that: 'Usually Farang have more weight in decision-making, even with the government officials. Their thoughts are good but difficult in practice because they are not suitable for the local environment and context. They usually work upon their principles. Although some people understand the local conditions, they refuse to accept or cannot accept it and they want other people to follow them.' He also mentioned about the concept of 'one-

size-fits-all'. He claimed that even though taking a one-size-fits-all approach to development has been broadly discussed and criticised over its unsuitability, *Farang* still apply it. In short, even though they realise that it is not good and that development should be context-based, they still take a one-size-fits-all approach. He further stated that:

Maybe it's not only about success because even if the evaluation indicates that it is successful but in terms of sustainability and suitability it is another story. Actually our Lao context is still complex and aid usually comes with conditionality.(Informant 8, 19/08/2017)

According to Informant 1, there are two forms of expatriates with two different reasons for joining the local team. The first kind aims to interfere and act like a spy for the donors. The second kind joins because they offer specific skills or expertise that is needed. Usually if expatriates join the working team, they hold higher positions than the locals. Their main jobs usually are monitoring and giving advice. As a result, when it comes to decision-making they have two cases. One is that they have more expertise, are well-educated and are from a developed country, and so the locals will need to listen to them in everything. Another one is as a donor. In this case it is impossible not to listen to them. The expatriates may change their perspectives or ways of analysing the problem but in a very superficial way because they still say yes but no in action. He claimed that actually, in their awareness, they still think that they are superior and it shows in many pieces of research regarding salaries.

From his experience, he does not agree with or listen to everything in case there is something inappropriate. He usually negotiates by explaining and giving reasons to them. However, it does not work every time as they have their own

agenda. Some expatriates are open-minded but some think that they are superior and are too proud of themselves. He argued that this is still the gap between the locals and the expatriates even though the locals are called specialists. He said that 'this concept links to the concept of 'white supremacy' that the whites will automatically get priorities'. However, he suggested that the locals that have been educated abroad will have some certain consideration in regard to this negotiation.

Informant 1 also argued that there are still a lot of conflicts even between the locals themselves who can have difficulty agreeing on each other's ideas. The case may get worse when having the *Farang* involved and on the side of someone, as the other one will be marginalised. He claimed that, in NGOs, there is still a lot of competition for funds which are needed for surviving. So, in the competition each side will make the other side look bad and make themselves look better and this can also lead to conflicts or disagreements. He said that it is hard to tell who is right or who is wrong because each organisation has their own approach and priorities. In the end, they need to compete for survival and this can mean NGOs compete aggressively and may need to consider internal redundancies or reduced benefits. On the other dirty side, there are still some organisations taking benefits from the poor by showing pictures of the poor to get funds when most of the funds do not really go to the community.

From the perspective of expatriates, Informant 13 contended that he now does not have problems with the locals but with the other expatriates. He said that this is because he has become more like Lao people and can understand Laos better. However, it is not easy to explain to the other expatriates and get them to understand the way he does things. He realises that Lao people do not like to show how they feel unlike *Farang*, which may be influenced by Lao polite culture. This makes it difficult sometimes because expatriates sometimes cannot

understand them. He suggested that, if someone really wants to understand Laos or how Lao people think, they have to look at not only Lao people themselves but who they are connected to.

5.7 Community Sustainability and Ownership

The concepts of sustainability and ownership are strongly connected. Interviews suggested that there are several aspects to this. Informant 5, Informant 8 and Informant 10 have similar opinions; they contended, for example, that it is important to ascertain whether the community really wants the projects and if the project responds to their needs. Development practitioners need to ask if the community truly receives benefits from the project. More importantly, it is about the community being willing.

As mentioned earlier, most participants insisted that the first and foremost thing is to get the community involved from the beginning of the process. They believe that the initial involvement will create a sense of ownership and sustainability. Informant 11 also asserted that the participation approach and giving a clear understanding to the community will develop a sense of responsibility, belonging and ownership. Apart from that, Informant 3 also argued that it is important to let local villagers be involved from design, to implementation and monitoring. Then allow them to be in charge of the monitoring process and final evaluation.

If the project really responds to the real needs of the community, it will make them feel a sense of ownership. We should start from something small but possible and realistic. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

In addition, Informant 9 argued that, in the past, the concept of ownership and sustainability were not mentioned so much, but now they have become more

of a central focus and are required by donors. This means most development partners have these as goals, but in terms of practice, they are still ambiguous. Informant 7 and Informant 11 stated that the degree of ownership and sustainability usually depends on each community. Sometimes there is a lack of awareness of ownership. The work is still seen as the project's own; the community does not really feel it belongs to them. This not only happens with the community, it also happens with officials or staff who join in the process as well. For instance, sometimes they join just because of the per diem. Similarly, Informant 13 argued that there are still a lot of government officials who are working and seeking per diem to supplement their salaries.

Furthermore, Informant 4 contended that there are two problems in development practice that cause projects to be unsustainable and to fail. The first one is because the planner and the implementer do not know how to take sustainability into consideration. He explained that they do not really know the true meaning of sustainable development, including its processes. Besides, the development practitioners think that they know better than the villagers. This happens while the recipients receive everything without being critical. At this point, local or indigenous knowledge is ignored or is not considered, unlike Western knowledge. Moreover, he said that expatriates can be so conceited that they do not realise what they actually do not know. Sometimes the projects are not sustainable because of initial information from the community. The villagers will say everything in order to convince the donors or development practitioners and make the projects happen.

Another issue that Informant 4 pointed out is that the planner and implementer choose to do what is easy for them. He explained that these people just work for wages or salaries; they do not care about anything even though

sometimes they know that it is not good. He said that it is interesting to observe that there are numerous projects coming in and being implemented, but he wondered if there are any projects that could truly build and strengthen communities' capacities. He suggested provocatively:

We should ask back that does the mainstream approach really work; is it suitable or effective? Should we continue doing the same thing? If so, it will make communities weak and more dependent (depending on the outside). It also disempowers them and promotes materialism. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

5.8 Summary

The research findings were analysed and thematically outlined. Six key themes were identified and summarised according to the interviews. The first key theme is development perceptions which suggested that development discourses play an important role in influencing development practice especially around community needs and priorities. Challenges in development practice were raised thereafter in relation to several barriers regarding communication, culture and geography. Another remarkable theme that was revealed was that participation was referred to by all research participants as the most crucial element for the success of development. This theme is critically important and related to other themes, especially: the effectiveness of development approaches; insider and outsider perspectives; and sustainability and ownership. These key identified themes will be discussed in the next chapter in association with the literature, framework and my viewpoints.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings and provides some discussion of the key themes discovered and categorised in Chapter 5. It begins by summarising the main findings and then discusses themes in relation to key literature and relevant studies.

6.2 Development Perceptions and Priorities

Results show that the term ‘development’ is still ambiguous and can be interpreted in many ways. The main finding of this research indicates that the term ‘development’ generally conceptualises a myriad of positive Western qualities. It also refers to aid and assistance in the global development scheme. This is in accord with what Lundgren and Peacock (2010) contend. They suggest that the way people understand development has been influenced by the way it emerged and evolved. Its positive conceptualisation in the Western world affects development practice and it gives more privilege to Westerners. As Harris (2013) argues, development practitioners have also been influenced by development connotations and most of them are from the Western world. This explains why Westerners are usually seen as knowledgeable, well-educated and having positive attributes. Also, the notion of aid has been generally interpreted and perceived as free assistance, especially at the local community level. I would like to refer to the interview extract below once again regarding the relationship between development and colonialism:

I think the perception around development is from wrong understanding from the colonialism era and the idea has been instilled since the war. An example is Laos, the country was colonised by French (who were very powerful and developed at

that time) for almost a century. Moreover, it is surely about development definitions which means they (the Westerners) are more privileged. Apart from that it is because of the power of money as they are donors. This creates such defective values or perceptions and this is why they are more superior than us.

The interview extract emphasises that development is somehow a product of colonialism which still allows colonialism to exist and carry on in different forms, which is similar to what Lundgren and Peacock (2010) mention. In terms of understanding poverty in Laos, the findings suggest that poverty is different from the mainstream definition. As Informant 12 explained, poverty in Laos is specific and context-based. This also links back to the complexity of poverty in the Lao context (Lao Government, 2004).

In practice, however, some Westerners or expatriates have spent a long period of time trying to understand local needs and finding more effective ways to work with communities. As Informant 12 and Infomant 13 expressed, even though community development in Laos may differ from the mainstream development definition, they could learn and understand it by spending sufficient time engaging with communities. This is also aligned with what Kumar and Leonard (2012) and Crawford, Morris, Thomas and Winter (2006) mention; that is, that development problems are usually context-based and require understanding and flexibility from development practitioners. However, in development practice things may not proceed as anticipated even though development workers who are working on the ground can identify the real needs of the community. This links back to what McGee (2010) argues, as it is not easy to work against what has been prioritised and identified by large international

organisations, even if these priorities and suggestions do not match community needs.

With regard to power in decision-making, this research accords with the arguments made by Mountfort (2013) and Page (2003) that donors usually are more dominant and have more power to influence changes in the process of decision-making. Interviewees discussed that the local development practitioners have less power in making decisions as compared to expatriates, especially the Westerners. The research also suggests that the real power is with donors and it is not easy to make changes against their agenda.

In terms of needs and priorities, the findings reveal that the way development practitioners perceive development affects how the needs are identified and the how the priorities are made. This again matches the contention of Harris (2013) that perceptions are very influential in practice. The findings further indicate that there are still some issues around the assumed and real needs of communities. As a result, it can create a kind of mismatch of perceived needs and priorities between project workers and the community which eventually can cause unsustainability and failure. For example:

In practice, the donors or their brokers have their own development agenda so when they go to a community, they usually try to influence or frame the activities in the way they want them to be rather than asking for opinions or really getting involved in decision-making. (Interview, 10/08/2017)

The donors sometimes reply that what is needed by the community does not match with our priorities and agenda. This sometimes discourages the practice. (Interview, 19/08/2017)

The two statements above outline that donors still play a big role in designing and framing development projects. This form of influence is often exercised through their representatives working as development workers. In addition, as Keough (1998) found, Western development practitioners usually face cultural gulfs and operate under the influence of a colonial legacy which is hard to break and can affect and determine practice and how the issues or conditions in the local developing contexts are seen or perceived (also Chambers, 1983).

It is true that in order to respond to the right needs of the community, the needs should come from the local voices of participants, canvassed in an inclusive way. This is something that was raised by the majority of interviewees. As Chambers urges, taking into account local voices, especially the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalised, is essential (Chambers, 1983, 1997). This strategy does not only help identify and determine the right needs, priorities and interventions for communities, it also helps enhance effectiveness of development projects as a whole.

6.3 Challenges in Development Practice in Laos

The research findings point out two main challenges for development practice in Laos. The first one is related to language and culture and the other one concerns geographical barriers. In terms of language and cultural challenges, Ember, Ember and Peregrine (1998) suggest that working across cultures is crucially important and requires a lot of attention to cultural differences and unique local contexts. This does not only apply to the expatriates, but also to the local development practitioners. As the results have shown, this is a commonly-faced challenge in development practice. As the UNDP (2015) and Coulombe et al. (2016) suggest, Lao has many ethnic groups with different cultures and the

majority of them living in rural and remote areas. They also suggest that those ethnic minorities typically have a high proportion of people living in poverty which means that both local development practitioners and expatriates are expected to work in their communities a lot.

Working with ethnic people is very challenging and that she does not want to have interpreters because some messages can be missing at some points throughout the process of translation. Similarly. (Interview, 17/08/2017)

Informant 7 also suggested that it is not just about the language but about understanding. By understanding she referred to traditions, beliefs, life styles and so on. (Interview, 18/08/2017)

The findings reveal that language and culture are very challenging in terms of communication and understanding the life style of the community. This can influence the effectiveness of projects. However, according to the research, development practitioners attempt to tackle this issue by getting more local people to participate and work in the project even though it is not always necessarily successful. In practice, most development practitioners try to avoid having interpreters as they realise that it consumes more time, costs more and may cause information loss in the process of translation. For foreign development workers, they will try to learn Lao language so that they can communicate with villagers directly - although this may not always happen.

Another issue is about geographical challenge because most poor people in our country are living in remote areas which

makes them very difficult to reach and costs so many resources (high operation costs). (Interview, 11/08/2017)

The research also points out that geographical barriers are also a challenge for development workers. This is due to the fact that the majority of the Lao population lives in rural areas where the terrain of the country is often rugged and mountainous, and which road transport cannot access in all seasons (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2016; World Bank, 2005). This is another common challenge for development practitioners when working in Laos. This issue can cause poor villages in remote areas to be unreachable and not be selected as development project targets.

6.4 Development Participation, Strategies and Ownership

The research findings reveal that local communities have different reactions to and expectations of local development workers and expatriates or *Farang*. Generally communities have higher expectations with teams including *Farang* and this is influenced by two main factors. The first factor concerns the perception of local communities toward *Farang*. Lundgren and Peacock (2010) claim that Westerners are usually perceived as having high-level educational qualifications, being highly skilled, and coming from developed countries. Perceptions can shape community interactions. For example:

The reaction is surely different. Local communities usually get more excited when they see Farang coming with the group...
(Informant 2, 11/08/2017)

The reaction is definitely different – not only with the expatriates but also with the locals who come from different areas...
(Informant 6, 17/08/2017)

The community seems to have more needs and expectations when they see Farang... (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

The given statements emphasise that communities not only have different reactions but also expectations. This demonstrates that communities generally have positive attitudes about *Farang* and they expect more help as they understand that most *Farang* have money. This links back to the definition of development and the way it has been traditionally shaped by Western perspectives.

In terms of participation, the findings suggest that participation is vital and essential for the success of community development projects. Also, participation is key to facilitating a sense of the project belonging to the local people. The results further outline that who participates and how to participate is crucial. They suggest that participation should be inclusive, which is similar to the study of McEwan in 2008 who claims that it is essential to take into account the local voices, especially the poor and the marginalised. She argues that a crucial aspect of successful development practice is to encourage voices of the marginalised, indigenous and other disadvantaged groups. This is important because it can really help identify the real problems in the local context and the real issues faced by these disadvantaged groups.

Even though the participatory approach was strongly recommended and suggested by all interviewees, in practice it can still be challenging. As mentioned earlier, in the process of participation it is not easy to have everyone involved and get every single voice and need counted, especially those of the disadvantaged (Chambers, 1997). Many informants, for example, claimed that in most cases the local authorities and some powerful groups were acting as representatives of the

whole community. They shared that even though some development workers realised that participation was not fully inclusive, they still chose to consider that those voices already represented spoke for the entire community. This is because some of them did not want to spend so much time in communities, or they just wanted to have the projects running as planned.

Overall, the term ‘participatory approach’ is still vague. McKinnon (2007) claims that discourses related to a participatory development approach may sound attractive and desirable. However, in practice real participation is still hard to define, as is who really counts in the process of participation, and how it proceeds. McKinnon also criticised Chambers’ participatory approach, arguing that the concept tends to promote universal application which is hard when putting it into practice in different contexts. This kind of idea was also raised by Informant 8 and Informant 12 from the research who asserted that there is no one size that fits all. As a result, it is vitally important to take into account context differences.

Despite above criticism, participatory development approaches have been considered as the most effective way to work and engage with communities. This links back to McEwan’s study in 2008 which emphasises the importance of participation. In addition, findings from this research suggest that spending time with communities and building trust is crucial. However, even though many development practitioners realise this is important, in practice it is still not fully done due to time limitations and some other factors such as context differences and livelihood conditions.

Another effective method in practice is to seek help from the local authority and try to use local people to do development work who understand the local context well and can help accelerate community participation. The findings point out that forced participation is not successful in the long run, and that projects

which come with fixed plans or frameworks tend to fail. This is similar to the concept that Keough (1998) suggests regarding participation and needs identification; namely that if the community lacks trust, a project cannot be successful on sustainable.

6.5 Insider Versus Outsider

According to the research findings, it is very common for development practitioners to have different opinions. This happens between the local development workers, between local development workers and expatriates, and also between expatriates. However, when it comes to the process of negotiation, bargaining power and decision-making power unavoidably have to be mentioned:

I found that some expatriates are quite open-minded and willing to base [their work] on local contexts. However, some of them in some organisations only insist on following what the donors want otherwise they will not give funds. (Informant 7, 18/08/2017)

When the conflicts happen, most of the time the locals need to listen to Farang as they usually have more power and are in higher positions. (Informant 9, 19/08/2017)

In regard to the findings, I have selected these two statements from the findings to highlight how project negotiation occurs in practice. It is obviously seen that the expatriates usually have more power in making project decisions. This happens because of two main reasons: (i) the power of donors who have significant roles in development (Mountfort, 2013); and (ii) the expatriates are privileged for being Westerners who are considered as having more expertise and knowledge (Harris, 2013).

The terms ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ are still used broadly in development practice and are relevant in the current research Merriam et al. (2001). For example, the term ‘outsider’ does not only refer to expatriates or *Farang*, but it also refers to local development workers who are not from the working community. Ember, Ember and Peregrine (1998) assert that local understanding is required when working in different cultures or communities. However, in practice this is still challenging even though many development practitioners are well informed of this fact. Some of them may just generally assume local conditions and needs because they have to follow the project timeline and log frame. Informant 13 shared his opinion in regard to this matter:

I do not really like the log frame because it is just a tool for working but it is mainly from donors, who are usually considered as outsiders, and designed by foreign experts who mainly do not know much about the country. Thus, the log frame should be like a guideline rather than a regulation which means it should be flexible. There should be reflections, evaluation and improvements on the log frame to make it more suitable for the local circumstances. Actually, this creates tensions with the donors as they want the log frame to be used and guaranteed so that the project will be successful based on what was designed in the log frame. However, they have to accept the fact that there is no perfect log frame; it usually requires improvements and flexibilities to fit to local needs and conditions. The development workers should have particular methods to listen to all stakeholders’ voices and take those voices into account.

(Informant 13, 01/09/2017)

In practice, development professionals can encounter difficulties deciding what a community's priorities are. Being insiders does not mean that actual needs will always be correctly identified and prioritised, and being outsiders does not mean the opposite. The issue of insiders and outsiders is still complicated. The voice of insiders may not fully refer to the entire community such as the poor and the marginalised. In addition, sometimes outsiders can be considered as insiders once they really understand the community. Thus, spending time learning about communities is necessary and it can determine success whether as an insider or outsider.

6.6 Summary

Mainstream development concepts are dominantly drawn from Western ideologies and the power is still mainly in the hands of donors and development partners. The donors then can influence policies in recipient countries and this can be considered as a new form of colonisation. The term 'development' is used as a means to establish power of the Global-Developed-North over the Global-Underdeveloped-South. Development in Laos has also been influenced by dominant western development discourses. This has conceptualised general understandings regarding development and affected its processes.

In development discourse, participatory development approaches have been suggested as a key for successful development practice. Participation is considered as a cornerstone for development which greatly affects sustainability and effectiveness of projects. However, as this research has shown, challenges raised by development practitioners are still not easy to deal with, especially achieving inclusive participation and responding to the expressed needs of a community. For example, the issue of insiders and outsiders still remains

challenging, and it also takes time for development workers to build trust with the community.

The next chapter will conclude key research findings and highlight remarkable discussions from this chapter and previous chapters. Recommendations will also be provided to key concerned stakeholders to seek better development practice in the future and recommend potential studies. Apart from this, research limitations and contributions will be also outline in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the key findings, analysis and discussion in this study. It begins by summarising the main outcomes of the study along with key analysis discussed in previous chapters. It will then outline limitations of this research and finally propose some useful recommendations to relevant stakeholders and for future studies.

The main objective of this research was to explore the experiences of development practitioners who have engaged in community development in Laos. It examined the experiences of both local and foreign development workers from both government and NGOs perspectives. The attempt was to provide insight into practice concerning community engagement in the Lao context. With the help of social constructivism, postcolonial theories, and qualitative and ethnographic methodologies, the research was able to provide an in-depth analysis from the perspectives and experiences of development practitioners. It provided a picture of development practice in Laos, including its strategies and challenges.

7.2 The Relationship between Participation, Ownership and Development Practice in Laos

Participation has been referred to as a central focus for development practice. Drawing on the interviews, the participatory approach was recommended as a means to bring about effective development outcomes. The research suggests that participation helps lay strong foundations for sustainability and community ownership as it usually creates a sense of the project belonging to the community. This is aligned with what most literature and studies have suggested (for example, Chambers 1997).

However, there are some considerable concerns regarding participation in actual practice. For instance, it is still challenging to include all stakeholders in the process of participation, especially the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Taking into account true voices and needs is still a big barrier for the success and sustainability of development projects. Most research informants agreed, for example, that participation from the local community is usually from certain groups and is not fully inclusive. The groups who are more powerful and more advantaged usually get more chances to participate, raise their voices and set the tone of development projects. This superficial representation eventually can create development gaps, conflicts and sometimes project failure.

The Lao government has devoted much effort and many resources to overcome poverty and lead the country to exit the list of Least Developed Countries by 2020. The government realises the importance of community development and works collaboratively with global development partners. By having a poverty database and necessary statistics, the government has been able to provide development targets to NGOs and development projects. All research participants revealed that the government database is very helpful and it helps save time and provide needed targets. They further shared that all development work should be implemented in alignment with government development priorities and policies, and noted that local government officials usually provide insightful information as well as help in connecting with targeted villages.

7.3 Development Perceptions and Insider Versus Outsider

The study shows that development perceptions have shaped conventional development practice in Laos. Mainstream perceptions were influenced by Western terminologies through development history and colonialism and then applied and understood universally. In the modern era of development, even

though many development practitioners are well informed regarding this fact, it is still hard for them to completely detach from this ideology. The results show that it not only affects development attitudes of the practitioners but also local villagers. The way local communities perceive development projects as a form of free assistance and a symbol of funding is an example of how development perceptions have influenced society. Furthermore, Westerners are usually perceived as having high-levels of expertise, being highly educated, rich, and more developed.

The issue of insiders and outsiders was recognised by most research participants. Even though expatriates are obviously seen as outsiders when working in Laos, most local development practitioners also realise that they can be both insiders and outsiders. In practice, conflicts and problems still happen. The conflicts may appear between expatriates and local development workers or sometimes even between the locals and between the expatriates themselves as discussed in previous chapters. Local problem analysis may be very challenging for *Farang*, but it can also be challenging for the locals because they are not considered as insiders in many cases.

7.4 Research Contribution

This study has contributed to the following six main outcomes. Firstly, it helped provide better understanding in regard to practical experiences and perspectives of development practitioners and their challenges in community engagement in Laos. Secondly, it helped explain how and why experiences of local and international development practitioners are different. The research highlighted how these two groups view and practise their community development in Laos. The third contribution was in reflecting on and identifying what works and does not work in community development practice in Laos. This

is very important to inform solutions and seek better strategies for more effective development outcomes. Fourthly, the study provided useful lessons for the current and future development practitioners who have to work in Laos and in similar development contexts. Fifthly, the study helped inform policymakers and other practitioners of what can be improved for better development work implementation and practice in the future. Finally, the study helped contribute to the academic domain as it provided evidence regarding the real experiences of development practitioners who work on the ground. In other words, it helped fulfil the academic gap identified earlier, particularly with its focus on Laos.

7.5 Research Limitations

Throughout one year of conducting this research, I encountered two main constraints and limitations. The first key limitation was the time I spent on my fieldwork. Apart from having a relatively limited time frame, it was not easy to approach and interview my research participants. This was because my target participants were development practitioners and most of them were very busy working in other provinces, and some of them were not entirely sure if they were development practitioners. Another issue was associated with supporting studies and information for my research. Since my topic was relatively new, there were not many studies exploring real experiences and perspectives of development practitioners. As a result, it was not easy to find highly relevant studies or research conducted in similar contexts, particularly in Laos.

7.6 Recommendations

My first and foremost recommendation is for development practitioners who work in Laos and other regions with a similar context. It is really important to learn and understand local circumstances, before engaging in development. Moreover, true participation is a key to success. Therefore, development

practitioners have to find the best possible way to get proper participation in the development process based on each context. The participation should be inclusive, which means it should take into account voices from the poor and the disadvantaged. This is why spending time and learning about a community is important. Superficial participation from only community authorities and powerful people is not enough; it needs to be inclusive participation in order to address the right problems of communities.

In addition, sufficient training should be provided for development practitioners in order for them to be adaptable when working on the ground. Training can involve various aspects such as participatory methodologies or learning about local social and cultural contexts. Training can also be provided based on the context. I would encourage having a development training centre which particularly trains and discusses issues related to the Lao context. The training centre can be an assembly place for development professionals from different backgrounds. Moreover, it can be like a school of development practice which focuses on real practice from experience.

Furthermore, local values, knowledge, and expertise should be well respected and acknowledged for effective development projects which will eventually create a sense of ownership in a community. Even though participation can lay the foundation for project success, taking into consideration local knowledge can facilitate development outcomes. In addition, the research makes an important recommendation to development partners and donors regarding development priorities. This is, priorities should be based on the actual needs of a community and techniques such as project log frames or frameworks should be flexible depending on the local context.

Power imbalance is still challenging. Even though donors usually are more dominant and have more power in development business, the government plays a crucial role in negotiation. Development practitioners should also put local communities at the centre of development and attempt to maximise the profits for them as much as they can. Particularly, local development workers should be the main ones to communicate communities' true needs and properly translate them to the donors. Alongside this, building capacity for communities is also critical because they are the most important stakeholders who have the most to either lose or gain out of development projects.

Mainstream or conventional development is not the only choice; alternative development should be considered. Development models and approaches should be flexible depending on the contexts. It is also important to be aware that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, especially when dealing with development issues like poverty and livelihoods. The mainstream development model was initially developed in Western contexts, by Western ideologies, and was meant to be applied universally. Of course, this is impossible as each country has its context specific aspects and needs different interventions, particularly in the Lao context.

The last recommendation is for future studies. I would recommend future researchers or academics who are interested in exploring the experiences or perspectives of development practitioners investigate the roles of local facilitators and interpreters, who directly communicate with communities. This could be so interesting because they usually play an important role and can influence the tone of development projects. Moreover, exploring relationships between the government, donors, and development practitioners would be helpful. It is interesting to examine how power is exercised and how negotiations proceed amongst these groups. The future studies can also focus on policy alignments.

This is to explore how development actors recognise the importance of development policies and how to adjust them to meet local development agendas.

In conclusion, the success of development practice comes from well coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders. People-centred and community-based approaches should be taken into consideration in order to achieve true participatory development and address real needs of local communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Human Ethics Approval

Phone 04-463 5205
Email Averil.coxhead@vuw.ac.nz

MEMORANDUM

TO	Johny Chanthavilay
COPY TO	John Overton
FROM	Dr Averil Coxhead, Acting Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	31 May 2017
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 24502 The Experiences of Development Practitioners and Challenges in Community Engagement in Laos

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 5 March 2018. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Averil Coxhead,
Acting Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

Appendix 2 Research Information Sheet for Participants English Version

The Experiences of Development Practitioners and Challenges in Community Engagement in Laos

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

Who am I?

My name is Phothong Chanthavilay and I am a Masters student in Development Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

What is the aim of the project?

This project aims to explore the experiences of development practitioners who have engaged with community development. This includes effective and ineffective approaches and strategies that they have used in development practice. Furthermore, the project also aims to learn from the experiences of both local and international development practitioners in order to seek for better more effective approaches.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee and the approval number is 24502.

How can you help?

If you agree to take part I will interview you at a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. I will ask you questions about community development experiences. The interview will take about 40 to 60 minutes. I will record the interview and write it up later. You can stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any point before 15/09/2017. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. This means that the researchers named below will be aware of your identity but your identity will not be disclosed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 5 years after the research ends.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Masters thesis.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;

- withdraw from the study before 15/09/2017;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:

Name: Phothong Chanthavilay

University email address:

chanthphot@myvuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Prof John Overton

Role: Director of Postgraduate

Programme in Development Studies

School: Geography, Environment and

Earth Sciences

Phone: [04 4635281](tel:044635281)

John.overton@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the

Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett. Email

susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.

Appendix 3 Research Information Sheet for Participants Lao Version

ການສຶກສາບຸດທະວິທີການເຂົ້າຫາ ແລະ ການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ຈາກມຸມມອງຂອງນັກພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນໃນລາວ

ຂໍ້ມູນສໍາລັບຜູ້ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມການສໍາພາດ

ກ່ອນອື່ນ ຂໍສະແດງຄວາມຂອບໃຈສໍາລັບຄວາມສົນໃຈຕໍ່ການສຶກສາຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ທ່ານສາມາດອ່ານລາຍລະອຽດຂອງການຄົ້ນຄວ້າກ່ອນການຕັດສິນໃຈທີ່ຈະເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ. ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຂໍສະແດງຄວາມຂອບໃຈໃນການກໍ່ລະນີທີ່ທ່ານຕັດສິນໃຈທີ່ຈະເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ ແຕ່ໃນກໍ່ລະນີທີ່ທ່ານຕັດສິນໃຈບໍ່ເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າກໍ່ຂໍສະແດງຄວາມຂອບໃຈໃນການພິຈາລະນາຂອງທ່ານເຊັ່ນກັນ.

ຂໍ້ມູນຂອງນັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າ

ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຊື່ ໄພທອງ ຈັນທະວິໄລ ນັກສຶກສາປະລິນຍາໂທ ສາຂາການສຶກສາກ່ຽວກັບການພັດທະນາ, ພາກວິຊາພູມິສາດ, ສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມ ແລະ ວິທະຍາສາດໄລກ, ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກິດໂຮຍເວລາວິງຕັນ. ການຄົ້ນຄວ້າຂອງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ແມ່ນເພື່ອຕອບສະໜອງໃຫ້ກັບການຂຽນບົດວິທະຍານິພົນລະດັບປະລິນຍາໂທຂອງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າເອງ.

ຈຸດປະສົງຂອງການສຶກສາຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ແມ່ນຫຍັງ?

ການສຶກສາຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ແມ່ນມຸ່ງເນັ້ນໃສ່ປະສົບການໃນການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ແລະ ບຸດທະວິທີຕ່າງໆໃນການພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນ ຈາກມຸມມອງຂອງນັກພັດທະນາ ຜູ້ທີ່ເຮັດວຽກ ແລະ ມີປະສົບການຕົວຈິງກັບຊຸມຊົນ. ການສຶກສາໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ແມ່ນຈະເກັບກໍາຈາກປະສົບການຂອງນັກພັດທະນາທີ່ເປັນຄົນລາວເອງ ແລະ ນັກພັດທະນາທີ່ເປັນຄົນຕ່າງປະເທດພ້ອມ. ທັງນີ້ ເພື່ອສຶກສາ ແລະ ຮວມຮວບວິທີການການເຂົ້າຫາຊຸມຊົນ, ການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ແລະ ການພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນ ເພື່ອເປັນທິດທາງທີ່ດີ ແລະ ມີປະໂຫຍດໃຫ້ກັບວຽກງານການພັດທະນາ.

ການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ໄດ້ຮັບອະນຸມັດຈາກຄະນະກຳມະການຈາລຶຍະທຳສໍາລັບມະນຸດ ຂອງມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກິດໂຮຍ ເວລາວິງຕັນ ໂດຍອີງໃສ່ເອກະສານການອະນຸມັດສະບັບເລກທີ 0000024502.

ທ່ານສາມາດມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້ໄດ້ແນວໃດ?

ຖ້າທ່ານເຫັນດີທີ່ຈະມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ, ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຍິນດີທີ່ຈະສໍາພາດບ່ອນທີ່ທ່ານເລືອກ ເຊິ່ງການສໍາພາດໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ມີເນື້ອຫາກ່ຽວກັບປະສົບການໃນການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ. ການສໍາພາດຈະໃຊ້ເວລາປະມານ 40 ຫາ 60 ນາທີ. ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຈະໄດ້ບັນທຶກການສໍາພາດ ແລະ ຈະຂຽນເນື້ອຫາການສໍາພາດໃນເວລາຕໍ່ມາ ທ່ານສາມາດຂໍໃຈການສໍາພາດໃນເວລາໃດກໍ່ໄດ້ຕາມທີ່ທ່ານຕ້ອງການ ໂດຍບໍ່ຈໍາເປັນຕ້ອງແຈ້ງເຫດຜົນໃດໆ. ທ່ານສາມາດຖອນຕົວອອກຈາກການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້ໄດ້ຕາມທີ່ທ່ານຕ້ອງການ ໂດຍບໍ່ຈໍາເປັນຕ້ອງແຈ້ງເຫດຜົນໃດໆ. ທ່ານສາມາດຖອນຕົວອອກຈາກການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້ໄດ້ຕາມທີ່ທ່ານຕ້ອງການ ໂດຍບໍ່ຈໍາເປັນຕ້ອງແຈ້ງເຫດຜົນໃດໆ.

ຈາກການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມໃນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້ານີ້ໂດຍການຕິດຕໍ່ຫາຂ້າພະເຈົ້າກ່ອນວັນທີ 15 ກັນຍາ 2017. ໃນກໍ່ລະນີທີ່ທ່ານຖອນຕົວອອກຈາກການຄົ້ນຄວ້າຂໍ້ມູນທັງໝົດທີ່ທ່ານໄດ້ໃຫ້ມາຈະຖືກທຳລາຍຖິ້ມ ຫຼື ສົ່ງກັບຄືນຫາຕົວທ່ານເອງ.

ຈະເກີດຍັງຂຶ້ນກັບຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ທ່ານໄດ້ນຳສະເໜີ?

ຂໍ້ມູນຂອງທ່ານຈະຖືກຮັກສາເປັນຄວາມລັບ, ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຈະບໍ່ລະບຸຊື່ຂອງທ່ານໃນບົດລາຍງານໃດໆ ແລະ ຂໍ້ມູນໃດໆກໍ່ ຕາມທີ່ຈະລະບຸວ່າແມ່ນທ່ານ ຈະມີແຕ່ອາຈານທີ່ປຶກສາ ແລະ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າທີ່ເປັນນັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າທີ່ຈະໄດ້ອ່ານ

ບັນທຶກຂອງການສຳພາດ. ເນື້ອໃນການສຳພາດ, ບົດສະຫຼຸບ ແລະ ສຽງບັນທຶກຂອງການສຳພາດ ຈະຖືກເກັບຮັກສາໄວ້ ຢ່າງປອດໄພ ແລະ ຈະຖືກທຳລາຍພາຍໃນໄລຍະ 5 ປີ ຫຼັງຈາກສຳເລັດການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ.

ການເຮັດບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າເປັນແນວ?

ຂໍ້ມູນຈາກການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ຈະຖືກນຳໃຊ້ໃນການຂຽນບົດວິທະຍານຸພົນປະລິນຍາໂທ ຊື່ຂອງທ່ານຈະບໍ່ຖືກ ອ້າງເຖິງຢູ່ໃນບົດລາຍງານຂອງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ. ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າອາດຈະນຳໃຊ້ຜົນຂອງການຄົ້ນຄວ້າເຂົ້າໃນການນຳສະເໜີຢູ່ກອງ ປະຊຸມ ແລະ ບົດລາຍງານທາງວິຊາການ. ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຈະເປັນຄົນດູແລບໍ່ໃຫ້ລະບຸລາຍລະອຽດຂໍ້ມູນຂອງຕົວທ່ານໃນບົດ ສະເໜີ ຫຼື ບົດລາຍງານໃດໆ.

ໃນເມື່ອທ່ານຕົກລົງທີ່ຈະເຂົ້າຮ່ວມການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ສິດຂອງທ່ານໃນການມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມມີຢັ້ງແນ່?

ທ່ານບໍ່ຈຳເປັນຕ້ອງຍອມຮັບການເຊື່ອເຊີນໃນການເຂົ້າຮ່ວມ ໃນກໍລະນີທີ່ທ່ານບໍ່ຕ້ອງການ, ຖ້າທ່ານຕົກລົງທີ່ຈະ ເຂົ້າ ຮ່ວມ ສິດຂອງທ່ານມີດັ່ງລຸ່ມນີ້:

- ທ່ານສາມາດເລືອກທີ່ຈະບໍ່ຕອບຄຳຖາມ;
- ໃນຂະນະທີ່ມີການສຳພາດ ທ່ານສາມາດຂໍໃຫ້ຢຸດເຊົາການບັນທຶກສຽງໃນຕອນໃດກໍ່ໄດ້;
- ທ່ານສາມາດຖອນຕົວອອກຈາກການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ໃນເວລາໃດກໍ່ໄດ້ກ່ອນວັນທີ 15 ກັນຍາ 2017;
- ທ່ານສາມາດຖາມຄຳຖາມກ່ຽວກັບການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຕອນໃດກໍ່ໄດ້;
- ທ່ານຈະໄດ້ຮັບສຳເນົາການບັນທຶກສຽງສຳພາດ;
- ທ່ານສາມາດອ່ານ ແລະ ໃຫ້ຄຳເຫັນຕໍ່ກັບການສະຫຼຸບເນື້ອໃນການສຳພາດ;
- ທ່ານມີສິດທີ່ຈະເຫັນດີໃຫ້ມີການໃຊ້ນາມສົມມຸດຕິກວ່າການໃຊ້ຊື່ແທ້ຂອງທ່ານ;
- ທ່ານສາມາດອ່ານບົດລາຍງານຂອງການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ໂດຍການສົ່ງອີເມວຫານັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າເພື່ອຂໍບົດສະຫຼຸບ

ທ່ານສາມາດຕິດຕໍ່ຫາພາກສ່ວນໃດໃນກໍລະນີທີ່ທ່ານມີຄຳຖາມ ຫຼື ມີບັນຫາ?

ຖ້າທ່ານມີຄຳຖາມ ບໍ່ວ່າຈະເປັນຄຳຖາມໃນປະຈຸບັນ ຫຼື ໃນຕໍ່ໜ້າ ທ່ານສາມາດຕິດຕໍ່ຫາ:

ນັກສຶກສາ:

ຊື່: ທ້າວ ໄພທອງ ຈັນທະວິໄລ

ທີ່ຢູ່ອີເມວຂອງມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລ

chanthphot@myvu.ac.nz

ອາຈານທີ່ປຶກສາ:

ຊື່: ສາດສະດາຈານ ຈອນ ໄອເວີຕັນ

ໜ້າທີ່: ຫົວໜ້າພາກວິຊາການສຶກສາການພັດທະນາ

ພາກວິຊາພູມມິສາດ, ສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມ ແລະ ວິທະຍາສາດໄລກ

ພາກວິຊາ: ພາກວິຊາພູມມິສາດ, ສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມ ແລະ ວິທະຍາສາດໄລກ

ເບີໂທລະສັບ: 04 4635281

john.overton@vu.ac.nz

ຂໍ້ມູນຂອງຄະນະກຳມາທິການຈະລິຍະທຳສຳລັບມະນຸດ

ຖ້າທ່ານມີຂໍ້ກັງວົນກ່ຽວກັບການຈັດຕັ້ງປະຕິບັດກ່ຽວກັບດ້ານຈະລິຍະທຳຂອງການສຶກສາຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ ທ່ານ ສາມາດຕິດຕໍ່ຫາ ຜູ້ຮັບຜິດຊອບຂອງຄະນະກຳມາທິການຈະລິຍະທຳສຳລັບມະນຸດຂອງມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກຕໍາເລຍ (Victoria University HEC Convener): ຮອງສາດສະດາຈານ ຊູຊານ ໄຄເບັດ (Associate Professor Susan Corbett). ທີ່ຢູ່ອີເມວ: susan.corbett@vu.ac.nz, ເບີໂທລະສັບ: +64-4-463 5480.

Appendix 4 Research Consent Form English Version

The Experiences of Development Practitioners and Challenges in Community Engagement in Laos

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for five years.

Researcher: Phothong Chanthavilay, School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point before 15/09/2017, without giving any reason, and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.
- The information I have provided will be destroyed five years after the research is finished.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor. I understand that the results will be used for a *Masters* thesis and a summary of the results may be used in academic reports and/or presented at conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.

- I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to my organisation in any reports on this research:

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I would like a summary of my interview:

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I would like to receive a summary of the final report and have added my email address below.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix 5 Research Consent Form Lao Version

ການສຶກສາບຸດທະວິທີການເຂົ້າຫາ ແລະ ການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ຈາກມຸມມອງຂອງນັກພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນໃນລາວ

ແບບຟອມຂໍ້ຄວາມເຫັນດີໃນການສໍາພາດ

ແບບຟອມນີ້ຈະຖືກນໍາໃຊ້ ແລະ ເກັບຮັກສາໄວ້ເປັນເວລາ 5 ປີ

ນັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າ: ທ້າວ ໂພທອງ ຈັນທະວິໄລ ນັກສຶກສາປະລິນຍາໂທ ສາຂາການສຶກສາກ່ຽວກັບການພັດທະນາ, ພາກ
ວິຊາພູມິສາດ, ສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມ ແລະ ວິທະຍາສາດໄລກ, ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກຕໍຣີແອນເວວລິງຕັນ.

- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ອ່ານລາຍລະອຽດຂອງຂໍ້ມູນ ແລະ ນັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າກໍ່ໄດ້ອະທິບາຍກ່ຽວກັບບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າໂດຍລວມໃຫ້
ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າແລ້ວ ດັ່ງນັ້ນຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຍິນດີທີ່ຈະຕອບຄໍາຖາມດ້ວຍຄວາມເຕັມໃຈ ແລະ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າເຂົ້າໃຈວ່າ
ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າສາມາດຖາມຄໍາຖາມໃນເວລາທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າມີຂໍ້ສົງໄສ.
- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຍິນຍອມທີ່ຈະໃຫ້ມີການບັນທຶກສຽງໃນລະຫວ່າງການສໍາພາດ.

ຂ້າຈະເຈົ້າເຂົ້າໃຈວ່າ:

- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າສາມາດຖອນຕົວອອກຈາກການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໃນຄັ້ງໄດ້ທຸກເວລາກ່ອນວັນທີ 15 ກັນຍາ 2017 ໂດຍບໍ່
ຈໍາເປັນທີ່ຕ້ອງແຈ້ງເຫດຜົນໃດໆ ແລະ ທຸກຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ໃຫ້ໄປຈະຖືກສົ່ງກັບຄືນມາໃຫ້ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ຫຼື
ຖືກທໍາລາຍຖິ້ມ.
- ຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ໃຫ້ໄປຈະຖືກທໍາລາຍພາຍໃນ 5 ປີ ພາຍຫຼັງທີ່ການຄົ້ນຄວ້າໄດ້ສໍາເລັດ
- ທຸກໆຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ໃຫ້ໄປ ຈະຖືກປິດເປັນຄວາມລັບໂດຍນັກຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ແລະ ອາຈານທີ່ປຶກສາ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ
ເຂົ້າໃຈວ່າຜົນຂອງຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ໃຫ້ໄປ ຈະຖືກນໍາໄປໃຊ້ໃນການຂຽນບົດວິທະຍານິພົນໃນລະດັບ
ປະລິນຍາໂທ ແລະ ຜົນການຂອງການສຶກສາດັ່ງກ່າວ ອາດຈະຖືກນໍາໄປໃຊ້ສໍາລັບບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າທາງວິຊາການ
ແລະ /ຫລື ຖືກນໍາສະເໜີໃນກອງປະຊຸມຕ່າງໆ.
- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າອະນຸຍາດໃຫ້ຂໍ້ມູນ ຫຼື ຄວາມຄິດເຫັນຕ່າງໆ ທີ່ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ນໍາສະເໜີໄປ ໃນບົດ ແມ່ນ ບໍ່ແມ່ນ
ລາຍງານການຄົ້ນຄວ້າດັ່ງກ່າວສາມາດລະບຸວ່າແມ່ນມາຈາກຫ້ອງການຂອງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ: ☐ ☐
- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຕ້ອງການບົດສະຫຼຸບຂອງການສໍາພາດຂອງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ: ແມ່ນ ບໍ່ແມ່ນ
☐ ☐
- ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຕ້ອງການບົດສະຫຼຸບຫຍໍ້ຂອງບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າວິທະຍານິພົນ ແລະ ລະບຸທີ່ຢູ່ອີເມວ ແມ່ນ ບໍ່ແມ່ນ
ຂອງ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າດັ່ງລຸ່ມນີ້ໃສ່ໃນບັດດັ່ງກ່າວ ☐ ☐

ລາຍເຊັນຂອງຜູ້ຖືກສໍາພາດ _____

ຊື່ຂອງຜູ້ຖືກສໍາພາດ: _____

ວັນທີ: _____

ຂໍ້ມູນຕິດຕໍ່ _____

Appendix 6 Interview Question Guide

Interview Guide

Key question: ‘What are the experiences and challenges of development practitioners who work on the ground in Lao PDR’

Sub-questions:

1. How are the experiences and challenges of local and international development practitioners different?
2. How have development practitioners dealt with challenges and difficulties encountered in their development practice?
3. What have been the most challenging and significant issues when practising development in Laos?
4. What did international development practitioners consider before working in Laos? How has it changed after working on the ground?

The interview questions for each group of participants will cover these topic areas:

Group 1: Local Development Practitioners (Gov’t Officials)

- How long have they been working as development practitioners?
- What do they consider before working in the community?
- What are difficulties and challenges that they have encountered in their experience? How do they cope with them?
- How do they understand ‘development work’ in Laos?
- What are community approaches they have used? Which ones are effective and which ones are not really?
- Have they ever worked with international development practitioners? How was it?

Group 2: Local Development Practitioners (NGOs)

- How long have they been working as development practitioners?
- What do they consider before working in the community?
- What are difficulties and challenges that they have encountered in their experience? How do they cope with them?
- How do they understand 'development work' in Laos?
- What are community approaches they have used? Which ones are effective and which ones are not really?
- Have they ever worked with international development practitioners?
How was it?

Group 3: Western Development Practitioners

- How long have they been working in Laos and as development practitioners?
- What do they consider before working in the community?
- What are difficulties and challenges that they have encountered in their experience? How do they cope with them?
- How do they understand 'development work' in Laos? Was it different before they came to Laos?
- What are community approaches they have used? Which ones are effective and which ones are not really?
- How do they deal with cultural differences?
- Have they ever worked with local development practitioners? How did this work in practice?

Appendix 7 Support Letter from Supervisor

Prof John Overton
Telephone +64-4-4635281
Email john.overton@vuw.ac.nz

24 May 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write a letter in support of Phothong Chanthavilay's research for his Development Studies thesis on "The Experiences of Development Practitioners and Challenges in Community Engagement in Laos". He is enrolled as a master's student in Development Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand and the research project is working towards his Master's thesis. His research will be conducted from June to September 2017 in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR. I am supervising his thesis research and I am the Director of the Postgraduate Programme in Development Studies.

The main objective of this research is to explore the experiences of both local and international development practitioners who have worked and engaged with community development in Laos. The work involves interviews with government officials, Lao national development practitioners who work with NGOs and international development practitioners in Laos. This research will provide a better understanding of issues, challenges and opportunities that helps inform development policy and community development practice. His research proposal has been approved by the Head of School and obtained ethics approval from the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington.

As Phothong's supervisor, I fully support his research programme towards his Master's thesis. I would be grateful for any assistance you could offer him.

If you need any additional information from me please contact me at Victoria University of Wellington or calling me at +644 4635281, and my email address is john.overton@vuw.ac.nz. Or you can contact Phothong Chanthavilay by calling at +85620 5555 9972 or +64 220 099 0374, and his email address is johnyinspiration@gmail.com.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof. John Overton
Director, Postgraduate Programme in Development Studies

Appendix 8 Support Letter from Home Organisation in Laos

ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ
ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ເອກະພາບ ວັດທະນາຖາວອນ

ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລແຫ່ງຊາດ
ຄະນະວິທະຍາສາດສັງຄົມ

ເລກທີ...732.../ຄສຄ

ນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ, ວັນທີ...31...ກໍລະກົດ 2017

ຫນັງສືສະເໜີ

ຮຽນ: ທ່ານ.....

(ໂດຍຜ່ານການຈັດຕັ້ງທີ່ກ່ຽວຂ້ອງ)

ເລື່ອງ: ຂໍອະນຸຍາດເກັບຂໍ້ມູນ ໂດຍຜ່ານການສຳພາດພະນັກງານທີ່ເປັນນັກພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນພາຍໃນ
ອົງການຂອງທ່ານ

- ອີງຕາມ ຂໍ້ຕົກລົງຂອງລັດຖະມົນຕີວ່າດ້ວຍການອະນຸມັດໃຫ້ພະນັກງານໄປປົກຄະດັບປະລິນຍາໂທຢູ່ທີ່
ປະເທດນິວຊີແລນ ສະບັບເລກທີ 0096/ສສກ.ຈຕ ລົງວັນທີ 07 ມັງກອນ 2016
- ອີງຕາມ ຫນັງສືສະໜັບສະໜູນການເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນເພື່ອນຳໄປປະກອບໃສ່ບົດວິທະຍານິພົນຂອງຜູ້ກ່ຽວ ຈາກ
ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກິດໂຮຍເວວລົງຕົ້ນ ປະເທດນິວຊີແລນ.

ຄະນະບໍດີຄະນະວິທະຍາສາດສັງຄົມ ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລແຫ່ງຊາດ ຂໍຖືເປັນກຽດຢ່າງສູງຮຽນສະເໜີມາຍັງທ່ານ
ເພື່ອຂໍຄວາມຮ່ວມມື ແລະ ອະນຸຍາດໃຫ້ ອາຈານ ໂພທອງ ຈັນທະວິໄລ ເຊິ່ງປະຈຸບັນກຳລັງສຶກສາລະດັບປະລິນຍາໂທຢູ່ທີ່
ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລວິກິດໂຮຍເວວລົງຕົ້ນ ປະເທດນິວຊີແລນ ມາເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນຢູ່ໃນສຳນັກງານຂອງທ່ານ ໂດຍຜ່ານການ
ສຳພາດພະນັກງານທີ່ມີປະສົບການໃນການເຮັດວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ແລະ ເປັນນັກພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນ. ສຳລັບຂໍ້ມູນ
ດັ່ງກ່າວແມ່ນຈະນຳໄປປະກອບໃສ່ໃນບົດວິທະຍານິພົນຂອງຜູ້ກ່ຽວ ພາຍໃຕ້ຫົວຂໍ້ “ບຸດທະວິທີໃນການເຂົ້າຫາ ແລະ ເຮັດ
ວຽກຮ່ວມກັບຊຸມຊົນ ຈາກມຸມມອງ ແລະ ປະສົບການຂອງນັກພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນໃນລາວ”.

ສຳລັບເນື້ອໃນແລະລາຍລະອຽດຕ່າງໆຂອງການເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນໃນຄັ້ງນີ້ແມ່ນຜູ້ກ່ຽວຈະເປັນຄົນປະສານເພີ່ມເຕີມ ໂດຍ
ອີງຕາມຄວາມສະດວກຂອງຜູ້ທີ່ຈະໃຫ້ສຳພາດ.

ດັ່ງນັ້ນ, ຈຶ່ງຮຽນມາເພື່ອຂໍຄວາມຮ່ວມມື ແລະ ອະນຸຍາດໃຫ້ຜູ້ກ່ຽວດຳເນີນການເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນດ້ວຍ.

ຮຽນມາເພື່ອຂໍຄວາມເອົາໃຈໃສ່ນັບຖືຢ່າງສູງ

ສສ ບຸນມາກ ອິນທິພອນ