

Laos – Interview with Frank Reimann, County Director of CARE International



HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK FOR CARE AND WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

Driven by a desire to make this world a better place I left our family business in Germany and pursued graduate studies in Management (MBA Economic Development) and Cross Cultural Leadership (MA Intercultural Studies) about 12 years ago. Upon graduation I was Country Director in Cambodia and Cameroon with another international Development agency before joining CARE Australia as Country Director for Laos in March 2006.

My job allows me to use all my creativity, emotional intelligence, management skills and love for people, which facilitates lasting change so that poverty is overcome and people live in dignity and security.

WHAT ARE THE FOCUS AREAS FOR CARE IN LAOS?

CARE International in Laos is focusing on Integrated Rural Development, Disaster Preparedness and Reproductive Health. We have adapted a geographical focus with programs in Sayaburi, Sekong and Phonsaly Province plus Vientiane Capital and Province.

WHAT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING/MEMORABLE MOMENTS DURING YOUR TIME WORKING FOR CARE?

I find it most rewarding when I can see how individuals and communities we work with have been empowered to enjoy an improved quality of life.

Noi, a young woman from a rural area of Laos comes to mind. Driven by the socio-economic dimensions of living in rural Laos she came to Vientiane to find work to support her family. Not having finished school and without marketable skills Noi quickly ended up as a low paid waitress who offered her company to male customers for exchange of an 'extra tip'. Through CARE's work Noi learned about the risks of unprotected sex and participated in training as a hairdresser which allowed her to make a choice and earn a living in security and dignity.

PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW THE NEED AROSE FOR COMPUTERSHARE TO SPONSOR A PROJECT IN PHONGSALY AND WHY THIS PROVINCE WAS CHOSEN?

Phongsaly Province is characterised by steep hills and mountains, with very little flat land. This means that the communities in the area cultivate their fields on slopes with a gradient that is often 50-60%. The steep land limits the quantity and quality of the crops, which fail to provide adequate food for daily needs. Rice production falls well short of requirements, for example almost half of the population in Khua and Samphan lack rice for 3 months of the year, and an alarmingly high number of people lack rice for 6 months of the year (Samphan 24%; Khua 16%). This must be addressed along with other issues outlined below.

Health issues are pressing and include high rates of:

- diarrhoea; linked to a lack of water supply systems and poor sanitation and hygiene
- coughs, flu and pneumonia; especially amongst children
- goitre and amenia, linked to limited knowledge of good nutritional practices and poor diets
- women's reproductive health related complaints
- malaria

With Computershare's support, CARE will build on planning and food security initiatives already underway in the area. This means that our work with Computershare will be based on specific needs already identified by the villagers themselves. It will provide tangible and practical benefits for the villagers, and consolidate and enhance the overall impact on health and livelihoods in 5 target villages.

WHAT WILL THIS FUNDING ALLOW YOU TO ACHIEVE IN THE LONG TERM AND WHAT BENEFITS WILL IT BRING TO THE COMMUNITY?

The project will assist the communities in having consistent and closer clean water supply, improved basic health services, and opportunities for increased income through access to markets.

HOW LONG BEFORE THE COMMUNITIES START TO SEE THE POSITIVE CHANGES THAT THIS PROJECT WILL BRING?

Water supply construction will have immediate benefits:

- > Water supply is clean and consistent
- > Reduced time required by women and children to collect daily household water

Other activities will have longer-term benefits:

- > Market access will depend on products identified and markets sourced. It is hoped that income will be earned from these activities within 18 months of project implementation.

CARE IS VERY STRONG IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS, PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE THE COMPUTERSHARE-SPONSORED PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

> Training and in-the-field support to build skills, confidence and understanding of people in the community to address development issues. For example, training of health workers will mean there are people with a better understanding of health issues available in the village itself.

> Water User Groups (WUG) will be established to manage and maintain the water supply units. This system has been found to be a sustainable way of ensuring supply of water to the village in other areas CARE has worked. The WUG's also create a sense of ownership and responsibility for the water supply unit amongst the community.

> The project will work with income generation groups that will provide them with skills in negotiating prices with traders, to help identify new or emerging markets, and develop quality of produce/products for increased market value. The skills, knowledge and relationships developed as part of this activity will continue beyond the life of the project.