

Policy impact in Lao PDR: from research to practice.

Deliverable 1

Report on determinants of policy-making and research to policy impact in Laos identified through literature reviews (English and Lao) and ethnographic observation.

Small research and development activity

SSS/2020/142



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ACRONYMS

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	Agriculture, Forestry and Development Company
CPC	Central Party Committee
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DAFI	Development of Agriculture, Forestry and Industry Company
DG	Director General
DoF	Department of Forestry
DOPLA	Department of Policy and Legal Affairs
EBP	Evidence based policy
FS2035	Forestry Strategy 2035
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoL	Government of Laos
LFAP	Land and Forest Allocation Program
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
Lao PDR	Lao Peoples Democratic Republic
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MADC	Mountainous Area Development Corporation
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
NA	National Assembly
NAPPA	National Academy of Politics and Public Administration
NEM	New Economic Mechanism
NLA	National Library of Australia
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic and Development Plan
NT2	Mam Theun II
NUoL	National University of Laos
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PM	Prime Minister
PPA	Provincial People's Assembly
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
SRA	Small Research and Development Activity

1 INTRODUCTION

June 2021. A Lao ethnographer is in a breakout room at a consultation meeting. Fifteen people sit around a long, polished table. Seventeen more have joined online. A strategy document is under discussion. They are supposed to be commenting on it, but most people are quietly looking at the document. 'People don't seem completely open. There are long moments of silence. It seems they want to say something but then let it go, just go with the flow of what is already in the strategy,' the ethnographer notes. It is only 8.52 AM, but suddenly a weariness falls on her. A woman offers some comments, suggesting that the strategy is not consistent with the relevant law that stipulates what this strategy should cover. 'Please focus on the contents,' the facilitator replies curtly. The ethnographer is shocked but stays silent, noting in her jottings: 'I thought she was talking about the contents? Or was it because she is a woman, so her comments are not treated as valid? Is this gender bias? Or am I imagining things? I must keep listening, don't get sidetracked!' The breakout room goes on, with the facilitator fending off each comment. 'I won't give any further comments,' the ethnographer jots, 'if that is how they are received. Were we invited just to show protocol was met, to show that many organizations have been consulted? In that case, we needn't have come at all.' After the coffee break, however, the facilitator changed tack. He welcomed comments, especially from the woman he had dismissed earlier. 'I don't know why he changed,' the ethnographer noted, but 'now he is how a facilitator should be.'

This ethnographic vignette illustrates some of the most important conclusions of this report. Policy-making processes in Laos are highly consultative: meetings, consultations, feedback and responding to problems raised by people and politicians alike are central to the very idea of what policy is. There are norms about what kind of behaviour is expected at these meetings, about which kind of feedback is most appropriate, and how it is best phrased. Sometimes these norms are not met. There are core principles about how decisions should be made, and ideals about unity and equality, but these ideals are not always realised. That said, having some idea of what the norms, principles and ideals at play are will assist anyone who wishes to operate effectively in policy-making circles in Laos. This report was commissioned by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) to assist that agency and its researchers in understanding and navigating the policy processes of Laos, with an eye on facilitating research impact. But it is also intended for anyone who is interested in policy processes in Laos, especially how these look when analysed using the tools and methods of anthropology.

This report summarises the activities and findings of the English and Lao language literature reviews and the ethnographic study for SRA (Small Research and Development Activity) SSS/2020/142. This report is complementary to Smith and Kanowski (2022), which reports the activities and findings drawn from the review of Case Studies conducted as part of the same SRA. The two reports approach the same question—policy processes and determinants of research impact on policy—from different, related, sets of materials. To avoid unnecessary duplication, this report will cite Smith and Kanowski where possible instead of repeating. It will also build on their findings, showing how issues identified in the review of the Case Studies can be understood in the context of existing literature and ethnographic attention to Lao policy-making processes.

For a general introduction to SRA SSS/2020/142 and the project's conceptual framework, the reader is directed to Smith et al. (2022). In brief, the research question for this SRA was:

what processes, practices and circumstances facilitate or hinder the influence and uptake of ACIAR commissioned research within Lao policy contexts?

And the topic of this report is:

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the determinants of policy-making and research impact in Laos.

A review of the English literature identified the main existing interventions on this topic. Because this literature is in English, it inevitably over-represented how policy-making processes and research in Laos appeared to outsiders. The Lao literature review investigated how the same issues are discussed in Lao sources, including newspapers, speeches, theses and policy documents. The ethnographic element of the research sought to deepen this understanding by investigating how these issues are lived in real life situations: in consultation meetings, Ministry offices and the halls of the NA (National Assembly).

The main findings are as follows:

- The Lao People Revolutionary Party (LPRP) is the main policy making body in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). It provides leadership on broad policy directions, guidance on implementation, and political training for bureaucrats and leaders.
- Policy has a another meaning in Lao, which appears to have been propagated after the LPRP came to power. This is the understanding that policy is an incentive, subsidy, waiver or pension which is given to people in recognition of their special needs or worthiness. This kind of policy can often be immediate and quite short-term, in contrast to the broad policy directions from the government which are generally long-term.
- The core principle of decision-making in Laos is democratic centralism. This phrase has many meanings, but currently seems to be used primarily to indicate the extensive consultations that go into any policy decision, and the way policy is ideally very responsive to feedback from people and industry. However, unlike unchecked democracy, the end goal of democratic centralism is unity, and the feedback in these consultations should never be divisive or lead to entrenched factionalism. Democratic centralism can also be used to mean that the Party rules on behalf of all people, not just one class or segment of society.
- The National Assembly (NA) and Provincial Peoples' Assemblies are an often overlooked but very important part of policy-making processes in Lao PDR. They are among the main conduits for feedback between policymakers and the populace.
- Short-term policy is often driven by the urgency of hot topics. This kind of policy presents special challenges to ACIAR scientists who aim to achieve policy impact, such as short time frames and unclear paths by which ACIAR researchers learn of hot topics early enough to be of any use in the response to the hot topic before it goes cold.
- Many bureaucrats and researchers in Laos contend with two realities (Bartlett 2013): they are both technical staff—specialists in their disciplines—and also political Party members. While sometimes hot topics are presented as technical problems requiring an urgent scientific and evidence-based approach, at other times urgent policy drives are driven by political considerations requiring a response that it is difficult for anyone outside the Party to fully understand.
- Policy churn is an entrenched feature of Lao policy-making settings, as it is in many other countries around the world, even if the reasons behind in Laos' case churn are also rooted in Laos' unique circumstances. This contributes to certain characteristics of the lived reality of policy-making: busyness, policy complexity, uncertainty.
- Researchers wanting to impact policy may find entry points in: the political culture of emulating outstanding results, the demand for evidence in settings like the NA, collaborative

approaches including involving many parties from very early stages in the research and taking part in consultation meetings that invite feedback on policies.

2 CONCEPTS AND METHODS

A detailed description of concepts and methods used in this study is provided in ‘Deliverable 2 Report on Concepts, Methodology, Methods, and Analytical Framework’ (Smith et al 2022). A summary of the concepts and methods applied to the ethnography and literature reviews and analysis described in this study are summarised below.

2.1 Literature Review Methods

2.1.1 English-language literature

I based the English-language literature review on a Scopus search [terms: (lao OR laos) AND policy]. This yielded 1,112 documents. I excluded documents published before 1991, conference papers, computer science publications (Lao is a common word used in coding) and ephemera (such as letters, notes and conference reviews). This reduced the sample to 986 documents. I then read the titles and selected the most relevant, yielding a longlist of 174 documents. I read these abstracts, culling those that on closer inspection were of limited relevance, yielding a shortlist of 56 documents (NB I included publications if they mentioned ACIAR, even if that document did not seem particularly intent on investigating the policy research nexus).

I then read shortlisted items in full, gleaning more leads to relevant documents and links to the older, ‘classic’ literature from their bibliographies or from my own knowledge of the literature. Some sources were also removed from the shortlist at this stage, if they were evidently of limited relevance, with the result that the final shortlist consisted of 94 documents. As the literature review proceeded, it became clear that forestry policy would be a focus of the ethnographic/interview work of the project, so I progressively included forest policy literature as relevant in the literature review.

Each item was tagged and notated to identify themes and trends in the literature. These were summarised in a first draft that was circulated for review, comment and further reading recommendations. As the SRA progressed, the Case Studies and Ethnographic research teams asked interviewees for recommendations for reading, and in that way identified some important further literature.

2.1.2 Lao-language literature

The Lao language literature review presented very different possibilities and challenges to a standard literature review. Databases, such as Scopus, were not functional for Lao language sources. Saowapha Viravong was engaged as a Research Assistant and worked with NUoL (National University of Laos) counterparts to consult the NAFRI (National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute) library database but found that the online catalogue had an extremely basic functionality and was inefficient to use. They only identified three documents using this method. Searching for sources on GoL (Government of Laos) websites proved to be more rewarding. A number of periodicals are published by the Propaganda and Training of the Central Party Committee (PTCPC) and the Central Party Organising Committee (CPOC). It is worth noting that former and current chairs of PTCPC and CPOC are also members of the Politburo and the Central Party Committee. These two committees take a leading role, guiding the high-level workings of the Party. Therefore, we approached these journals as useful indicators of Party viewpoints and philosophy, with Saowapha and myself closely examining a number of examples drawn from these sources. These committees each host a website and social media feeds, featuring content such as videos and news reports, and these were included in our search. These materials proved to be very useful in providing us with a better understanding about policy in the Lao context. In addition, they provided examples

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of key terminology in context, and some cultural background. However, these required substantial time to process. Saowapha and the NuoL team members shared the workload of reading and, in select cases (with my involvement), translation. An Excel spreadsheet was created of newspaper articles, which was useful for the ethnographic work. During the extension, this dataset was uploaded into NVIVO¹ and coded for keywords in Lao.

As we conducted the interviews and ethnographic aspects of this work, we asked for recommendations for readings towards the Lao literature review. In this way, we gathered internal documents (from MAF on policy processes; and Forestry Strategy documents and NAPPA theses). These materials were useful and relevant to the Lao literature review. The National Library of Australia (NLA) (located in Canberra, ACT, Australia) has Lao language holdings, and we conducted a database search using Lao language search terms. The Lao word for 'policy' did not retrieve many useful results, so we used our understanding of the political structure, and the awareness of publications produced by various key sectors of the Lao political structure produced by the search of the websites, to identify relevant holdings at the NLA. Through this process, we found some rare sources, such as the 'red books' or 'selected speeches of Kaysone Phomvihane'. We also located relevant journals and historical documents in the NLA that may be harder to obtain to Laos itself. After careful review of these, we identified the most relevant to the research for translation.

The review of contemporary literature (newspapers, theses, policy documents) led us to conclude that the canon of Lao policy making is found in the collected works of Kaysone (which we were very fortunate to locate in the NLA). His words are still regularly cited to this day in newspapers and NAPPA theses, and familiarity with his thought is a key topic of NAPPA training, which almost all significant policymakers undergo. Throughout this report, frequent citation is made to Kaysone's comments on various topics. The reason is that midway through the project we concluded that Kaysone's speeches form a kind of condensed political philosophy of the Lao state. When he spoke, he was not just expressing his views: he was speaking on behalf of the LPRP, and often presenting guidelines and principles for the LRPR regime which are still fundamental to the Lao PDR today.

We identified a subset of the Lao literature review for translation. Among these, the works of Kaysone were the lions share. This may be the most significant attempt yet to translate Kaysone's works into English. However, at the end of the project it remained unclear—given copyright considerations—how these could be shared to a wider audience. We coded Kaysone's works in NVIVO and this analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of his vision for the Lao PDR.

2.2 Ethnographic methods

2.2.1 Methodological concepts

The ethnographic parts of this study proceeded along the lines of classic ethnographic fieldwork and analysis, modified for the special conditions presented by the study of policy and science, and by COVID-19. Ethics approval for the ethnographic work was obtained through the Australian National University (ANU) (Smith et al 2022).

Classic ethnographic fieldwork and analysis involves long-term immersion in a cultural context and a holistic study of how disparate phenomena—from the 'imponderabilia' of everyday life (Malinowski 1966) to enduring institutions, from bodily habits to myths and legends—are all in fact linked by an underlying cultural structure. Geertz developed the notion of culture as a text (1973), deepening an emphasis in English-language anthropology on the importance of local concepts, terms and expressions. Geertz argued that cultural interpretation requires contextualisation in local meanings, famously arguing that the difference between a wink and a twitch of the eye is purely this: the

¹ NVIVO is a qualitative data analysis software application for archiving, analysing and using qualitative data.

context, the intent and the meanings attached to it. The legacy of this ‘interpretive’ approach to anthropology is evident in this study: the project team have conducted research in Lao language wherever possible, identified key terms and contextualised these in both their formal definitions, but also in their meanings as evident in usage. Levi-Strauss (1963) advanced the power of ethnographic analysis by developing structural analysis as a methodology. His methodology for myth analysis addressed the problem of how to systematically identify patterns and themes from amongst the welter of facts, details, repetition and variation that are evident in any observation of existing people and their social settings. He argued that qualitative materials can be read like an orchestral score: both diachronically (an ‘as it happened’ account, over time) but also synchronically (for the underlying structure). The problem with diachronic accounts is that they tend to be long and multiple: any witness to a car crash will tell a different story. Synchronic analysis is a methodology for working with such conflicting stories, and distilling from complexity the repeated refrains and their relationships to one another which are the underlying structure.

The ethnographic study of policy and science both converge in the approach of insisting that these fields, once considered inappropriate sites for ethnographic studies, *are* amenable to ethnographic analysis. Both draw on the tradition of ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972), which is to say, studying elites. Both attend to the materiality of science and policy, follow documents and attend meetings, and also follow the often-unintended consequences of actions taken by these elites. Tess Lea (2020) has argued that the ethnography of policy reveals ‘policy worlds’ (also called ‘carpet worlds’ and ‘policy citadels’) that are peopled not only by individuals, but also by the specters of policies past. These ‘ambient policies’ continue to shape conditions in the present, including very material factors such as the objects we use and the foods we eat. She contrasts ambient policy to ‘artefactual policies’, which are the policies that exist in documents, ‘recognized by unfriendly formats and technocratic or banally offensive writing’ (Lea 2020:26).

This project took place during the COVID-19 epidemic. Gökçe, Varma and Watanabe (2020) note that, even before the epidemic, the ‘classic’ model of long-term immersion in a field site far from home was no longer a realistic portrayal of most ethnographic work. Ethnographers today use multi-sited fieldwork, auto-ethnography and the internet. Often, researchers are constrained not only by the peculiarities of their field sites, but also by their personal lives (care commitments, mental and physical health, disability). This became only truer during the pandemic. For this SRA, travel restrictions associated with the pandemic meant that the face-to-face fieldwork planned for this SRA changed dramatically. ‘Patchwork ethnography’ (Gökçe, Varma and Watanabe 2020) refers to fieldwork that is realistic about such constraints and continues with ‘fragmentary but rigorous data’, while ‘working with rather than against the gaps’ that emerge when traditional fieldwork is impossible, in ways that ‘maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterizes so-called traditional fieldwork’ (2020, N.P.).

2.2.2 Ethnographic research activities

We originally planned to embed ethnographic fieldworkers (High and NuoL social scientists) in policy-making settings in Lao PDR (over 20 days/1 month). However, because of the COVID-19 crisis, international travel was impossible and so we switched to the Lao team running the ethnographic research under my remote supervision. I ran an ethnographic methods training day that was attended by Vilaythieng, Souphinh and Saowapha. Through this process, we discovered that there have been some problems in translating the concept of ethnographic research methods into Lao. We adopted the word ‘*somphaw whitanya*’ ຊີວະວິທະຍາ as the translation for ‘ethnography’, as is the convention in Thai, but we also discussed how the literal meaning of this word (science of ethnicities) does not really capture the contemporary meaning of ‘ethnography’ in English. These days, ethnographic research methods involve observation of day-to-day life, immersion in the field site and attempting to understand the perspective of people in that situation. It can be applied to any group, not just ethnic minorities. So, the training day focused on how to use ethnographic methods to

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study policymakers. We also discussed how we could achieve good results even under the challenging circumstances presented by COVID-19. We expected disruptions and agreed we would adapt the methods as and when these arose.

Our first approach was to contact the DOPLA (Department of Policy and Legal Affairs) and they agreed to an initial interview by NUoL researchers with the head of that office along with some technical officers attending as well. We did two further follow up visits (Lao ethnographers taking photos, deep hanging out and informal interviews). However, after that the DOPLA reported that there was no physical space to host embedded researchers. We later learnt that DOPLA was in the process of being dismantled, so it was understandable that they did not feel it was a good time to have external researchers observing the office. However, they remained available to answer our questions over the remaining months.

Using their personal networks, the Lao team members were able to arrange permission to do ethnographic research in the NA in the Opening Ceremony session of 2022, in March. Lockdowns in Vientiane, however, scuttled these plans as outsiders were not allowed into this session. When the NA met for its second session of the year, the personal contacts of our Lao team were no longer in the NA (their term had ended) and we were not able to get access again. Instead, we made ethnographic observations of the NA based on publicly available sources. We found that even accessing documents and recordings that were supposed to be public could still be challenging and required some persistence. We asked if there was a Hansard or equivalent, but we could not locate anything like this. We scoured YouTube to download recordings of key speeches, but we could not find any full recordings of the sessions and we later found that not all sessions of any given NA meeting are videotaped. In the end, we found the following to be the most useful sources in observing the NA:

- YouTube (openly accessible)
- Department of Media in Ministry, Information and Tourism video tapes of Opening Session (March Session)
- ‘The People’s Representative Newspaper’ the newspaper published by the NA
- The official Agenda of First Session (August session)
- Draft of the National Agenda, released at August meeting (we had this translated)
- ‘5 Focus Work of ministry of Agriculture & Forest’ (delivered by the Minister at 1st NA general meeting in August, as the MAF element of the National Agenda.

These are detailed in 7.1.1 Appendix 4.

Through other professional networks we obtained permission to embed researchers in the office preparing the Forestry Strategy 2035 and Vision 2050 in the Secretariate Unit of Forestry in MAF which was responsible for strategy, in this case collecting the material needed by those responsible for drafting the strategy. Ethnographic fieldwork here involved interviews with bureaucrats responsible for drafting the strategy, embedding researchers at the office and reading drafts of the document. This ethnographic work was again interrupted by COVID-19 lockdowns: for instance, the Lao team prepared to travel to the Vangvieng consultation meeting, but this meeting was cancelled because of travel restrictions.

Through the Secretariate we obtained an invitation to the June National Consultation meeting for the Forestry Strategy. This meeting ran for two full days, 29-30 of June 2021, in person and online. Various members of the team were able to participate in different break-out rooms and we shared a summary and reflections meeting amongst the team members afterwards. Team members attended two subsequent meetings (internal, MAF-only) in July (July 21st and 30th) where the FS2035 was

discussed after consultation. The second of these included an important set of comments by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry giving feedback on the existing draft strategy.

Analysis was completed by uploading and coding the materials gathered in the ethnographic work, including fieldnotes, translations, interview transcripts, speeches and documents, into NVIVO for storage and sharing amongst team members. Once in NVIVO, the documents were coded for themes.

3 RESULTS

This section describes the results of the literature review and ethnographic research. We firstly set out the results of the English language literature review. This contains many of the ‘established truths’ of the field and will likely be familiar to many readers of this document, with some comment on how questions from this literature shaped our ethnographic and Lao literature research. We then turn to the findings of the Lao language and ethnographic research. In some cases, these findings support and reinforce knowledge already established in the literature. In other cases, they depart from expectations and provide fresh insights into policy processes in Laos (from an English language perspective at least).

3.1 Results from English language literature review

3.1.1 The core role of the Party in policy formation

There is a wide consensus in the existing literature that broad policy directions emanate from the central committees of the ruling LPRP. As Noonan and Phommangsy state:

The Central Party Congress is held every 5 years to establish the broad economic and social policy frameworks, sectoral objectives, and sometimes specific targets for the next 5 years. The Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP), together with the National Assembly, is the major policy-making body in the country and plays the key role throughout national policy and planning processes. Other stakeholders at the central, provincial, and district levels generally have more indirect input into national policies and participate in more limited ways in policy dialogue (2020: 41; see also Phommangsy and Honan 2017).

Noonan and Phommangsy (2020) are reporting on policy change in the education sector. By focusing on policy change over time, they show how, even if the Party holds a pre-eminent role in setting broad policy directions, this is always in a context of a complex policy ecology of Lao and foreign stakeholders and influencing factors, all impacting one another under continuously changing conditions. Their study shows that, even if the Party does seem to hold the lion’s share of policy influence, it is not the only influencing factor in Lao policy circles. (See also EXTERNAL INFLUENCES section 3.1.6; NATIONAL ASSEMBLY section 3.2.5; COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS section 3.2.4).

Established in 1955, the LPRP has been the only legal political party in Laos since 1975. In 2016, there were 268,431 members of the Party, representing about 3.9% of the then national population of 6.846 million. Of the current NA, 158 of 164 seats are held by LPRP members, and the remaining six are held by independents. While we have no data on how many government workers are Party members (due in part perhaps to the difficulty of defining a government worker) our ad hoc enquiries in this SRA have so far revealed that all our local counterparts and all the Lao policy makers we have interviewed are Party members. As one of our Lao counterparts remarked, if people are involved in policy-making, it is almost certain that they are also Party members.

It is common for the LPRP to be described as ‘secretive’ (e.g. Rathie 2017:19). Yet other scholars note that the Party is very vocal: in narrations of history (Pholsena 2004; 2006 Tappe 2013, 2011;

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High 2021), current events (see for instance High 2014 on a border incursion) and policy issues (see STORYLINES section 3.1.7). A number of key works by Kaysone Phomvihane are available in English (1976, 1977, 1978, 1981). Our project's Lao literature review found that there is an abundance of information provided by the Party about the Party: for instance, the structure, meetings, decisions, and major events of the Party are regularly reported. There are two journals dedicated to this: *Alun Mai* (Section 8.1.1.2) and *Khosana* (Section 8.1.1.3). There is a newspaper reporting on the NA (*Phu Thean Passason*). The Office of the Prime Minister (PM) also publishes a journal called *Nak Borlihaan* (about leaders and leadership in Lao PDR). Video recordings of NA and Party Congress sessions are regularly uploaded onto YouTube both in the form of edited news broadcasts and unedited full versions (for instance, of key speeches, some of which our project has translated). The problem that faced our Lao language literature review was not a scarcity of information about the Party and its views on research and evidence but a surfeit: how to read, analyse and report on such a large and ever-growing body of documentary evidence within the scope of a Small Research Activity? We will comment more on the methodological implications for this later, but for now it is enough to flag that, while it is true that Party meetings are only open to Party members, it is important not to mistake this for a lack of information about the Party, or use this to justify a kind of laziness about seeking to understand its goals, principles and processes.

A claim often paired with the view that the Party is 'secretive' is the claim that the civil society is absent or suppressed in Laos (Mustalahti et al. 2017; Rathie 2017). Jerome Whittington (2018: 10), for instance, notes that one of the reasons the policy environment around hydroelectricity dams in Laos is so unique and has attracted such international attention, is that Laos provides a laboratory where hydro schemes can be carried out in a context of no or negligible civil society activism. Mustalahti et al. (2017) argue that one of the main challenges facing REDD+ and other green growth initiatives is the lack of civil society. The UN Special Rapporteur's (Alston 2019: pp2) end of mission statement in 2019 claimed that a combination of factors meant that meaningful consultation was difficult if not impossible in Laos. To quote:

This disconnect is greatly facilitated by a determination that the Party should remain firmly in control of public dialogue, an assiduously maintained lack of transparency in most realms, a reluctance to permit criticism, the absence of meaningful complaint mechanisms, the marginality of the judicial system for anything to do with people's rights, the comprehensive government management of the media, the tight regulation of any potentially independent civil society, and the firm leash kept on foreign aid. The result is that efforts to promote meaningful consultation, to encourage participation in decision-making, to enlist genuine advice and criticism, or to propose alternative approaches, are all rendered difficult, if not impossible.

While this is a commonly held etic view of the Party, it is much less clear that this is an emic view from within the Party: as far as the Party's views are accessible in its public announcements and in our interviews, it is apparent that the Party believes it is itself the civil society, in that the Party is a people's party that represents the people and acts for the people. The Lao literature review made it abundantly clear that the very definition of Laos as 'democratic' (as in the Lao People's *Democratic Republic*) hinges on the idea that the Party is the body that represents the people and guides government on behalf of the people (see DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM, section 3.2.3) and that this is expressed through frequent consultations (see for example COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS section 3.2.4). In some ways, legalising a civil society outside the Party would threaten this underlying *raison d'être* of the Party to be the People's Party. Within existing policy-making processes, there is room for 'people' to find voice, for instance through the NA. We examined this as far as possible in our ethnography of the NA (see NATIONAL ASSEMBLY 3.2.5). NA members regularly visit their constituencies for consultations and report their concerns in the Assembly. There are a number of 'hotlines' to the NA and PPAs that regular people can call to express their perspectives and concerns directly to policy makers. There are ongoing attempts to extend and

consolidate links between the central decision-making levels and the grassroots, such as the Three Builds (Adam Smith International, Noonan and Phommalangsy 2020: 48) (see POLICY PROCESSES 3.2.2). However, a weakness of this SRA was that it focused on Vientiane-level policy processes: we did not conduct fieldwork or interviews at the village, District and Provincial levels to examine policy-making processes there. These levels are important entry points where the grassroots are supposed to be consulted, so the absence of a direct observation or participation in these consultation meetings is a significant lacuna in our study of policy-making processes. These also appear to be under-examined in the existing English literature. Existing literature suggests that at these levels, there is often a very noticeable gap between central level policy and its implementation (see POLICY IMPLEMENTATION GAP). This gap may indicate in part the influence voices and interests other than the central Party leadership have over policy as it is enacted on the ground.

3.1.2 Corruption

The common English-language literature assertion that there is no civil society in Laos is part of a wider trend in the English-language literature to describe Laos as ‘authoritarian’ (Souliyong 2017; Singh 2012), patrimonial or neo-patrimonial (Rathie 2017) and even ‘inscrutable’ (Stuart-Fox 2011). There is a generalised sense in the English-language literature of misdealing and suspicion in matters of state in Laos (High 2014): one might say it constitutes a sort of ‘atmosphere’ around policy and politics in Laos. Stuart-Fox (2005:25) notes a saying which is attributed to local people in Laos: ‘winning a legal case, especially a civil dispute, depends on who has ‘the strongest string.’ Another saying in Laos is that ‘the poor are never admitted to hospitals, and the rich are never admitted to prisons.’ To et al. (2014) report that the forestry sector is particularly prone to corruption. Indeed, all three documents located in our English-literature literature review that reported on research specifically on corruption drew their examples from the forestry sector (namely, To et al. 2014; Stuart-Fox 2006; Hodgdon 2010).

The study of corruption presents significant methodological challenges for social scientists. Cases that might look at first like clear-cut corruption, such as land grabs and failure to compensate adequately for land acquisitions, can—on closer inspection—be much more complex. For instance, Pathammavong et al. (2017) investigated allegations of land grabbing and failure to compensate associated with Vientiane’s 450 Year Road. They found instead a complex story of competing interests often fuelled, especially from the policy side, by the best of intentions. That is, what looked like corruption in this case was more likely just the law of unintended consequences that does seem to dog even the most well-intended interventions.

To et al. (2010) showed how complex corruption cases typically can be, even when authorities are confident enough to bring formal charges, and how important personal relationships are in these networks. Hodgdon describes a project aimed at decentralising control of forests that was backed by Vientiane policymakers, but which was ultimately scuttled when District officials and sawmill operators realised that it would result in their loss of control and profit. Stuart-Fox (2006:59) postulated that there is a ‘political culture of corruption in the Lao PDR’ . He explains:

The largest single item exported illegally has been timber in the form of whole logs, despite a total ban imposed by the government. Massive logs are difficult to hide, so it is obvious to everyone that their export continues. This is almost entirely in the hands of the military. Export of timber to Vietnam in the past is said to have been in payment for the debt Laos accrued to the Vietnamese military during the revolutionary ‘thirty year struggle’ (1945-75). Exports now are probably to pay for ongoing military assistance. Export of timber to Thailand is entirely commercial. (Stuart-Fox 2006:59)

Stuart-Fox continues:

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Timber was the principal resource set aside for exploitation by the three umbrella military-controlled state enterprises that together cover the entire country. The prototype was the Mountainous Area Development Corporation (MADC – also known as BPKP, the initials of its title in Lao). Established in 1984 with its headquarters at Lak Xao in Borikhamxai province, MADC exploited timber concessions in central Laos, including clear-felling the area to be inundated by the Nam Thuen II dam. Later it branched out into other activities, including mining, saw milling, transportation, import-export, and hotels and tourism. Subsequently two additional military-controlled SOEs were established to carry out similar activities: the Agriculture, Forestry and Development Company (AFD) in the north and the Development of Agriculture, Forestry and Industry Company (DAFI) in the south of the country. (Stuart-Fox 2006:59)

Stuart-Fox goes on, writing:

In 1993 the Lao government set aside 24,600 square kilometres of land in seventeen National Biodiversity Conservation Areas for protection of threatened plant and animal species. These areas are not national parks. People live within their boundaries, most practising slash-and-burn subsistence agriculture; and some logging is still permitted of ‘production’ timber. This makes it impossible for police to manage these areas. Illegal logging continues, as does poaching of exotic wildlife, often in collusion with the Lao military and Party officials. The smugglers pay off local officials, who could not stop the traffic even if they wanted to. Some officials facilitate the trade by applying a law to confiscate protected wildlife from small operators and then selling it to a larger smuggling syndicates (Stuart-Fox 2006: 61-62).

This passage shows both the importance of the issue of corruption when considering forestry policy, but also the methodological problems for social science posed by rumours, suspicions and unsubstantiated claims. Stuart-Fox (2006) reports the above as a series of established facts, but it is not clear how he obtained his information, how reliable it is, or how much more could have been learnt if a sustained study of these claims had been conducted. As a model example, To et al.’s (2014) much more careful study illuminates the social networks involved in corruption. Another positive example is Pathammavong et al.’s (2017) study, which showed that rumours can be simple stories told about a much more complex and less obviously corrupt reality.

The Party itself regularly issues missives calling for a break with previous harmful practices, including corruption. For instance, the call for ‘four breakthroughs’ includes breakthroughs in ‘thinking’ (Noonan and Phommalangsy 2020) or ‘mindset’ among government workers. This is linked to a slogan calling for a ‘firm,’ ‘transparent’ and ‘professional’ Party cadre and government. During our ethnography of the NA, for instance, the PM reminded government and delegates of the principles of governance that were again cited in the National Agenda:

The principle of being strict and firm: this is the strict compliance to the resolutions, laws, and regulations, etc., that everyone has to follow. Those who don't must be held responsible. ... If there are government officers, whether they're from customs department or a bank, who abuse their positions to gain benefits from businesses, please do report it. ... The second principle of transparency is the same. ... what is the third one? It is the principle of being professional. ... we can't just go on haphazardly, (policy) must be based on proper knowledge and principles.

These calls for reform and exhortations to stamp out corruption indicate that perceptions that corruption remains a significant problem in Laos are both etic and emic.

People who do research in Laos often hear rumours about corruption or misdealing, almost as if this is a common wisdom that locals feel they need to induct newcomers in to (High 2014). This is also true of some Australians who consider themselves ‘old hands’ after having worked in Laos for some

time: a newcomer to an ACIAR project might find themselves on the receiving end of an informal induction about rumours. One ACIAR researcher said she had been told by old hands that she could not mention the word ‘cooperatives’ because of political sensitivities related to the rollback of collectives in the 1980s, whereas in our interviews and Lao literature review it was clear that farmer cooperatives (using the same Lao word, *sahakon*) do have an important role in contemporary agricultural policies. We also found that Lao counterparts were much more willing to talk about Party membership and political activities than Australian researchers, who may feel that questions about the Party are ‘off limits.’ Such advice or intuitions about ‘topics to avoid’ may influence ACIAR researcher’s attitudes towards project counterparts and Lao policy-makers, and reduce their willingness to understand and engage in policy processes.

The case studies analysis (Smith and Kanowski 2022) revealed that concerns with corruption have been considered by ACIAR forestry researchers. In a report to VALTIP2, Said (2017) writes of corruption in the plantation sector. He draws on Keuleers (2002) to argue that:

‘Combatting corruption is not just a matter of laws and legal enforcement. It has to do with people’s behaviour and is largely influenced by social control systems, culture and spiritual beliefs.’ Therefore efforts to tackle the problem through strengthening the ethics of governance in Lao PDR need to be informed by an understanding of the moral values that are part of the national culture.

Said (2017), still drawing on Keuleers’ (2002), comments that corruption in Laos appears to be opportunistic, fostered by decline in moral standards and the effectiveness of formal and social control systems. He also speculates that, ‘Lao society has a cultural avoidance of confrontation and situations where one might lose face, potentially leading anti-corruption agencies to avoid confronting wrong-doers’ (2002). Again, this underlines that many of the sectors of interest to ACIAR—such as forestry, fisheries, rice and livestock—will bring ACIAR researchers into direct contact with social science questions about ‘society’, ‘cultural’ factors and ‘belief’. But it is important to take care when using these concepts: when social and cultural analysis is reductive, social science concepts can become labels. Applying simplistic labels to complex situations runs the danger of typecasting and stereotyping, which in turn exacerbates rifts (e.g. ‘Lao people are like that, we are like this’) rather than common grounds for mutual understanding and working through differences (e.g. ‘We all value stability in the region,’ ‘We all value good outcomes for fisheries ...’). Attaining policy impact for research requires, at a minimum, the identification of common grounds.

3.1.3 Policy failure

Policy failure has been a recurring theme of academic studies of policy in Laos. An early notable example is Grant Evans’ (1988, 1990) damning accounts of the failure of collectivised agriculture. His analysis was that collectivisation was suspended only one year after launch and that it ‘ultimately faltered because of the government’s administrative incapacity, its inability to apply mass coercion, besides inherent difficulties in collectivised agriculture’ (1988:2). In more recent literature, The Land and Forest Allocation Program (LFAP) is often discussed as an example of a failed policy suite. For example, Yokoyama (2014) describes a village where sufficiency in rice was never a problem until the LFAP was implemented, after which NGOs implemented a range of interventions in tandem with the LFAP which resulted in contract farming at scale, resulting loss of forest for cash crops and chronic rice shortages. Yokoyama (2014) argues that these policies were initially motivated by a storyline (see STORYLINES 3.1.7) about the deficiencies of swidden agriculture, without an understanding of how adaptive swidden is to this particular area (see also Sturgeon et al. 2013; Broegaard et al. 2017; Lestrelin et al. 2012a; Lestrelin et al. 2012b). Fujita and Phengsopha (2012) have argued that early land forest allocation policies were marred by significant divergences between policies and what resulted on the ground (see POLICY IMPLEMENTATION GAP 3.1.4).

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Others, such as Vongvisouk et al. (2014), have argued that the results of LFAP were mixed, with some villagers reporting significantly improved rice sufficiency and others reporting increased insecurity and labour. Policy failures can be an important part of the storylines used to justify new policy interventions and even new ACIAR research. For instance, ACIAR forestry researchers studying smallholder plantations reported the initial success of the LFAP for initial uptake but subsequent failure and unintended consequences (although not necessarily negative for everyone) of 'local land accumulation' associated with planting teak trees (Smith and Kanowski 2022).

Failure causes policy-wariness among target populations but also, counter-intuitively, this does not seem to diminish the appetite for renewed policy efforts (High 2014). Despite 'failing' to deliver the plan for development in many cases, failed projects can at the same time 'succeed' in reinforcing the perception that the state is and should be the first port of call for people's demands for more and better development. Even people made cynical about the endless cycles of policy still often direct their desires for a better life towards the state, and these desires contribute to renewed policy activity. Olivier Ducourtieux (2013) argues that failed policies can be a 'trojan horse' for subsequent policy interventions. In a similar vein, Fleur Johns (2015) has argued that, even when policies fail in their explicit goals, they often do so in an instrumental way and can thus be considered successes in other terms. For instance, Johns (2015) argued that mega-dams in Laos have 'failed forward': in failing to deliver on their ambitious claims to deliver wide socio-economic benefits they have nonetheless paved the way for further dams that promise even less by way of benefits for the wider society. The Nam Theun II dam, for instance, involved heavy conditionalities and a range of interventions that gave the sense that the dam would lead to a reform that would totally transform the Lao government. In fact, the dam enhanced the power of the Lao state-as-usual and paved the way for subsequent dams, like the Saynabury dam, that involved far fewer social welfare or sustainability promises.

But in our case study interviews, we heard a different story about why dams have proliferated on the mainstream of the Mekong: interviewees referred to the 'Riparianisation' of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), whereby foreign experts were replaced by local staff, who were much less likely to take strong positions (such as opposing mainstream dams) if it would lead to conflict. Some experts who left the MRC during this process ended up at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and were thenceforth instrumental in scaling up the ACIAR 'fishways' research into ADB policy. As one case study interviewee put it, the ADB interest in these ACIAR findings was solely due to one man, an ADB insider, who 'championed' the findings. When he left, so did the ADB's interest in transforming this research into policy. As another interviewee put it when reflecting on these events: 'it is all people.' These findings from the case study interviews suggest that, while social theorists may construct insightful theories about policy failure, ACIAR researchers involved in some of these processes may gain insights that, often, what is decisive in policy processes is particular people, particular individuals and the specific historical circumstances in which they are operating. This highlights the difficulties posed by the classic problems the social sciences face in terms of the individual versus society, the general versus the specific, and the diachronic versus the synchronic, in modes of explanation.

3.1.4 Policy/implementation gap

That there is a significant gap between policy as it appears on paper and/or in the intentions of the policymakers, and policy as it appears as effects on the ground at the point of implementation, is a well-established observation in Lao PDR. Perhaps the most famous example was Grant Evans' (1988) parody of the targets set for the collectivisation of agriculture versus the reality of what happened on the ground. While neat-looking graphs showed promising growth, 'many, perhaps most, villages in Laos only paid lip service to the campaign or simply ignored it' (Evans 1988: 45). He argued that the grand plans formulated by central authorities were worn down by the persistent logic of peasant production (Evans 1990). More recently, Dwyer and Vongvisouk (2019) have shown, using the example of Chinese acquisition of land in northern Laos through the expansion of rubber

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cash cropping, how policy intentions of protecting small holders and reducing poverty led to the unintended consequence, over the long term, to many poor farmers ceding their land to rubber companies. That said, Smith et al. (2020), reporting on ACIAR-funded forestry research, noted that District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFO) and Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO) participated in the acquisition of land and reallocation to companies under the guidelines of ‘concessions and contract’ farming.

Lestrelin et al. (2012b: 591) argue that the policy implementation gap in relation to land policy is explained by the latitude District and Provincial officials have in selectively applying policies received from above. They explain:

the current patterns of rural development in Lao PDR are, broadly speaking, driven by objectives and strategies set at the central level and largely reinterpreted at the subnational level on the basis of existing economic opportunities and constraints and the perspective of provincial and district leaders.

The second chapter of Sunderland et al. (2012), too, notes that District and Provincial levels can have significant influence on policy through local level orders and planning measures. Lestrelin et al. (2012b: 592) note that one District official informed them that, in some cases, central level land policies were not implemented because they were considered ‘unrealistic’. They conclude that it is local practices—such as local networks, practices of compromise and collusion—that fill in the gap between high-level plans and on-the-ground realities (Lestrelin et al. 2012b: 592). Likewise, Vongvisouk et al. (2016a) mention ministerial rivalry as likely cause of slow uptake of REDD+ on the ground. Citing Lund (2011) on ‘fragmented sovereignty’, they write: ‘Local land and forest management in Laos appears to be based on many individual and minimally coordinated decisions by different government agencies and staff at national, provincial, district and village levels’ (Vongvisouk et al. 2016: 402). Singh (2013: 338) argues that even an agency with the clout of the World Bank must contend with ‘inherent processes of localisation that can subvert and redirect formal development plans’.

Smith (pers. Comm.) in the process of ACIAR forestry research, consulted the 2012 translation of the PAFO Mandate. She reports that Article 8 says the mandated ‘working style’ is stipulated as follows:

The activities of PAFO are performed, based on the Party’s policy guidelines and Government’s laws and regulations, through developing the Agriculture and Forestry development strategy, and local socio-economic development plans, into its strategic plans for effective implementation.

Article 3.2 on the duties of PAFOs states:

Preparing Provincial Agriculture and Forestry development strategic plans, including concrete plans, programmes and projects of each sector, which are to be implemented in accordance with local particularities and resource potentials.

Policy-processes in Laos are very top-down (see 3.2.1), with the Party leading and the government left to form the laws and regulations, and ministries the strategies and plans, that will implement these policies. However, at the same time, any translation of high-level policy into a regulation, strategy or plan is expected to take particularities into account, so that there is quite a large degree of leeway for variation in practice.

3.1.5 Policy incoherence

Incoherence is a characteristic of Lao policy that has been observed by many scholars (see for instance Smith et al. 2017; Vongvisouk et. al. 2016; Bourgoin et al. 2012; Cincotta-Segi 2011). Some contend that policymakers seem to accept policy complexity and even contradiction as part of the expected landscape of policy-making (Vongvisouk et. al. 2016: 190).

Policy incoherence has been attributed to tensions between the central and the local levels (as described above). Donor influence (see EXTERNAL INFLUENCES 3.1.6) is another attributed cause. For instance, Suhardiman and Giordano (2014) argue that the social and economic safeguards imposed by the international community with NT2 resulted in legal plurality where there were many, not just one, ways a dam could be approved. Safeguards could thereby be evaded. In relation to forestry, Smith et al. (2017:179) note the ‘complexity’ in laws and regulations relating to forestry, and link this to the particularities of the forestry sector, which must articulate with a range of international standards, and also tends to be influenced by global trends. They also link this complexity to a form of ministerial rivalry, where multiple government agencies assert authority over land and natural resources, and to donor influence which can encourage the uptake of policies that have succeeded elsewhere without adequate adaptation to the Lao context (see also Broegaard et al. 2017 and Bourgoin et al. 2012 on complex and contradictory land policies). The result is:

An expansive body of legislation variously enables and constrains national, provincial and district authorities, creating duplicate and sometimes contradictory rules resulting in costly red tape and gridlock in a seemingly unworkable governance environment (Smith et. al 2017: 179).

Smith et al. (2017) gleaned from interviews with Lao counterparts that policy may be implemented poorly at local levels because of tensions between various Provincial and District Offices who are under the direction and guidance of local authorities in political matters, but under the direction and guidance of the Ministry for technical activities (Smith et al 2017). And Singh (2012) has provided important ethnography of a small District office. However, by and large there is a gap in the existing literature regarding the role of and relations between Provincial offices, and their relation in turn with District offices and the village level.

3.1.6 External influences

In 2007, financial assistance from ODA (Overseas Development Aid, multilateral and bilateral) reached 92% of central government expenses (Lestrelin 2012b: 592), resulting in Forestry department hosting as many as fifty foreign projects at a time. Conditionality was common. Smith et. al. (2017) discuss how forestry policy has developed over time and in stages, often under international influence. Cole et. al. (2017) argue that excessive donor influence has resulted in a lack of ownership of REDD+ in Laos.

Donor influence has been the cause of significant disgruntlement in the education sector (Phommalangsy and Honan 2017). The impact of international agreements and global trends on Lao politics can be seen very clearly in this sector: it was directly after the Jomtien conference in 1990, where a declaration on ‘Education for All’ was endorsed, that Laos shifted from policies targeting adult illiteracy to policies targeting universal primary education (Noonan and Phommalangsy 2020). After the conference, the Jomtien goal was expressed at the 6th Party Congress and this was followed by a Decree on compulsory education in 1996, and then an Education Law in 2000. This was followed by a roundtable with donors in 2000. The influence of international agreements was evident again when Laos committed to the Millennium Development Goals, which again were translated into Lao policy targets. Donor influence has also been noted in the dam sector (Robichaud and Shoemaker 2018; Johns 2015; Singh 2009; Lestrelin 2012b). More generally, there is wide consensus in the existing literature that many policies in Laos are influenced by external factors (donor

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influence, examples from other countries) yet a common refrain is that these are not suitable for the particular conditions in Laos, or that they first need to be trialed in Laos (e.g. Durham et al. 2016: 8).

Jönsson et al. (2015) temper arguments about donor influence: they argue that even when policies are well formulated in collaboration with external collaborators and donors, and then translated into detailed laws and regulations, they may not in fact be implemented if they are without strong backing of the Party. Donor influence is also often constrained by pragmatic concerns: for instance, donors have been accused of sidelining their values and justice simply to ensure a right to remain in the country and keep their programs running, so that their employment can continue (Lestrelin 2010: 436). Singh (2009:500) has argued that World Bank policies have been subverted by localising strategies of district officials and local villagers.

Many of Clarke et al.'s (2015:10) respondents mentioned that it was common for models or policy approaches copied from abroad to be applied in Laos, often inappropriately, instead of policies being evidence driven. Clarke et al. (2014) identify reliance on donor support for research funding, and resulting prominence of donor research interests, as one of the key constraints on translating research to policy in Lao PDR (see also Essink. et al. 2020, citing Akkhavong et al. 2014).

This has been partly addressed in the health sector through a Ministry of Health strategy on health research and a nation-wide prioritisation of health research domains, in a process called the 'National Health Research Agenda' (Essink et al. 2020). This process could serve as a model for a similar process in the Agriculture and Forestry sector. To summarise: after a long period of noting that health research was either irrelevant to policy or not being adequately translated into policy (e.g. Jönsson et al. 2015; Sychareun et al. 2013; Sychareun et al. 2012; Sychareun et al. 2010; Essink et al. 2020) a nation-wide consultation process was initiated where health providers, bureaucrats and researchers were invited to rank research domains in pairs progressively, to determine the priority rankings among these and also any research domains that had not previously been identified.

This process was laudable in many ways. For instance, this strand of research and intervention attempts to understand where policymakers' priorities lie and which constraints they face (e.g. Sychareun et al. 2012, see also Vongvisouk et al. 2016). It was also an attempt to decisively break with donor-driven research. However, there were important deficiencies: there was no evidence of consultation with bureaucrats or health providers below the district level, nor with ordinary people (Essink et al. 2020:15). Local people emerged most notably in this consultation process as a problem needing to be fixed. For instance, the people who were consulted (mainly Vientiane level bureaucrats) placed ordinary people's deficient 'health seeking behaviour' as a top research priority. By contrast, 'health service provision behaviour', or 'health policymakers' behaviour', were not identified as problems to be researched at all. Any national research priority setting process in the Forestry and Agriculture sector would need to break with this model and strive instead to include small land holders, ordinary consumers, farmers, and the regional and village level in the consultations.

Perhaps one thing that sets ACIAR apart is that in some cases ACIAR research does regularly involve local level people, eliciting their opinions and experiences as an integral part of 'value chain' assessments. The Case Study review (Smith and Kanowski 2022) noted that, while this local grounding is a great strength of some of the most successful cases examined in the review, in practice the funding was not enough to do this 'properly'. For some 'pure science' researchers (who often lead the projects), 'properly' might mean talking to a statistically valid sample of people. For those concerned with local experiences, this might mean consulting locals at the start of the project, as often happens, but also after the project ends, as a way of assessing the benefits (if any) of the project for locals (including the benefits of any policy changes promised and/or delivered by the

project). Again, this is another area where our research team believes that good social science methods are important to ACIAR projects.

3.1.7 Storylines

Another important trend in the study of Lao policy is the identification of storylines. It has become standard to argue that the LFAP was linked, at least initially, to a ‘storyline’ that held that traditional swidden agriculture practiced by uplanders was the cause of massive deforestation (Forsyth and Walker 2008; Rigg 2006; Lestrelin 2012a). Baird (2014) has examined the way the concepts of ‘degraded forest’ (pa mai xout xom) and ‘degraded land’ (din seuam xom) are applied in what he calls ‘official Lao government policy narratives.’ He argues that, while these concepts are crucial in Lao land administration, they are also nebulous in practice (see POLICY INCOHERENCE 3.1.5). Likewise, Lestrelin et al. (2010:430) analyse official environment and land policy as ‘discourse’ and ‘narratives’ that are shaped in turn not simply by scientific uncertainty, but by ‘the values and political economic projects of their proponents’.

Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan (2020) draw on Actor Network Theory and Discourse Analysis to view policy processes (in this case, the translation of global REDD+ initiatives into Laos) as taking place through different storylines, which can be wildly divergent at difference levels and decision-making contexts. For example, at central levels, REDD+ was viewed variously as a technocratic/neoliberal tool to support green growth in Laos, as an opportunity for training for bureaucrats, and as a chance to reform local villagers, who were blamed for deforestation. At a village level, however, it was viewed as a potential land grab:

One villager in Ban Hmong refused to give an interview saying: ‘No, I do not want to talk to her. She [the field researcher] is from the project. I am not part of the project. I will not participate in the meetings. I do not want to attend, because then they will say: You participated, you ate the meal, and so it means that you agree to sell the forest.’ In total ten out of the 15 respondents in this village expressed various degrees of fear and mistrust of the project and the government (Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan 2020:447).

Villagers were not even informed that the REDD+ program involved possible payments for retaining forests. Clearly, something had been lost in translation. The authors argue that there were benefits to REDD+ in Laos: these accrued, however, to the international and national development consultants, bureaucrats who worked on REDD+ (Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan 2020:450). The authors argue that science played a role in this policy process, but it was a role in support of a centrally driven institutional reform based on storylines that rode roughshod over local concerns and knowledge (2020:451).

It is often said that ‘Laos is not a reading culture’. Another truism is that, while policies are well-written (often by or with the help of donors) they are rarely read. As a counterpoint, our Lao literature review did identify ample official publications (we surveyed just a small part of the very extensive Lao Government and Party publications) and, in these, a distinctive field of political philosophy and practice. There is also ample evidence of a healthy literati in Laos producing high-quality creative writing, especially poetry and short stories. However, our ethnographic work confirmed that people were not generally in the habit of reading. Even participants in the study who are lecturers at NUoL commented that they rarely read newspapers. Social media is changing this somewhat, with many Lao becoming ‘netizens’ who read and comment on news and other writing online. However, such reports are rarely in-depth and the most popular posts often take the form of short videos, songs and photographs rather than texts. In such a context, it is perhaps understandable that narratives and storylines carry considerable authority, rather than texts (such as policy documents), or complex and exhaustive accounts, which can be hard to access, difficult to read and far removed from the speech and experiences of everyday lives.

A weakness with Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan's (2020) approach is that, while it imports sophisticated analytical tools from global social science, it does not build seriously on any local Lao or ethnic minority concepts. Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan do not cite a single Lao word or concept in their 2020 article. In other words, while Ramcolovic-Suominen and Nathan specifically problematise translation of policy concepts (from international policy circles to the Lao village level) they do not problematise the translation of social science concepts across these various domains.

If it is true that storylines are important in policy action, how and why do certain stories move actual, real people, while others fall flat? Roy Huijsmans' (2018: 628) writing about migration policies, suggests that storylines around human trafficking, or child and youth migration, are influenced by 'knowledge that moves'. He argues that 'policy making and research (is) an emotional practice' (2018: 628) and calls for an appreciation of policy as 'more-than-rational' (2018:629). This echoes Paul Cohen's (2013:179) earlier argument, in relation to drug eradication policies in Laos, that in some cases policies are led by more-than-rational fetishisations, fixations and moral absolutisms.

Lestrelin et al.'s (2012a) response to the recognition of how influential storylines have been used in policy in Laos to date (in this case, the storyline of eradicating swidden) was to call for more evidence-based policies (better pathways from research to policy) and more attention to local knowledge. Rather than believing that we can do away with storylines altogether, however, it may be more productive to think with Huijsmans (2018) about how research can be used to produce more compelling storylines. As he demonstrates, storylines are an effective means of driving policy change.

The Lao literature review revealed that 'good news stories' are important genre in Lao newspapers. This is consistent with the long-running method of using 'emulation' to rollout policy directions: change is encouraged by highlighting outstanding 'models' that others (villages, households, individuals) are encouraged to copy (see EMULATION 3.2.9). The Case Study review of the ACIAR fisheries research contains evidence of how good news stories and emulation can amount to policy impact for ACIAR research. In this example, the 'good news story' of a successful demonstration site of a fish ladder was important in gaining publicity and high-level attention for the research results, and eventually policy change.

3.1.8 Policy values

A step beyond these approaches, but a useful step in the construction of storylines that gain traction in any given setting, is an understanding of the values animating policy. Philips et. al. (2016) concluded that when Lao policymakers were exposed to new information, such as the results from research targeted at health policy impact, their level of interest in a given health policy may alter. But the new information was not likely to influence policymakers' values, both personally held values and the values ascendent at the time in the broader political climate (Philips et al. 2016). That is, when a choice must be made between political or personal values on the one hand, and new evidence on the other, often it is values that carry the most influence. Jönsson et al. (2007) argue that one hindrance to translating research to policy in Laos is due to the predominance of ideology over evidence in policy decisions.

Existing work on Lao political values and concepts includes Grant Evans' (1990) attention to the concept of the 'natural economy', Sarinda Singh's (2012) account of forests and local concepts of 'potency', and Leah Zani's (2019) attention to parallelisms in rhetoric. But work on the values underlying Lao political cultures—at least in English-language literature—remains in its infancy.

One of the reasons, perhaps, is the confusion over the role of political ideology in Laos, particularly the confusion over whether Laos is, indeed, post-socialist after all. I have recently (High 2021)

argued for ‘pushing Lao studies past the posts’, namely, the ‘post-socialist’ paradigm that has arguably dominated the field since Evans’ dramatic statements on the topic (most notably in Evans 1995 and 1998). ‘Pre-socialist’ (High and Petit 2013) may better reflect the way socialism has remained as a policy goal. Yamada (2019) has argued that socialism remains an important part of the legitimacy of the ruling LPRP, and that English-language analysis that emphasised a break with socialism were overblown. However, Yamada’s (2019) analysis, by understanding socialism so narrowly as a cynical attempt at political legitimacy, runs the risk of repeating earlier, and problematic, arguments about the nefariousness of a ruling elite holding on greedily to power through ideology alone, an argument that ironically undermines itself (how can an appeal to a greedy, nefarious elite serve well as a legitimation strategy?). As a result of these developments in the English-language literature on Laos, and as a contribution to them, this research project took a deep dive into Lao socialist values and concepts as they were evident in Lao literature (including policies), in policy processes, and in the comments of our interviewees as a means of understanding how socialism is not just about claiming legitimacy (a kind of accusation of superficiality) but instead how socialism (as defined and developed in Laos) actually contributes, in very tangible and real terms, to how resources, ideas, abilities and constraints circulate in Laos.

We found that Lao interviewees were generally happy to speak about the definition and importance of socialism. The 8th NSEDP contains a succinct statement about socialism as a goal in Laos: ‘Socio-economic development based on a market economy mechanism that is managed and regulated by the Government with a comprehensive system is a key for the development of socialist orientation’ (GoL 2016: 77). One of the Case Study interviews also resulted in us learning the motto of the 11th Central Party Committee, which was released in May 2021. The motto reads:

ຍົກສູງຄວາມສາມາດການນຳພາຂອງພັກ, ເພີ່ມທະວີຄວາມສາມັກຄີເປັນປົກແຜ່ນຂອງປະຊາຊົນໃນຊາດ, ຮັບປະກັນສະຖຽນລະພາບດ້ານການເມືອງຢ່າງໜັກແໜ້ນ, ຜັນຂະຫຍາຍແນວທາງປ່ຽນແປງໃໝ່ ສູ່ລວງເລິກ, ຜັນຂະຫຍາຍແນວທາງປ່ຽນແປງໃໝ່ ສູ່ລວງເລິກ, ສ້າງການຫັນປ່ຽນ ການພັດທະນາເສດຖະກິດສັງຄົມ ໄປສູ່ຄຸນນະພາບໃໝ່ຢ່າງແຂງແຮງ, ຍົກລະດັບຊີວິດການເປັນຢູ່ຂອງປະຊາຊົນໃຫ້ສູງຂຶ້ນ, ສືບຕໍ່ນຳພາປະເທດຊາດພົ້ນຈາກສະຖານະພາບດ້ອຍພັດທະນາ ແລະ ກ້າວເດີນສູ່ຈຸດໝາຍສັງຄົມນິຍົມ!

Raise high the leadership ability of the Party, increase unity and solidarity of the people in the nation, surely guarantee stability on the political front, disseminate and expand the new path of change profoundly, build transformations in socio-economic development towards new qualities that are strong, raise the living standards of people, continue to guide the nation out of underdevelopment and advance towards the goal of socialism!

Again, socialism is the ultimate goal. But along the way, this motto makes clear that the road to socialism is dense with value statements. Our interviewees identified equality as a core value of current socialist aims: the aim is that there should be no difference in living standards between city and country, upland and lowland. Another value is unity, and this is strongly related to democratic centralism. We found that democratic centralism is a core principle of decision-making processes in Laos, and is visible in the formal structure of the government and Party, and also in how people conduct themselves, for instance, the behaviour expected in consultation meetings (see DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM section 3.2.3).

It bears noting that science, technology, research and evidence-based approaches are themselves expressed as values (aspirations) and presented as well-aligned with socialism and LPRP rule in this plan. For example, one motto in the 8th NSEDP included the phrase ‘Enhance the historical leadership of the Party-Government to be able to apply to the current situation science and democracy’ (NSEDP 2016:135). That is, at a policy level, there is a hunger for research evidence.

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How to translate evidence so that it comes to the attention of those who want it is another question. More findings regarding how science is discussed in high-level policy pronouncements is in Section 3.2.2 POLICY MAKING PROCESSES.

A related consideration is the possibility that a focus on evidence-based policies can be depoliticising, a sort of 'rendering technical' (Li 2007) of what are essentially questions about values and what kind of system or ideology our efforts are ultimately sustaining. Perhaps delving into political values can be too 'sensitive': this is a Lao term for topics that are not open for discussion, but may also describe some feelings Australian researchers may have about discussing political values. Interestingly, in our interviews we found that Australians reported greater feelings of 'sensitivity' when discussing political matters (such as Party membership) than Lao people did. Despite the sensitivities on all sides, however, I think it is worthwhile for researchers aspiring to policy impact to have some knowledge of the values underpinning policy directions in Laos.

This relates to the discussion of storylines above. Huijismans (2018) argues that there is a disjuncture in Laos between the way research is predominantly presented in policy circles and the information that actually moves policymakers into action. Formal presentations (scientific or policy-related) typically have a comparatively greater emphasis on 'disembodied data' (especially statistics, figures and diagrams). Huijismans (2018:633) argues that these dry presentations are typically to represent and justify interventions into what are in fact deeply embodied and emotionally-charged issues: land use changes, poverty, resettlement and migration, to name a few. He argues that this data, when examined closely, is often meaningless, nonsensical or unrelated to the question at hand, but that it performs a ritualistic role: it yields a performance of objectivity, rather than an example of it (Huijismans 2018:633). Likewise, in our Case Study interviews, one Australian researcher commented that he had often been asked to provide evidence to support a policy, instead of designing policies that were supported by evidence (Smith and Kanowski 2022:68). Huijismans (2018) argues that what really moves people into policy action often occurs off-stage: sharing stories, or anecdotes about the experience of a cousin while working in Thailand, for instance. It is often this emotive sense of how an issue is actually embodied in real lives that lies behind policy urgency. One senses this, for instance, in discussions around the urgency with which NAFRI staff were asked to investigate banana plantations and use of harmful chemicals (a topic raised in the Case Study interviews). There was arguably a mix of fear, outrage and bodily horror in the stories told about these chemicals, and arguably this, more than evidence, can sometimes be the driver behind policy.

Clarke et al. (2015:11), too, note the importance of anecdotes in moving policy responses. They interpret this as a deficit indicating a lack of evidence-based policy, a deficit that needs to be rectified with more and better data. However, our Case Study Review found no clear link between more and better data and policy impact. Instead, policy impact seemed to be much more likely when quality research was available, serendipitously, at a time when there was some larger story going on (a PM ban on logging disrupting local livelihoods, or widespread fears about declining fish levels in the context of mega-dam development) that spoke directly to the research. Rather than leaning away from storylines, perhaps sometimes effective policy impact is found by leaning into them? ACIAR might consider advising researchers who want to achieve policy impact not only to produce the highest levels of solid evidence, but to also think about how their data could be presented as a 'story that moves'.

Incidentally, I found that some of the ACIAR publications I read for this literature review were written in a very dry style, emphasising objective facts to such a degree that sometimes I suspected that the attempt to 'perform objectivity' (in Huijismans' sense) had distorted the findings. For instance, Nampanya et al. (2017) discuss 'large ruminant health: challenges and opportunities' largely in terms of statistics and tables. They did not mention that large ruminants are important gifts and sacrificial objects in ritual and family exchanges in Laos. It seems to me that leaving aside the

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question of why smallholders maintain stock, and the meanings and significance they attach to these animals, misses something crucial in relation to the ‘challenges and opportunities’ which were intended to be the subject of this study. As a counterpoint: a more recent example from the forest sector Case Studies showed that where research had proceeded on the policy-linked assumption that that farmers wanted to plant trees to protect forest cover, and so they could later cut them down and sell the wood to the processing sector that the GoL and donors were trying to build. There was a project logic that plantation smallholders behaved like ‘rational foresters’ and hence projects were designed to understand bottlenecks in timber value chains that prevented them realising this ‘logical’ goal. But when questions started to be asked about ‘why did you plant the tree?’ the answers revealed that while tree-growers did repeat policy slogans about increasing forest cover, they did not generally mention using natural timber and generating income from wood: for most, the value of the tree was not in the wood but was in the land the trees were planted on. Attempts were made to re-orient project activities, but pervasive policy values and the instruments designed to bring them into practice were difficult to influence.

Like values, concepts do not make much sense in isolation: they need to be grounded in contextual understanding if we are to come close to grasping their significance. An example is the importance of mottos and sayings in Lao policy circles. For instance, Noonan and Phommalangsy (2020:48) note the importance of two slogans after the 9th Party Congress: the ‘Four Breakthroughs’ and the ‘Three Builds’. They translate these as:

- Breakthrough in thinking
 - Breakthrough in human resource development in all areas
 - Breakthrough in solving challenges in the governance and management systems
 - Breakthrough in poverty eradication
-
- Build the provinces as strategic units.
 - Build the capacity of the districts in all regards.
 - Build the villages as implementation units.

Noonan and Phommalangsy (2020:57) take care to give an indication of the full semantic range of *boukthalu* (breakthrough) and *sang* (build) in order to give some depth and significance to these mottos. They also give the mottos some context, for instance by noting that *boukthalu* (breakthrough) was also used by Kayson Phomvihane in discussing the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986. In the Lao language literature review we dug in to slogans, mottos, and rallying cries such as these, seeking to understand them through context. We also saw these concepts and words being used during our ethnographic observations, such as in the NA.

Interestingly, the 8th NSEDP (2016:78) stated:

Although political trainings have been carried out continuously and at several levels, thorough awareness and understanding the Party’s directions has yet not been fully realized. The most obvious woe is the inability to achieve the ‘4-breakthroughs’. The translation of the Party’s resolutions into detailed programmes and projects that are suitable to the actual sector and local capacity is still slow.

Here, the four breakthroughs are evidently about the problems presented by translating policy into practice. The frequent mention of this slogan shows that translating policy concepts is not just a problem for foreign researchers, but also internally: there is a process described here of teaching the populace about the Party’s resolutions (the highest level of policy), a process that is described as difficult and incomplete (necessary but unsuccessful/perennially incomplete). To summarise, translation appears to be a problem on many levels and in many senses: translating concepts from

central to local levels, translating languages between Lao and non-Lao, and translating policy into implementation.

Several studies have noted that ‘policy’ does not seem to mean what is expected in the Lao context, but it was not until our Lao literature review and ethnographic work that we fully understood why (see section 3.2.1). Britto et al. (2008:104) define policy as ‘a plan or course of action, supported by a publicly funded institution (e.g., government) that has an impact...’. In Lao, the usual translation for policy is *nanyobai*. One Lao interviewee described policy as ‘the decision-making process in relation to an issue.’ The Party, for instance, lay down ‘policy directions’ through CPC resolutions. *Nanyobai* in this sense are higher than plans or strategy documents, and some Lao people insisted on maintaining a distinction, so that strategies and plans for them were *not* examples of policy. Pathammavong and Kenney-Lazar (2017) have noted that ‘Turning Land into Capital’ was consistently referred to as a ‘policy’ in Lao government circles, even though no formal policy document was produced to define it. Nevertheless, as a broad policy thrust, it influenced real flows of resources, rights and access. Mention of land into capital as a ‘policy’ does appear in Resolution of the National Land Meeting 7-8th May 2007 (National Land Meeting 2007). Confusingly, *nanyobai* can also appear as a short term, immediate response to a problem, and in that sense lower than plans and strategy. For instance, MAF, in addition to strategy documents, also has ‘The eight policies’ which are a series of subsidies, rewards, recognitions and incentives, such as reduced electricity prices for farms, designed to assist the sector in specific ways.

Silfver (2010) provides an attempt—rare in the English-language literature—to carefully translate the Lao concept of *nanyobai*. Intriguingly, the author quickly turns to discussing personal networks. She writes:

Within Lao society there were, of course, channels for women to succeed within the system. *Nayobay* was one such example, where gender could be down-played by networks and connections. *Nayobay* translates to policy. After the revolution in 1975 it was used to put systems of affirmative action in place. The aim of *nayobay* was to even out differences based on discriminatory practices under prior political regimes. *Nayobay* has, for instance, been used to open up opportunities for members of ethnic minorities to access education without sufficient grades. *Nayobay* was therefore used to recognise that the educational system had disadvantaged ethnic minority students since the language of instruction post-1975 was Lao, the language of the majority group. What has, however, been a far more prominent feature of *nayobay* is that it has been a reward system for those doing service for the government. As such *nayobay* has had a special focus on, for instance, family members of teachers, national heroes and leaders. What types of connections one had in the *nayobay* system thus became important, which can explain why some female respondents in my study saw marriage as a way of creating possibility, rather than as an institution of repression: ‘[The university] would be the best for finding the funds to study Master Degree so how can I study, how can I stay there? So I tell myself, I should get married to a university teacher’ (Phet, university-level education official). Marrying a teacher at the university could mean that one not only secured a position as member of staff for oneself but also secured a place for one’s children for both studies and future employment. Thus, what became important was not one’s gender or formal qualifications, but one’s family tree, which functioned as a guarantor in the (*nayobay*) system (Silfver 2010:490).

To summarise, *nanyobai*, which translates as policy, is used in the above paragraph to mean 1) state policies in pursuit of overall political values (such as affirmative action in pursuit of equality), 2) a ‘reward system’ for those who serve the state (such as perks for teachers), 3) non-state forms of preferential treatment, such as marriage, where perks are accessed through connections. This gives some insight into the family resemblances between the various uses of the word *nanyobai*. One

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common use of the word *nanyobai*, for instance, is ‘can you *nanyobai* that for me?’, meaning, can you give me some kind of special treatment? i.e. in evading a fine or waiting time that might otherwise be imposed. This is discussed in more detail in 3.2.1.

There has been a recent shift towards ‘evidence-based policy’ as a value for some researchers writing about Laos. Souliyong (2017:3), for instance, writes that ‘EBP (evidence based policy) still plays only a small role in policy-making process in Laos because, while politicians and policy makers know that research results are very important for policy-making process, they have still used their own values, interests and judgements to create public policy’. Sunderland et al. (2012) edited a book on ‘evidence-based conservation’ that featured one chapter each on the Phou Leuy, Nam Kading, and Nakai-Nam Thuen and Xe Pian conservation areas. Castella et al. (2014) have argued that the problematic elements of land use planning in Laos can be overcome through more careful and participatory research methods. Yet, they do not directly address concerns raised in the wider literature, such as that land policies in Laos have been driven by storylines that are not necessarily vulnerable to more accurately represent local experience (as suggested above), or that the forest clearance which has followed land allocation policies has more to do with the unintended consequences of introducing commodity crops (i.e. cash cropping) than the original research or intentions underpinning the policies. Indeed, land clearance has continued despite local preferences (reported by this author at least) for retaining forest cover (Yokoyama 2014). Castella et al.’s (2014) work, then, can be understood as an example of a perhaps overly-optimistic view of what research can achieve in terms of influencing policy outcomes through more and better evidence alone.

Huijsmans (2018) warns that the call for more policy-relevant research can imply an implicit gendering, where what ‘counts’ as policy relevant research is that which presents itself as detached, objective and rational, as opposed to (say) research that focuses on subjectivity and situatedness. By contrast, our literature review suggests that researchers who wish to have positive policy impact could be well-advised to familiarise themselves with subjective forms of research and evidence, including identifying important storylines (see HOT TOPICS section 3.2.6), sharing ‘good news stories’ about research, and providing embodied experiences and chances for emulation through tangible examples like demonstration sites (see EMULATION 3.2.9). Although discussions of values can be sensitive, some frank talk about what is driving various people participating in the research and attending carefully to issues of translation both in policy to implementation and in the research process may be a useful starting point for identifying common ground.

3.1.9 Attaining better understanding of Lao policymakers

Clarke et al. (2015) produced a short study on research to policy processes in Laos. The emphasis of their study fell on interviewing researchers about how they had linked (or not) to policy. One conclusion that Clarke et al. (2015:10) drew is that research that is not well-aligned with national policy directions is likely to be ignored or fail to have impact. Another conclusion was that translating research to policy requires analysis of ‘the needs of policy development actors and understand(ing of) their priorities, processes and problems’ (Clarke et al. 2015:13). The existing literature shows that some sectors have already made considerable advances in studying Lao policymakers: in health (Essink et al. 2020; Sychareun et al. 2010), education (Noonan and Phommalangsy 2020; Phommalangsy and Honan 2017) and REDD+ (Vonvisouk et al. 2016a; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Nathan 2020; Mustalahti et al. 2017). Our project is itself a part of an awakening of interest in this topic in the agricultural and forestry sector. However, there is very little existing English-language literature that explores policy makers in depth, especially in the fields relevant to ACIAR. Some of the most important contributions, in fact, have been made by non-social scientists, in reflections on their time working in Laos. A particularly important contribution to this genre is Bartlett (2013), who reflects that, in his experience of working in the LEAP project, his Lao counterparts effectively lived in ‘two realities’: one, the bureaucratic structure where they worked as

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technical and scientific personnel, the other as Party members who worked towards political goals often phrased as waves of urgent mobilisations galvanised by slogans and requiring extraordinary dedication from Party cadre (see TWO REALITIES 3.2.7). As one interviewee commented to us, ‘I wonder how they balance the two, and I think quite a few of them do struggle to find a balance.’ The study of the lived realities, constraints and values of Lao elites (such as scientists, policymakers and bureaucrats) remains very underdeveloped. In this SRA, we could only scratch the surface of this very large topic.

3.2 Results from Ethnography and Lao Language Literature Review

3.2.1 Definition of policy

Nanyobai has a wide semantic range. As apparent from the discussion in 3.1.8, It can mean something akin to the English ‘policy’, but can also mean any kind of assistance, from tax incentives to affirmative action. It can mean one-off assistance, such as waiving a fine or ignoring a regulation in light of a person’s special circumstances and appeals. One example drawn from a short story, the word ‘nanyobai’ is used when a woman was given a scholarship to study medicine even though she had not been allocated one in the original rankings: instead, she obtained one through a personal appeal to a top bureaucrat (Duangchampa 2005). In this sense, policy means something similar to ‘special treatment’ and might even look like corruption to others, or be deemed socially damaging. However, in this short story and many other typical examples, it has a positive sense of something like compassion or loving-kindness. This sense was evident in our ethnographic observations, when the PM said that the government’s nanyobai towards returning migrants was to accept them, no matter the cost and without judgement. It can also refer to assistance that is officially organised according to one’s social status, such as welfare payments for distinguished retired servicemen, assistance programs for teachers and other government workers, the support that could be extended to researchers to facilitate their work, or reduced electricity tariffs for farmers. In this sense, it can mean something similar to ‘perks’, ‘rewards’, ‘incentives’ or ‘concessional rates’. What unites these various meanings is that nanyobai is almost always extended from people who hold positions of power (usually official, state-backed power) to an individual or a group who are less powerful. It is not used to describe the forms of assistance that flow from the less powerful to the more powerful, such as when ordinary people pay their taxes or render labour free of charge to a government project. The government nanyobai’s individuals or groups, but people and groups do not nanyobai the government.

In some cases, the divergence between nanyobai 1 (nanyobai as policy) and nanyobai 2 (nanyobai as assistance) can cause amusing misunderstandings in Laos. One interviewee recounted how one of the main distractions when he was working in a ministerial ‘Department of Policy and Legal Affairs’ was the misunderstandings this name for his office created. Many people assumed that the purpose of the office must be to provide help and assistance to anyone who required it, so he was beset by requests for special assistance, for instance in requests to reduce their electricity bill or arrange a tax reduction. He saw part of his job as educating other people in the Ministry about the specific meaning of policy as (1) and not (2). He wanted to separate the two meanings, and be clear about which sense was meant in any usage. He warned ACIAR researchers that if they used nanyobai carelessly in village level work, it may raise expectations that the project was there to offer some special one-off assistance. He suggested that the Lao members of our SRA might consider formulating an official definition of nanyobai to propose at a Ministerial level, because in his observation, there was a lot of confusion about the term.

In other cases, nanyobai 1 and 2 merge in common usage. A good example is PM Phankham’s speech on returning migrants, where his claim that ‘this is the government’s policy’ was both a statement that he was taking a compassionate view of the migrants (nanyobai 2) and a statement that

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the government policy position on the migrants was to accept them (nanyobai 1). Indeed, all the Resolutions of the CPC (the broad policy directions of the Party, nanyobai 1) are ultimately phrased as nanyobai 2 in the sense that they are all justified as aimed at helping the Lao people by addressing some kind of problem.

Indeed, in our interviews and literature review, it became apparent that any talk of nanyobai 1 (policy goals and processes) was almost always illustrated in terms of nanyobai 2, i.e. the government helping the people. For instance, one other employee of a Department of Policy and Legal Affairs said: 'If there is no problem, there is no nanyobai,' indicating that policy is understood always as a response to an on-the-ground issue. This can be contrasted to the Australian usage of 'policy' to mean the impossibility of helping someone. For instance, in Australia it is common to hear 'Sorry, that is our policy,' which is a semi-polite (but also dismissive) way of saying: 'I can't help you/my hands are tied,' as if non-help could be justified by referring to something higher and impersonal: policy in the sense of a depersonalised and rational measure that can not make exceptions. Nanyobai does not communicate this meaning it has in Australia of non-help. This second employee of DOPLA noted that, because policy is about addressing problems, policy is usually urgent and reactive, the exceptional measures taken in order to offer the help needed.

Strategies (like the Forestry Strategy 2035) are not policies, because these are documents that are regularly released. Policies, on the other hand, address a specific, pressing need. One Lao scientist stated:

that's correct, nanyobai is a policy, and a strategy is a separate thing. Policy starts from a problem. For example, a policy on (rapidly increasing) exports of agricultural products. What are the problems for researchers to conduct a study on? That is the main determinant. Like I said in English earlier, a policy starts from a problem.

Problems are understood as arising in unpredictable ways and demanding rapid attention, unlike strategies which are mapped out years, even decades, in advance. So, policies are *ad hoc* responses to exceptional events. This interviewee also gave examples such as the response of coffee growers to the COVID-19 crisis and tax reductions on inputs to agricultural production. In such a case:

The ministry would then propose to the government to approve this policy. This is just a short explanation on how a strategy is different to a policy.

He identified the National Agenda (a rapid-fire response to the COVID-19 crisis and drug abuse crisis that was tabled at the NA during our observations) as a policy. However, the NSEDP released every five years, and also approved by the NA, are not policies. Another Lao policy maker also explained that the origin of policy is need:

There is a problem and you want to solve it. Or something is happening and you can support it. COVID for instance, Agriculture had some policy to assist in order to support agricultural producers. ... If we don't see a problem first, we don't see a point to solve. If there is a disaster, you make a nanyobai and you use it.

This appeared to be a particularly important distinction for those working in MAF, where nanyobai has quite a specific meaning. One researcher wanted us to change our research question to consider strategy impact, instead of policy impact, to avoid this confusion:

I don't think the Lao word is nanyobai. The Lao word is nyutasart (strategy). In our language. Because our Department of Livestock and Fisheries keeps the word 'nanyobai' separate. There

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are eight nanyobai. I have not spoken of them. There is the 'Nanyobai about Electricity Prices' 'Nanyobai of Land Prices', 'Labour Policy', and so on.

The extension to this project allowed us to explore a question that had emerged from the earlier Lao literature review: namely, did nanyobai always have this elastic meaning? Or had it changed over time? There was nothing in the etymology of the word to suggest nanyobai 2 was a long running meaning of the word. Nanyobai is a compound word that indicates a plan or guideline for a set of actions. Older Lao sources seemed to use it exclusively in this sense, i.e. nanyobai 1. During the extension, we gathered enough historical evidence to suggest that it is highly likely that nanyobai 2 arose only after the LPRP established control over the GoL. For instance, we asked the author of the short story mentioned above, who was a writer formerly employed of the Ministry of information and Culture, why she used the word nanyobai in the sense of nanyobai 2 in that story. She confirmed that she had deliberately used the word in that sense, which at the time was a new sense, in order to support 'them' (the Party-State) in their effort to propagate this new meaning of what politics, policy, and state-local relations would be in the new era.

The deliberate turn in the meaning of policy is also evident in Kaysone's speeches. For instance, Kaysone used the word nanyobai to describe the special forms of support and incentives for grassroots cadre:

There is another problem that we should face. This is the policy to guarantee the standard of living village-level officials. We have not tried enough in this regard in the past. As a result, there have been not inconsiderable amount of negative results for the mobilisation of the grassroots level. In some cases, these officials, their excessive focused efforts on communal work had negative impacts on their family work and they had a difficult standard of living. This makes them worn out and degraded. Some leave the work altogether. In the opposite direction, some order the (ordinary) people to attend them and render service. In these cases, it creates class divisions in society, a new form of aristocracy in the countryside is born without our awareness. Events in Hua Phan Province in past years, and events elsewhere, have confirmed this problem clearly. As a result, it is necessary to have the appropriate policy towards grassroots officials. On one front, we must build the conditions such that they do not completely shun production, including cooperative production and that of the family. On another front, we must make reasonable contributions, from the people and the budget, to support them so that they have a secure standard (of living). (1997a: 144-145).

Synonyms for nanyobai in his speeches are support and encouragement. Tentatively, it may be possible to conclude that when the LPRP came to power, they quite literally changed the meaning of policy. From that point forward, policy would be inextricably linked to expectations of help, support, and assistance from those in power to those in need.

3.2.2 Policy processes

Policy processes in Laos are led by the LPRP. Kaysone described the LPRP as:

The leading political organization and a frontline fort led by the organizations of the working class and patriotic labor of all ethnicities working in unity in a political system, in all the state's operations, and in society (1997: 466).

The Party has members at all levels, from the 'grassroots' village-level Party units, up to the Politburo. Feedback through the internal Party structure is one means by which grassroots views, experiences and opinions are feedback into the policy process. Every five years, the Central Party

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Congress proposes and discusses Party resolutions. Party Resolutions (often referred as ‘the policy directions of the Party’) are the set of agreements reached at these meetings. These are published as a very condensed set of minutes of the meeting. Various organs of the Party, such as the Propaganda and Training Authority and the political training academies, then study these resolutions and translate them into short and easy to understand documents for dissemination to Party units and members. These academies are important, as all high-level bureaucrats and most NA members will attend an academy for political training. Kaysone explained that to:

ensure a uniform practice of public administration nationwide ... (all) heads of provinces and districts must undertake training at a National Academy for Public Administration. (1997: 495).

The Party is tasked with identifying, training and recruiting leadership personnel. Again, the NAPPA and other academies are key elements in this process of creating leaders. Another aspect of the leadership role of the Party is inspections of the Government. As Kaysone said:

Lenin used to say that without inspection, there is no leadership. (1997, 193).

As one Lao researcher and policy maker stated:

I try to convince with the students that the policy is, is the decision so, of the, of the political parties. So, we have, every five years, we have this sort of a policy decision, and then that time, what they are thinking about for us, and then that is the broad policy.

It is the up to GoL to unpack these broad policy directions into specific strategies and plans. Kaysone described the role of the government in these terms:

Our State holds the right to reasonably distribute and utilize all resources, has a role to monitor, inspect, and regulate the national economy for the national collective interests, takes care of and protects the legitimate interests of all members of the national community, and harmonizes the interests of all actors by regarding the interests of workers as a starting point (1997: 328).

The head of the GoL is the President. According to Kaysone, the

President is the head of state and has the power to control and manage operations of state organizations, appoints and removes members of the Cabinet, chairs the Council of Defence and Public Security, and presides over special tribunals or the supreme prosecutor’s office to pass a ruling in cases related to high-ranking officials...(1997: 488).

The head of the executive is the PM. The current PM, Khamphanh Viphavan, referred to his role as ‘commander-in-chief’ of government initiatives, for instance the National Agenda introduced to the NA in 2021 (Viphavan, speech to NA 2021). Underneath him are three Deputy PMs, each responsible for (‘commanders’ of) specific sectors (economy; socio-cultural and administration; security and defence). Viphavan told NA members that this PM team ‘only discuss and decide on big and important issues.’ The PM is responsible for Government actions, and is accountable to the NA. The NA and Provincial Assemblies, the legislative arms of the GoL, are detailed in a separate section (see NATIONAL ASSEMBLY Section 3.2.5).

Kaysone was clear that the organs of the state do not create policy: the role of state bodies is to organise and implement policy coming from the Party. He said:

State organizations are organizations that represent the people and organize and lead an

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implementation of the directives, policy plans, and policies of the party. They regulate, facilitate, and control society's activities to ensure compliance with laws. (1997: 466)

Importantly for this research, Kaysone identified the 'rollout' of science and technology as one of the responsibilities of the GoL. He said:

The state administrative body's roles include but are not limited to the following: to develop a socio-economic strategy, short term and long-term socio-economic development plans of the country, sectors, and local administrations, define directions and goals, and ensure a financing of those plans. To translate the Party's directions and policies into laws, regulations, rules, domestic and foreign policies, and regimes of socio-economic supervision, and to roll out science and technology. (1997:152)

The Cabinet includes the President, PM, and Deputies as well as Ministers. In Kaysone's words, it is:

a supreme executive body that is comprised of ministries and committees under the ministers (or Prime Minister) and performs a technical function. (1997:488)

The Ministries are arranged along technical lines, reflecting different sectors (Agriculture, Education, Health etc). The MAF mandate second states that it must:

Study and disseminate the Party's Policy Direction, Government Strategic Plan and Agreements on Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development and integrate these into plans, programs and projects of the Ministry, as well as ensuring effective implementation; (GoL 2021)

Sometimes, this can involve law-making, in which case legislation may be proposed by a Ministry, and approved by the PM Office, or tabled at the NA for discussion. But more often Ministries operate at a lower level, creating regulations under existing laws, rather than proposing to change the law. As one researcher and policy maker noted:

... we have laws. And then we also build legislation under law. Every department, such as the Technical Departments, they take the law issued by the government, and then they (phan khanyay) expand that into regulations under the law, because we can't make a new law every five years. Updating law or including new clauses in a law is not easy. Because it has to go through the NA has many members and that is not easy. But what we can do is take the Mother Law (got may mea) and make nitikam (regulations) under the law. And this the duty of each department, ... Even if there is not a law, it is not like we cannot use it. If we come up with a regulation we can use that as a document that has to be implemented.

An important role for Ministries is that of creating strategies and plans based on broad policy. One Ministry based researcher said:

For example, related to agriculture and forestry, (at a broad policy level) they are talking about the ratio of forest cover, they are talking about food sufficiency, they are talking about market product, market production oriented, agriculture modernisation, that sort of thing broadly. But then the ministry will, based on that decision, they will clarify what it says, and they will decide how to go for that, to achieve the target goals. So, after the policy at the top level, they will have the national strategy for the National Social Economic Development Plan right. So, with the strategy of the ministry, they will base on that national strategy... national plan for socio-economic development. So, normally strategies are five years or ten years. But the point is, as we,

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as you know, among socialist communist countries, we are different from China or Vietnam. They have a one hundred years plan. Vietnam also have fixed plans for long term plan: fifty years. But for us, we can't do that we cannot do that, because we don't have kind of resources as them. So, we kind of go step by step, but we want to reach for everyone has equal economically and socially condition living. So that is our ultimate goal.

As this interlocutor notes, planning is a central feature of socialist-inspired statecraft. Kaysone stated:

We know that a plan-based economic growth is a specific characteristic under a socialist economy under the direction in a regime of collective ownership of production inputs. Therefore, planning has a central role in economic supervision. State's planning is a second political project of the Party. It has a role to provide detailed directions and socio-economic strategy of the Party so that they can be translated into action plans. Without a plan, policies cannot be achieved. For socialism, as Lenin has stated, a plan is also a yardstick, a standard, a torch, and a destination. (1987: 323).

And:

Planning is another revolutionary process that is linked with an industrialization process and makes production socialist in nature. (1987: 323)

It is worth underlining that Kaysone made these comments whilst introducing the new market mechanism and his 'opening up' policy: English-language scholarship has often mistaken this period as Laos' break with socialism, but it is perhaps better understood as a different approach to the same goal. Kaysone thought that planning was an essential part of the new economic mechanism. He said:

planning shall be linked with the market while transactions shall be made using currency as the medium of exchange. For example, when conducting planning, a tobacco enterprise needs to base such plan on a target advised by a higher authority (say ten million boxes), on the one hand, and on a market, on the other hand. (1987: 325)

Targets were also frequently mentioned in our ethnography of the Forestry Strategy 2035 process, and in interviews with ACIAR researchers, which confirms the view that planning remains an essential feature of Lao policy processes. One of the chief authors of the FS2035 said 'The 2020 targets, as I mentioned, were: increase the areas of forest coverage to 70%, achieve six million hectares of forest regeneration, achieve 500,000 hectares of tree plantation.' He cited Party Resolution number 098 as the source of this target, while other contributors to FS2035 cited Kaysone's speeches as the source of this target. No one cited scientific evidence as a source of a target. Instead, the most common citation when discussing targets were Party-leadership (and sometimes GoL leadership) level agreements, resolutions, orders and speeches. Of targets, Kaysone explained:

A long-term plan does not require everything to be perfectly accurate; but we need to have targets, steps, and key actions to realize our targets. (1987: 329)

Ministries and Provinces have their own Planning Departments, and these hold considerable power, because it is here that the decision is made as to how any given policy will be implemented, if at all. Kaysone said:

A department of planning in a ministry compiles plans from other departments and works under a direct leadership of the ministry. A planning division of other departments and planning units of

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sub-national levels is supervised by each ministry and sub-national authority. ... each local level (provinces, Vientiane Capital) is a level-one holistic planning authority. A planning unit at a local level shall make efforts to create their own balance by using multiple sources and to address their own needs for local production and consumption as much as they can including a wage bill budget line. (1987: 333)

Some researchers noted that Planning Departments were a considerable bottleneck to contend with, noting that research cannot be disseminated until it is approved by the relevant Planning and Cooperation Department, which can take a substantial amount of time (Somvang, 2021). In auto-ethnographic reflections, some Lao team members commented that at the Provincial level, the Planning Department is very powerful and may not appreciate visiting researchers from Vientiane who do not take the time to get to know them and respect their expertise before commencing work in that Province. At the same time, familiarity with Provincial Planning Offices is a promising avenue for attaining impact for researchers. As one researcher commented, there are:

...many district or province policy-making process. They invite, like, expert from the National University of Laos, from the economists, from the development expert, to help them writing the was five years plan. Which is good, because when I see those plan, in some province, they have some quite a good database or evidence-based analysis from those lecturers. So that's a new thing that I can notice in the last five years. They use more experts.

Targets, a key part of planning, can also appear as sudden impositions on Provinces, which Planning Offices then need to scramble to meet. During our research, a disruption to the livestock sector was caused by the sudden adoption of a target of exporting 500,000 head of cattle annually, part of a high level agreement with China, a target widely viewed as unrealistic. One researcher explained:

the beef is very much political sensitives because it's the food security's food security's agendas for governments since a central plannings. So, the target it has to be made by province and also, they do everything to support this sector.

And another bureaucrat in this sector commented:

I don't know if (this target) reflects the realities. Decision-makers, I don't know very much about it, those at the top have been influenced by the lobbyists, you know, in favour of, you know, very much the private sector or groups that benefit inventors. It is quite simple (to make it a target), but for me to implement it is quite impossible and complicated.

As this comment indicates, and as established by the existing English language literature, there is often a gap between policy and implementation. One of the reasons is that there are several levels to policy making in Laos: the central level policy is only one level where policy decisions are made. Our project was limited in scope and focused on Vientiane-based policy makers and researchers. We were limited, therefore, in how much we could understand of the Provincial, District and Village processes in this study. However, it is evident that Provinces, Districts and Villages are also very important sites for policy, not only of implementation, but also of policy-making in Laos.

The PM made a statement in the NA during our research in which he mentioned the role of Provincial officials in the policy process (in this case, the process of the national agenda). He said:

Now, you (the NA delegates) were also asking about Provincial Governors. Provincial Governors are government representatives at the local levels. If we're talking about national security, it

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would be drug abuse issues [at the local level]. What do you think the Provincial Party Secretary do? S/he is the chief of national defence at the Provincial level. How else would you like it to be? They give commands, on behalf of the government, on every affair in their own provinces. That is how our organisational mechanism will work. Now in each province, there are also different offices that are responsible for specific sectors. There are provincial police, military, health, education, and so on, which are under the leadership of the Provincial Governors, while Ministries are responsible for providing technical information. But they are under the command of the Provincial Governors [for implementation]. That's how it works. But then you might have concerns that we have to pass the decisions at the Provincial level as well, no we don't. All decisions are made here.

Whatever plan is laid out for education [for example], the whole country must follow. All work set out for health at the central level must be followed throughout the country. The Provincial Governors take this guidance as a reference to take charge on the implementation to achieve results. That's it. If we talk about budget, whatever the Provincial Governors could do to create budget surplus in your provinces, go ahead, please do.

As these comments highlight (without the PM perhaps wishing to), the Provincial level offices of the Ministries have three lines of authority: the Ministry their office is a part of, the Provincial executive, and the Provincial Party committee. The PM is clear that the ultimate authority at a Provincial level is the Provincial Party Secretary. The Secretary is a representative of the Party, not the GoL, although in practice the Provincial Party Secretary is often also the Provincial Governor. Reading through the lines of the PM's comments, it appears that he was responding to comments by NA delegates pointing out that, whatever was decided at the NA (a legislative part of the GoL) would only be as good as its implementation at a Provincial level, and this in turn depended on Provincial authorities being of one accord with central level 'commands', which is a Party matter that is essentially out of control of the GoL.

It is a truism that any policy is only as good as its implementation. This is a well-established motto in Laos, too. Kaysone stated:

At any given location and any point in time, ultimately an effectiveness of the Party's and state's policy direction implementation comes down to a grassroots level's implementation capacity (1997:129)

But this implementation is very often problematic, and the gap between policy and practice was a common theme in the Lao literature review, just as it was for the English language literature review. For instance, Kaysone said of the NEM:

In as much as the new imagination has yet to be fully instilled, a number of personnel and agencies have faced obstacles in leadership and management roles in communicating the policy directions by the Party and the state to the public and translating them into actions at a grassroots level. (1997:126)

And:

Such a delay in a transition to the new imagination among personnel and state machineries, to a certain extent, can be explained by a lack of awareness, failure to learn new things or study or absorb the policy directions introduced by the central level. (1997:127)

One of the NAPPA theses that we read, which was on the topic of Lao forestry regulation and governance, noted that while policies were good on paper, the problem was in implementation. This

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led us to reflect that it is possible that, in the ‘command’ structure of the policy making process, it may in fact be easier to criticise the implementation of a policy, than any high-level policy guidance. In this way, grassroots implementers may become ‘easy targets’ for criticism that in some cases might be more accurately aimed higher.

It was also common for ACIAR researchers to comment, in relation to our research question about the potentials for ACIAR research to impact policy, that although policy might change, this left untouched the question of implementation. One ACIAR researcher noted that:

we've changed the policy. But how often does that policy then actually change the farmer practices or the way agribusiness organises or encourages or get rid of constraints for investment? And that's the challenge because I don't think more policies is necessary or better policies, in terms of writing is necessarily going to help alleviate, you know, the issues that we care about.

Another Australian ACIAR researcher linked this problem to a lack of understanding at the local level where policy is implemented:

National policy and how it's implemented, interpreted and implemented, at provincial and district level is often not that clear, and can be quite confusing, and it gets interpreted and applied by different levels of government in different regions in different ways. And adapted to the local context. And so, I think that (while policies) can often be quite explicit, they're often not well followed or, adhered, at the local level.

Another Australian AICAR researcher noted that, although her project did seek to engage Provincial and District staff, these were not in-depth consultations and:

to really understand the nuances of policy at the local level, I think needs a depth of research that, you know, we weren't able to do in the, in our, in our project.

Kaysone repeatedly emphasised the importance the cadre stationed at these levels, because they were the interface with what he called ‘the grassroots.’ Kaysone (1997:130) defined the grassroots as the level ‘where people live, work, engage in daily production, education and struggle’.

The central and provincial levels shall deploy personnel to strengthen the district level to enable its close linkage to the grassroots level. (1997:146)

a leadership that is out of touch with the grassroots level and fails to holistically strengthen the grassroots level can be compared to a planted tree with a weak root system. (1997:130)

(the state) needs a strong grassroots level otherwise its plans and policies are merely just a dream and exist only on papers. (1997:130)

Kaysone advocated for strong and regular consultation at a grassroots level, including central leadership traveling for direct consultations with grassroots’ people:

For each grassroots level visit, we need to have a detailed work workplan, including where, when, how long, and why? When there, we need to arrange time to hear feedback from many people, including receiving reports from leaders and listening to feedback from the people, the elderly people, the young people and so on. This will enable us to develop an in-depth

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understanding and a true nature of a situation before developing appropriate interventions. Otherwise, it will be like a medical doctor who does not know a patient's illness. You prescribe a wrong medication. Our Lao saying also remind us to 'scratch where it itches.' (1997:189)

'Scratch where it itches' is an apt aphorism for the LPRP approach to policy as a response to a need. The Lao literature review revealed that periodicals such as *Khosana* and *Alun Mai*, but especially the NA newspaper, *Phouthen Pasaxon*, frequently report on the consultations people's representations of both National and Provincial Assemblies make with the people in their constituencies to follow up on and inspect ongoing policy initiatives, and to hear the feedback and concerns of people in their constituencies. These news stories are frequently accompanied by photographs of the representatives, usually men in button up shirts, being warmly welcomed by villagers. These periodicals also carry stories about how people's representatives then strongly voice concerns and emerging issues that have been reported to them by the people in their constituencies. In addition, these periodicals frequently feature stories reporting directly on the concerns, views, and experiences of 'grassroots' level people. The Provincial and National Assemblies are one of the main conduits between the 'grassroots' and the Government of Laos (see NATIONAL ASSEMBLY section 3.2.5).

An important means by which the grassroots level is integrated into the Party structure, apart from village level Party units, is by means of the Mass Organisations. Kaysone stipulated that the 'Lao Front for National Construction, Lao Youth's Union, Lao Federation of Trade Union, and Lao Women's Union will work closely with all the processes at a grassroots level in order to enhance their roles and leverage their respective strengths' (1997:136). The Mass Organisations, he explained: 'are political organizations of various social classes and strata that represent the interests and rights of all people of all classes and groups in a society who are involved in developing directives and policy plans of the party'. (1997:466)

There are local level elections where the Village Leadership Committee is appointed, and village level leaders are empowered to create local ordinances, so long as these do not breach the policy directions from the 'levels above' and are 'according to the legitimate aspirations of people.'

The judiciary was barely mentioned in our study, but this may be because we did not make the role of the judiciary in policy-processes a specific part of our research design. Dahuai et al. (2017, 4222-4223) explain the current juridical arrangements in Lao PDR involve adjudication and also the monitoring and inspection of the legality of all entities, including government bodies. They provide a detailed account of how these exist on paper, but give no details about how these arrangements work in practice. Johns (2015) mentioned the judiciary, saying that in practice the judiciary of the Lao PDR was generally not considered independent. The judiciary was not raised by any of our interviewees or informants. Kaysone (1997:489) defined the role of the judiciary in this way:

Courts protect the constitution and laws and operate independently in prosecutions. The Party leads courts in terms of directions, mindset, organization, and personnel development without intervening rulings or proceedings.

He called for a separation between Party and the courts, warning that Party members should not interfere in legal decisions (1997: 468). One pathway to consider for future research into policy processes in Laos is where the judiciary plays any role in policy making processes in Laos. For instance, do they have a role in 'testing' laws and regulations in court?

In our NVIVO analysis, we noted when policy announcement or decisions cited a reason or determinant for a given policy. For instance, a policy announcement or decision may cite pressing circumstances (such as COVID-19), existing policies (such as Party resolutions) or scientific evidence (such as ACIAR research results). While our analysis was unavoidably *ad hoc* drawing

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only on the sources we included in our NVIVO project and relying on subjective judgement during coding, our results suggest the following indications of policy determinants in Lao PDR.

In Kaysone's speeches, the most commonly cited inspiration for his policy platform were the words of Lenin. In the documents we reviewed, Kaysone cited Lenin approximately thirty times, Marx and Engels three times each, Ho Chi Minh twice, and Dimitrov once. When Kaysone used the words 'researcher' and 'scientist', he often meant Marxist-Leninist theoreticians, such as in this statement:

Researchers have asserted that a state can truly establish the rule of law only when it considers laws having the supreme power superseding everything. (1997: 482).

And:

The role of value rule is a big issue that scientists from sibling countries have debated fiercely for decades, and it is now agreed that a rule of value is a rule of production of commodities. In a socialist society where there is production of commodities, the rule of value remains. We shall make use of such rule to serve socialism and should not consider this as just an 'appendix' that can be removed anytime. (1987, 300)

Kaysone also frequently cited existing policy as a reason behind the policy directions he announced. In fact, the most common determinant for policy, after Lenin, was the existing resolutions from the Politburo and planning targets (eleven examples each), and then existing PM Orders (three times). An example of the citations commonly included in announcements about policy that cite other policies is this statement by Kaysone:

Since the 5th Congress (Session II) of the Party's Central Committee, our party has established a policy that states: 'To build an economy at a national level and promote the growth of the economy at a sub-national level pursuant to a commonly agreed national economic structure.' Then, the resolutions of the 6th and 7th Meeting of Party Central Committee also re-emphasize such issues. Recently, in the III Party Congress, the 3rd and 4th Meeting of Party Central Committee (Session III), and resolutions of the Politburo of Party Central Committee also set a clear target that states, 'we have to be confident in decentralizing authorities for economic management to local levels and agencies.' (2005:140)

One example of a case where Kaysone used quasi-scientific citations to justify his policy directions was in his use of statistics in his 1991 speech on forest works. He said:

In the past 10 years, our forest cover has been destroyed on an annual basis due to slash-and-burn agriculture practiced by about 277,000 households. This covers about 380,000 hectares, out of which 80,000 hectare is in evergreen forests. Moreover, 80,000 to 100,000 hectares of forest area are also destroyed by logging every year. Given this pace, forest cover in Laos will decrease to 20,6% by 2000. (2005: 526)

This statement appears to draw on statistics gathered through the state apparatus, and includes a forecast (perhaps produced by an expert, but this is unclear). Another example from the same speech also hints at the use of factual evidence in driving policy:

It is estimated that there are several hundreds of plant species in our country. Out of those, 50 species have potentials for construction related uses. However, in the past years, we have utilized only 7 to 8 tree species. Most of them are high-value trees, and there is a lack of attention on conservation, breeding, and alternative species. I think that we should have measures and methods to explore other underutilized high-value tree species. In addition, we shall make more

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use of our country's abundant non-timber forest products. (2005)

We did not find an example of Kaysone himself explicitly citing a scientist or expert advice as an authority behind his policy announcements, but a role for experts was certainly flagged in this statement and other statements by Kaysone. A role for experts was also evident in our ethnographic research at the NA, with the new PM's announcement that he had appointed an advisory board of experts. He stated that these experts would be assigned 'research topics' and present their findings to the PM and Deputy PMs, who would then use the findings to give recommendations to the government for developing policies, and that 'Once the policy is enacted, it will be translated into measures which will then be implemented' (Khamphahn Viphavanh, 2021 summary of National Agenda to NA). However, this group of advisors were not scientists: they were composed of industry leaders, business owners, and finance specialists. They were not paid, but working on a voluntary basis for the PM. This is not 'research' in the sense in which ACIAR uses the term. The Lao word for 'research' can also mean 'consider', 'investigate' or 'synthesise': it does not necessarily involve activities that resemble academic research (see Appendix 2 GLOSSARY).

Even though this advisory committee did not involve academics, this announcement was welcomed by the NUoL researchers we interviewed, some of whom suggested that this may indicate a more welcoming reception for scientific evidence by the Government. One interviewee stated:

I will tell you a secret. The leadership group still don't have enough confidence in ground level researchers, but the up-and-coming generation, the Prime Minister has gathered many specialists to be his advisors. They are from business... various things.... later will be scientists, and other disciplines ... as his advisors. This is a clear (indication) that our researchers will continue to advance, and we trust this will continue to grow in the future.

Another way that evidence appears as a determinant of policy is when circumstances are cited as the motivation behind policy. Kaysone frequently referred to the circumstances of Laos: these were not generally presented as facts backed by evidence but were instead statements presented as facts. Kaysone repeatedly argued that it was very important to take the specific 'characteristics' of Laos into consideration when forming policy. He spearheaded what he called 'a righteous localization of Leninism-Marxism into our country's context.' (1997: 336. This involved identifying what it was that was specific about Laos, and tailoring Leninism-Marxism to suit that context.

Among the most commonly Lao 'characteristics' mentioned by Kaysone were:

- Social-cultural characteristics, i.e. he glossed the Lao as 'patriotic, harmonious, compromising, loving, generous, honest, hardworking, and fair' yet 'idealistic, having a simple one-sided view (not thinking critically), peace loving, lack in fluidity and ownership, stick to old ways (conservative), put own kinship, lineage and ethnic interests above all.' (2005, 45).
- The 'aspirations' of grassroots people for improved standards of living.
- The inexperience and low capacity of personnel.
- The serious destruction caused by the war.
- Natural conditions, such as the mountainous terrain and recurrence of drought and flooding, as well as an abundance of natural resources.
- Economic conditions, such as limited productive capacity, a 'natural' economy of 'scattered' smallholders operating in a subsistence based agricultural sector, and limited infrastructure such as roads.
- International conditions.

Often Kaysone's speeches reveal a sense of being under siege internationally. With the fall of the Eastern Bloc, he argued that 'hostile forces' had continued to attempt to undermine the Lao PDR.

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For example, ‘the hostile force has never given up their dark tactics that aim to destroy our new regime. They actively continue orchestrating their “peaceful evolution” plots in new various forms, focusing economy and politics ahead of military force.’ (2005, 50). This is one of many statements about ‘enemies’ that we found in our Lao literature review. It is important to note that the tactic of ‘peaceful evolution’ indicates a sense that the Lao PDR may be undermined by apparently friendly activities. This is an important factor for ACIAR to consider if it aims for policy change in Lao PDR: they may not be welcome, or may be strongly resisted, if it is perceived as part of a ‘peaceful evolution’, a tactic of undermining the regime. To counteract this danger of misperception it is worth underlining to ACIAR researchers and Lao counterparts alike that the priority of ACIAR is stability in the region (as mentioned the case study review, Smith et al. 2022), not regime change.

In our ethnographic work of contemporary policy processes, likewise, we found that circumstances were one of the most common citations behind policy. These were sometimes supported by citations of statistics, and sometimes supported by stories drawn from a delegate’s own experiences and observations. During our observation of the NA, these included budget limitations, debt and COVID-19. I will return to the question of how current circumstances were cited in policy process under ‘Hot Topics’ (section 3.2.6).

Although instances where scientific evidence was specifically mentioned in policy announcements or discussions were rare, our ethnographic review and Lao literature search unearthed many strong statements about the value and importance of using scientific research to inform policy. Kaysone (1997: 200) advocated the importance of science and research for the development of policies, and said the role of Government was ‘to identify detailed steps, come into a consensus, and to *make evidence-based decisions*.’ In a 1979 speech on cooperatives, he exhorted listeners to emulate his scientific style: ‘I hope that all comrades will *use this scientific approach* and seek new models to further enrich our accumulated lessons.’ (Kaysone 1997: 106). In 1989, discussing the NEM, he said, ‘In summary, the pathway to gradually progress from people’s democracy towards socialism introduced by our Party’s new imagination is *righteous, revolutionary, and scientific*.’ (1997:324). His 1991 speech on forest work is teeming with calls for more and better research to inform forest policies. He argued, ‘There is a need to enhance and mobilise efforts of the entire Party, people, and sectors *including social sciences, natural sciences, and hard sciences in planning and operationalizing plans and policies of the party*.’ (1997:34). However, incorporating the sciences into policy processes was hampered early on by a lack of funds, expertise and facilities. The link between the sciences and policy has also been uneven according to discipline. In our research it was clear that previously social scientists at NUoL had not been significantly involved in policy making processes, although other faculties (such as Forestry) were regularly involved in policy-making.

In our ethnographic research, strong statements about the value of scientific evidence in policy making were again common. One Ministry-based interviewee said, ‘**You can write a policy without good evidence, but it is like writing a lie**’. He also said, ‘If we actually participate, if we see the actualities, the policy will be more accurate, and we will release a policy that is appropriate.’ Another interviewee, a former NA member, said, ‘Certainly, the comments given in **the National Assembly must be rational and based on evidence**, such as when passing a law we have to provide our comments.’ He also said, ‘definitely, when the National Assembly members provide comments, **access to research findings would be very useful for evidence**. But unfortunately, mostly we’ve only had academic research but not much policy research so far. If we had more policy research, it would be more useful.’ An interviewee who had extensive experience at NUoL, the Ministry of Education, and the NA, said, ‘we should turn the research topics to be more of issues that support policy making and the development.’

In our ethnography of the NA, the PM said:

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To put it simply and make sure that we all understand and on the same page, it (his advisory board) is a mechanism to mobilise brainpower to help inform policies, which will shape measures and implementation methods for managing the country socio-economic affairs in a more scientific, selfless, and objective direction.

Kaysone identified ‘scientific and technological personnel’ and ‘technical staff’ as among the different categories of state personnel. For these government workers, he designated the following roles and responsibilities:

For scientific, technological and technical personnel: they are required to possess technological and technical knowledge that matches with their assignments, thirst for learning new knowledge, lessons learnt, obtain advanced technologies and techniques of the world in order to constantly upgrade their technical knowledge, and actively contribute to technological and technical innovation, productivity improvement and efficiency of both the tasks at the grassroots level and the ones assigned to them. (1997:165)

He argued that staff with scientific and/or technical expertise should be deployed to the ‘grassroots’ level so that (1) they could apply their expert knowledge there and (2) understand the real conditions facing people, so that they could make their research or technical knowledge more relevant to those problems, and more aware to the kind of ‘mobilization and organization skills’ necessary to rollout technical changes at the grassroots level. He also acknowledged that, in reality, most specialists—such as those with an international education— were far removed from the grassroots level (Kaysone 1997:143-144).

Our ethnographic study of the FS2035 consultation meeting revealed that scientific research was rarely mentioned. In the Lao language rooms, people more commonly cited their own experiences—things they had seen or heard in the past—the specific concerns of the organisations they represented, or other policies (the Forestry Law, the NSEDP, the NA resolutions) rather than scientific evidence. One of the chief authors of the Strategy commented in an interview:

As for the analysis of different factors, in the past we refer to the legislations. But we have never used what you asked about in terms of scientific information or the like as a reference for our work. I have never seen anyone doing research on this. It would be good if we have.

This is not to say that there are no examples of scientific research impacting policy (some are detailed in the Case study report). It is only to say that in the Lao Language and Ethnographic parts of this study, there were very few examples where scientific evidence was specifically cited as an influence in the policy processes we observed.

Barriers to including scientific evidence in policy mentioned in our study included time-poor bureaucrats (see section 3.2.10), low quality of research produced at NuoL, disconnect between ‘pure’ research and policy needs, lack of independent funding for research in Lao PDR, the donor-driven nature of many research projects, and the long timeframe of quality research projects versus the fast tempo of ‘hot topic’ politics (see section 3.2.7). Scale was also a barrier, with many of the policies we looked at closely (such as strategies) conducted at a national level, with research often happening in a specific locale or area.

3.2.3 Democratic centralism

Kaysone frequently stated that Democratic Centralism means that a form of statecraft ‘of the people, with the people and for the benefit of the people’ (e.g. 2005: 61) where the state is ‘organized by the people and for the people’ (1997: 512). While this is a cliché that may sound very familiar, it is also

one of Kaysone's definitions of Democratic Centralism, the core principle of decision-making in the Lao PDR.

Following Lenin's instructions, we shall enhance democratic rights and collective rights of the masses. The word 'democracy' does not only mean that people can elect their representatives to be in a government but also means to ensure that the Party's plans and the state's policies all start from the needs and aspirations of workers. People shall have the rights to be consulted with and to lead an implementation of plans and policies actively (1997:187).

In some comments made in a Central Level theoretical training session in 1984-85, he defined Democratic Centralism by contrasting it with bureaucratic centralism: this latter he defined as a situation where decisions are only made at a high level, and at those at the lower level are left with only waiting and following orders: 'for policies, plans, prices, money and so on' (1987: 230). With democratic centralism, by contrast, decisions are still made at the higher level, but the lower level 'take ownership of making use and implementing policies and plans.' (ibid). For instance, if the centre decides a pricing and salary policy, the grassroots level would determine the actual prices and salaries (ibid). Citing Lenin, he defined democratic centralism as a form of central coordination and planning that still allows the local potentials of creativity, including local solutions and diversity in implementation, because 'no one understands a local situation more than local people' (ibid). Like Lenin, he thought that too much democracy without the countervailing force of centralism would lead to anarchy. He likened centralism and democracy to 'two sides of the same coin that cannot and should not be separated' (ibid).

In a 1988 speech to the Central Party Committee, Kaysone used 'democratic centralism' in a way that emphasised the sense of listening to other's points of views. He presented democratic centralism as a form of collective decision-making, where there is discussion and scrutiny before a decision is made, and the decision represents a unity on the matter. The goal is 'to enable everyone to understand and come to a strong consensus.' (1997:184). One meaning of democratic centralism evident in Kaysone's use of the term is that any decision made must be a collective decision. He emphasised that decisions should serve the good of the whole nation, not just the class whose interests are served by the political party in power at the time (thus his opposition to multi-party democracy). He repeatedly contrasted democratic centralism with situations where a decision was made by whoever was at the desk at the time, or by people who stay in their offices and do not consult at the local level. Freedom, in Kaysone's view, is something quite dangerous and undesirable: if left unchecked, it would lead to anarchy, then violence, war and then an authoritarian regime. He said, 'Actions that demonstrate freedom, a lack of discipline, localism, and unregulated small-scale production all deviate from the principle of democratic centralism.' (V3 Ch3, 1986: 187). The centralism of democratic centralism allows the creative powers of democracy to be harnessed without deviating into anarchy. Thus, in democratic centralism the lower levels must always follow central directions, but equally the centre must listen to and be responsive to the lower levels.

In a 1991 speech to the 10th Plenary Meeting of the Party Central Committee, Kaysone warned that democracy was an evolutionary process. When 'educational and cultural levels are low,' he cautioned, 'a high level of democracy ... is impossible' (1997:509). He recommended introducing democracy gradually, alongside socio-economic development. To rush would be to invite 'anarchy.' He suggested that democracy be introduced first in the economy, through freedoms of trade, and then scaled up. He saw this as an essential element in limiting the power of the Party. He warned that, without a steady increase in democracy, the Party would risk abusing its power, becoming 'masters among revolutionaries': corrupt, powerful, and violating people's rights (1997:510). Kaysone cited Lenin, saying that Lenin had repeatedly warned that the greatest threat to the ruling Party is that of absolute power. Instead, he envisaged the role of the Party as 'sincere servants' of the people (ibid).

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In our ethnographic work of contemporary policy making in Lao PDR, we found that democratic centralism remains a key principle of decision-making processes. One example offered by an interviewee was that of the NA: there, ‘All issues need to receive comments and participation from all members. The decisions are based on the majority of votes’. This interlocutor said that, from his experience, the process was ‘highly democratic’ in that everyone was free to give their opinions. In this usage, democratic centralism is defined by the degree to which others are invited to give opinions on a given topic before a decision is made. At the same time, democratic centralism is characterised, according to this interlocutor, by the care and responsibility participants take with their comments. He said, democratic centralism is ‘also underpinned by a high level of responsibility taken by the members. This means that delegates are responsible for what they say. Their comments are based on evidence or technical principle. ... everyone gets to say what they want, but responsibly.’

Another interviewee likewise stressed both the importance of comments, participation and voting in democratic centralism, but also the unity after the vote, which must include even those who were voted down:

‘democratic centralism’ ລວມສູນປະຊາທິປະໄຕ what it means here is that everyone has a voice to say yes or no. ... (it) depends on the on the majority, If the majority of people say yes, then we decide yes. But for those who say no, they then need to follow up with a yes. You cannot ...not to go with yes. So that is what we mean by democracy, centralised democracy.’

In this interlocutor’s view, democratic centralism was a means of making important decisions in a way that takes into account a diversity of views, but still allowed unity to be preserved.

We cannot just say okay, we people say that, people say this, and then we don’t come up with the agreements and then we fight each other. We are not allowed to do that. Unity is of foremost importance for us in our current time. So, we see the situation of the nearby country like Myanmar and Thailand, we cannot accept that. So that is why the unity is this is the most important thing that we must focus on.

Kaysone, too, pointed to a lack of unity in other countries as a warning. He said:

The changes in the world situation, especially in the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, are already proof of that. We have also experienced these difficulties having seized power and built a new regime for 15 years. Prompted by the negative impacts of this development in Eastern European socialist countries, the 9th Central Meeting analysed the situation clearly and learnt that the primary causes were emotionalism, subjectivity, and a rush to build socialism strictly according to centralized, bureaucratic, and subsidized model. During the reform, there was a lack of unity among leaders, a wavering stance on Marxism-Leninism, **an abandonment of democratic centralism ideals and principles**, and baseless compromise. Their policies, methods and steps forward were unclear. Emphasis was not placed on the economy and living conditions, but on the transition to democracy without strong principles. All these led to chaos and the collapse of the people’s revolutionary administrative powers. The Parties also lost their powers and leadership role of society as a whole (2005, 62).

Democratic centralism, as it is understood and practiced in Laos, carries a strong accent on unity and solidarity. Even though it is formally a means of eliciting varied and diverse views on any given topic, the goal in these decision-making processes is always agreement. This has several effects that I believe were apparent in our ethnographic work, even when democratic centralism was not appealed to directly as a principle. Firstly, although we observed policy making processes at both a Ministerial level and in the NA, we did not see people debating or arguing. When NA members commented on

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proposed legislation and policy, this was phrased as providing their opinions, views, and comments. Leaders and bosses gave guidance and advice. Among peers (such as members of the same Party cell) there is a requirement to monitor one another's behaviour (cell members must vouch for one another's performance each year) but this is not framed in a divisive way, but as collegial feedback on strengths and weaknesses. From my own experience on village level in Laos, those most adept at navigating the political system are those people who do not frame their laments as attacks on the government, but as views, opinions, comments, and occasionally as requests for help. When I asked one policy maker in the present study how conflicts were handled in his department, he seemed puzzled by the question: 'Arguments? No. We don't have these. We would have to solve it internally. We don't have disagreements.'

This can produce very different kinds of meetings than those that some ACIAR researchers may be accustomed to, depending on their backgrounds. When we observed the Stakeholder Consultation Meeting for the Forestry Strategy 2035, we noticed very different behaviours and demeanours in the English-speaking break-out room as compared to the Lao speaking break-out rooms.

The room where people were speaking English was very different in style and tone from the rooms where people were speaking Lao. The English-speaking room was quite emotional, with people expressing frustration, disbelief, and strong opinions. Physically, the people in this room moved around more: people rearranged their chairs, spread out or stood up as they wished, perhaps to get a better view (as it was a bigger room). Some sat pushed back from the table, legs spread wide and elbows on knees, in quite a casual—or was it aggressive?—pose. The Lao-speaking rooms were more reserved. Long stretches of time in the breakout sessions were spent in total silence. When people did speak, it was with considerable formality. They often based their comments on their specific experiences or fields of expertise, rather than providing general and broad ranging comments. Physically, people largely remained in their chairs, and maintained the placement of the chairs neatly around the table. Everything offered in all the breakouts was supposed to be included in some way in the summary comments provided by the Chair of the room to the meeting coordinator at the end of the break-out. People in the Lao speaking room sometimes cooperated to assist the Chair to prepare these comments, with these comments becoming the focus of the work. In the English-speaking room, where the conversation was more free-ranging, meandering and inconclusive, the Chair expressed some concern about how to condense from the session a meaningful summary.

3.2.4 Collaborative meetings

Our ethnographic observations of policy making processes confirmed that consultations, meetings, and group approaches to identifying and addressing problems were very much part of the lived fabric of policy processes in Lao PDR. As a core part of democratic centralism, the need for regular consultations was clearly stated by Kayson. To choose just a few of the many examples, he said:

The Party's plans and state's policies all start from the needs and aspirations of workers. People shall have the right to be consulted with and to lead an implementation of plans and policies actively. (1997:188)

Government must:

Inform people regularly regarding its activities; organize elections for different organizations and for people's representatives; **conduct public consultations regarding the policy plans**, policies and laws related organizing and implementing support of people by different organizations and by civil servants and government employees. This is to enable people to exercise their rights and their oversight of the state's organizations. (1997: 479)

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Scientists are listed among the groups to be sought out in consultation:

a government may establish an economic council and a scientific council with members from different sectors in order to engage in consultation with business people, intelligentsia, and scientists before developing and promulgating policies and regulations. (1997:488)

And:

Our experience affirms that before any resolution is passed, all leading authorities shall conduct public consultations with a grassroots level, local authorities, the masses, experts, and scientists first. It is time to stop passing resolutions based solely on the subjective opinions of a certain group of people who only sit at their desks or based on numbers generated from lifeless computers. (V3 Ch3, year: page)

Kaysone himself engaged in consultation at the grassroots level:

Recently, I also visited some local levels, engaged in public relation building, and met with the grassroots level. This has enabled me to understand the dynamic reality of the local situation in many aspects. I then provided (these as) contributions to the Party Central Committee during our plenary meeting. (1997:189)

In our ethnographic fieldwork, we observed consultation meetings as part of our fieldwork. Consultations were a core part of development the Forestry Strategy 2035 (which began as the Forestry Strategy 2030, but changed its name during the consultation process). One of the prime authors of the strategy said that the process began with a review of the previous strategy, a review which ‘involved many parties.’

The first meeting was an open meeting to disseminate this decision. And based on the decision, we divided the participants into groups to discuss the nine programs in the 2020 Forestry Strategy. The groups then shared their comments and information on the achievements and outstanding issues of each program implementation up to the year 2020.

After that, in the follow up meeting, we consolidated all the comments and outstanding issues presented into a report. Then in the 3rd, 4th and 5th consultative meetings, we went into detail, specifying the structure of the 2030 Forestry Strategy, in particular, the vision, targets, objectives, operation framework and budget plan as well as operational plan for each program.

So, after we, the secretariate committee, prepared the draft 2030 Forestry Strategy, we presented it to the steering committee at the department level to give us comments. After that, from December to January, we organised validation meetings at the local level. The first one was held in Bolikhamxay, attended by seven provinces. We invited five sections from each province: Planning and Investment, Industry and Trade, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Forestry. In the meeting we discussed the draft strategy, which we took with us. They examined it and gave comments and feedback on the vision of the 2030 Forestry Strategy.

We also heard in interviews that wide consultation is the preferred means for any research project.

If we have big budget, we have to invite other ministries’ researchers to join our team and share budget with them. For example, for the project that I’m preparing with Dr. XX right now, we will invite four researchers from the Department of Agriculture and four from the institution, a total of eight.

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He said that all of his research was consultative, and if there was enough budget, then it would also involve collaboration. It was central to his research that:

whichever programme we work on, we have to plan jointly with others. ...if we have small budget, we can invite their representative to contribute. They participated well in the past. And they suggested we look for more budget, so we can do joint research as a big team. For some mega projects, we definitely have to work with other parties, but for our small research projects like what we had in the past, we just invited them to join and share comments. That's how it was done.

I also would like to point out that, other ministries also invited us to join their steering committees when they had research projects that are related to us in the past. We always collaborate among the institutes from MPI, MOIC, MONRE, and our ministries.

This style of research was much preferred to a model where researchers plan and execute a project in isolation, and only afterwards sought to contact wider stakeholder groups, such as policymakers. One policy maker said in an ethnographic interview:

Sometimes, they do an entire research project and they do everything, even the policy recommendations, and then they come to us (he said this with a tone of surprise, as if suggesting this is not collaborative enough). It is an 'citkagum nueng seu' a one-off activity (implying that it is not enough to base a policy on).

Smith and Kanowski (2022: 20) note that a frequent theme emerging from the case studies of ACIAR research was the effectiveness of “‘working with’ a wide variety of stakeholders.’ The findings from the Lao literature review and ethnography help to ground this observation. Involving ‘many parties’ is an essential ingredient of democratic centralism, where decisions be reached collectively, and through extensive periods of consultation. Where democratic centralism is the primary means of reaching political decisions, only a research project that has been consultative and collaborative *from the very earliest stages* has a chance of attaining traction in decision-making circles.

Sometimes, ACIAR researchers—particularly those new to Laos—may not understand the importance of the many meetings and consultations to which they might be invited, especially if the research is intended to have policy impact. The results of our research (ethnographic, literature review, and case studies) strongly suggest that attendance at meetings and early cultivation of collaboration among ‘many parties’ is an important part of policy processes in Laos. This is not just a question of creating the right ‘networks’ to achieve impact, although that is a consideration. It is also a question of demonstrating a high degree of consultation and openness to diverse sources of input. This is a basic feature of democratic centralism: without it, any project would risk looking irrelevant at best, disrespectful at worst. Likewise, at these meetings, a diversity of views should be welcomed, but attitudes of not listening, divisiveness, derision, polarised views, and heated debate (which may be common in Australian meetings, particularly in the university sector, for instance) are not. Again, diverse views are welcome, but only insofar as the end goal of attaining some grounds for agreement in the end remains in sight.

3.2.5 The National Assembly

The NA was a focus of our ethnographic work. It is also an often-overlooked entry point for researchers to find pathways to policy impact. For these reasons, I pay special attention to it in this report.

The formal role of the NA is to:

- 1) Consider, approve and make decisions on important issues;

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- 2) Monitor the administration and governing bodies in their performance and implementation according to the rule of law;
- 3) Approve laws and legislations;
- 4) Represent the people.

We studied two sessions of the 9th Legislature of the NA. The membership included people we knew from our existing research networks, such as well-established researchers from the university sector. Of the 164 members of the current legislature, 31 hold a PhD and 77 hold a Master's degree. Another 36 hold a bachelor's degree, leaving only twenty without a university education. This is a very important consideration, insofar as it indicates that NA members are likely to have some understanding of scientific research: the importance of EBP, how to understand research results, and perhaps how to apply them. As one interviewee said, 'Members of the NA are very highly educated these days.' The overwhelming majority of NA members (149) had also completed the highest level possible of training in political theory. Only five members had taken no political theory training at all.

The NA is a formal platform in bringing feedback from people or district level to the central (government). As one periodical explained:

Our Party has laid down the directions for building government, to give a government that is strong in law, belonging to the people, with the people and for the benefit of the people. Abilities of the Party can be seen in the quality of the activities of the NA and Provincial People's Assemblies. These representatives are Party people, and they are representatives of the people. They must have strength enough to carry two important duties. Namely: 'Those who lead and those who serve love the people's Party'. (Amphai 2021: 36)

From our viewing of video footage of the NA, it was evident that NA delegates expressed a great deal of respect and admiration for the government. As one said, 'As a people's representative, I have trust in the leadership.' It was universal for NA members to begin their comments by noting the agreement between themselves and others who had already spoken or tabled documents for discussion. Some even opened their comments by stating directly that they intended to enhance unity and harmony with their comments. However, they would go on to make suggestions for improvement, some of these quite significant: 'I fully agree with this direction, and I am very happy with it. However, I would like to propose....' Some of the suggestions raised were quite significant: doubling targets in one case, in another case, complaining revenue collection remains a problem and, 'after a long time, we still have not seen any results', and that this was related to too many restructures: 'It might be better if we could stick to one change long enough to see the results, not go back and forth too quickly.' In another example, a representative from Attapeu noted that many of the people displaced by the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy dam collapse were still living in temporary shelters. These are quite serious complaints, but these were always framed with a great deal of respect and phrased in terms of agreement with the overall direction. These were presented as comments offered in an effort to improve a joint effort, not arguments made in a debate.

It was notable that NA delegates phrased their comments based on specific examples from the Provinces they represented: these were comments that were 'researched' in the sense of consulting with local people, checking up on local conditions, and also reading the tabled documents. As one delegate commented: 'I did my homework.' In this way, an important form of 'evidence' that NA delegates draw on in their contributions to the policy-making process are their firsthand experiences in the Provinces they represent. NA consultative visits to the Provinces they represent are thus extremely important. As one NA delegate told us in an interview, consultations involve:

listening to their feedback, opinions and suggestions and then refer to relevant sectors to provide answers or clarifications accordingly. It's also by getting to know the people, meeting them,

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*asking for their opinions, and learning about their feelings.... There are schedules for each year to meet with the people. And there are two formats. One is a formal visit, which is organised twice per year. As there are two National Assembly sessions per year, so after each sessions, the delegates will be assigned into teams to visit the people. We will ask them questions and listen to their comments as well as disseminate the achievements of the Assembly meeting. But mainly the visit is to listen to them. The comments we receive will then be summarised and sent to the Vientiane Capital People's Assembly standing committee and forwarded to related sectors to address or provide answers. And for comments that are related to the central level, they will be sent to the National Assembly to be forwarded to appropriate sectors to address. That is the formal visit. There's also an informal visit. **There's a saying that the only time we're not a delegate is while we sleep.** Any situation, whether it's drought or flood or wherever people are facing problems, we would go and visit them.*

There is also a direct hotline to NA when it is in session. This line is for people to voice their complaints or give comments directly to the NA (Phouthen Pasaxon, 3-7 July 2020: 1, 3). The Direct line is 156. In the first session of 2020 the line received more than 490 calls. The newspaper that reports on these is Phouthen Pasaxon, which provides a summary. It noted that the 490 calls addressed a total of 72 kinds of problems and concerns about governance of the state, governance of the economy and society. Among these, the more prominent problems were: the price of electricity, land disputes, road construction, governance of the currency exchange rate, addictive drugs and court decisions. One NA member told us that the comments given on the hotline are all recorded and treated with gravity: 'whatever issue is shared by the people, we have to respect them all.' All calls are recorded and collated. A standing committee categorises the contents of the calls and sends them to the relevant authorities for a response. This NA member said that sometimes the calls could be quite repetitive, with different callers or even the same caller raising the same issue again and again (home schooling during lock down had been a particularly oft-raised issue in his session). As a result, he said, the government had become more proactive, pre-emptively providing information on issues likely to be a wide popular concern. In that sense, the hotline has been quite effective in creating a more responsive government 'of the people, with the people, and for the people.'

Another important role of NA is also to take part in considerations when complex issues to be addressed, for example dealing with legislation or law involving two or more ministries or a complex issue requiring many different parts of the government to coordinate their efforts. In such a case, the NA has an important role to hear from different Ministries in a process of establishing a coordinated response. During our ethnographic observations, an example of this role of the NA was when the National Agenda was tabled for discussion. The National Agenda was an emergency response to the financial crisis triggered by debt and COVID-19, and the drug abuse crisis. It was intended to set out work over the next two and a half years to urgently address these problems. As the PM explained in the NA, 'I would like to ask that you distinguish which ones are long term strategic work, and which ones are outstanding and urgent, similar to a serious disease that needs immediate surgery.' The longer-term work should be reserved for the NSEDP, but the National Agenda was addressed to immediate and urgent problems (see HOT TOPICS section 3.2.6).

The MAF responded to the National Agenda with a list of 'Five Works' which the Ministry committed to carrying out, as their contribution to the National Agenda. These were:

- 1) Accelerating exports of agriculture and livestock with existing contracts and trading partners;
- 2) Improving Clean Agriculture efforts to be on par with ASEAN standards, including legislation, inspection and certification measures;

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- 3) Identifying products for import replacement and expanding domestic production, especially through farmer co-ops and networks;
 - 4) Focus on infrastructure (for instance, to facilitate trade utilising high-speed rail) and technical know-how, highlighting existing aid programs and business investments;
 - 5) Agricultural Investment Zones operating on a public-private partnership model, contract based agriculture, 2+3 investments, PPP model, state land leases, and/or concessions.
- Anticipate changes in legislature to facilitate these and ease bottlenecks ‘so that investments in agriculture and forestry can run smoothly’ (as reported in Lao Phattana, see Section 7, Lao references).

These are the areas identified by the Minister as requiring urgent attention in the next two years to contribute to easing the crisis flagged in the National Agenda. The Minister spoke to these in the NA and received comments on them from the delegates.

Part of the NA participation in these considerations of policy is to inspect government proposals. As one interviewee explained, for instance,

the government might have a plan and defined the GDP growth at 7.9%, The National Assembly members would then have to check if this was feasible, how this number was calculated or what was used to guarantee that this number would be reached. The National Assembly members might have different information or different ways to calculate and might ask the government to reconsider or revise the number.

Often, NA representatives are given little time to comment on important issues like this. Yet, the genre of speech in the NA is such that comments with good evidence behind them carry more weight. Not only are well-supported arguments more persuasive, but they are also more conciliatory, fitting the overall theme of unity and harmony. However, relevant evidence can be very hard to find. As this NA member continued: ‘So yes, definitely, when the National Assembly members provided comments, the use of research findings would be a very useful for providing evidence.’ ACIAR researchers may be asked for evidence by NA members directly. One ACIAR researcher commented: ‘As the Forest Law reached near completion, we (the specialist teams) were receiving requests from members of the National Assembly (Madame Souvanpheng in particular) to address and explain particular issues’.

The final stage of an NA session involves summaries. The Chair summarises the main points of the comments and instructs the government to consider and act on these comments. In some cases, Ministers will be asked to respond to specific points raised in the summary of comments, and NA members again have a chance to ask questions and make comments to the Minister. These exchanges will also be summarised. The summaries are provided to the National Assembly Standing Committee, who oversees the government’s response to the comments. The government makes the appropriate changes, and then resubmits the document to the National Assembly Standing Committee, which makes the final decision on whether it can proceed to approval. If it does proceed, it is read again to the NA, where comments can again be collected, and where it is finally passed as law, legislation, decree, PM Order, development plan or another document. In our analysis, it was notable that the names of NA delegates were not mentioned in the summaries: comments were aggregated and combined, so that the summary represented the response of the NA as a whole, not individuals. This again underlines the importance of the principle, so important under democratic centralism, of unity and harmony as the end goal after the elicitation of a diverse set of comments and opinions.

3.2.6 Hot topics

There are several tempos to policy making processes in Laos. Some are very long term, such as visions, strategies and plans. Some people in our study even spoke of the aspiration to one day make a one-hundred-year plan for Laos. Other tempos are shorter, involving immediate and urgent responses to current events, such as the National Agenda tabled in the NA, ‘policy’ (in the sense of support) in response to disasters, and decrees made in response to an emergency situation. We have glossed this second tempo with the term ‘hot topic’, a term used by some of the policy makers and researchers in our study.

‘Hot topics’ are an important consideration in policy making processes in part because of the specific meaning that ‘policy’ has in Laos: when you translate policy as ‘nanyobai’, it is likely that people will think of those responses (of support, immediate aid, or extraordinary measures) that are made in the face of a pressing need. As one interviewee commented when we asked how and when research impacts policy:

Speaking about (researchers) stepping into decisions about policy planning, that is when there’s a ‘hot issue’: if the topic is hot. To give a simple example: why have the bananas in the north impacted the health of the people working (on the plantations)? That was perceived as ‘Oh, we can’t have this! This is an emergency. We must analyse it urgently. Send researchers right away.

A common saying we heard in the ethnographic interviews was ‘If there is no urgent issue no policy is needed.’

In part, this is simply a problem of translation: ACIAR has a broad understanding of policy which includes law and strategies as well as shorter term responses. But this is also a problem of temporality between policy cycles and research timing. One NAFRI researcher commented that, in general, ACIAR research was very high quality, and it was relevant to policy issues, but that ‘*they come a little bit late.*’ For this researcher, the turnaround on a policy related research project was usually six months. Funds from other projects may be redirected to this urgent research. He commented that, if a donor was involved, the research may extend to one year but in such cases the chance of policy impact was lower, because policy research, in his experience, was often in response to ‘hot topics’ that required an immediate response. He explained that research in response to a hot topic has some special characteristics:

A hot topic means that there is a situation in society or the environment, a real situation, so we already have lessons learned from that. Certainly, the staff, the ones who are closely concerned with that area will take hold. They respond to that, both government officers and researchers, and write up a proposal to assist with this or that problem to solve it. (ACIAR) come in late because that information has not reached them. The’ don’t have the data, so their researcher’ don’t know. Who would feed the information through to them? The’ don’t know. Who gives the relevant researchers the collected information?

One key means by which hot topics are raised is via the NA. When members report on the concerns people have voiced to them, or issues are raised repeatedly on the hotline, these can coalesce into a hot topic that galvanises an emergency response. One such example was the PM ban on logging exports. When asked why a ban made sense in this context, one Lao research explained that it was motivated by reports from everyday people that were channelled into the NA by the delegates. As another NUoL researcher explained:

at the National Assembly session, they will hear the voice from the, from the member and the member that will understand the issue from the province from the district, what is the hot issue

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from there, for example, banana growing, in the, in the forestry sector is Land lease, or plantation occasion on the livelihood. There is a lot more example you see if the voice of the people say this, because they'll come in quite listen to the voice of the ordinary people. Sometimes it's heard from the industry.

Hot topics were identified as one of the main entry points for researchers into policy making processes: when a topic was really 'hot', researchers may be invited to present at the NA. As one Lao researcher said, 'in the National Assembly session, it will end up there if it is a really hot topic, they will invite Professor from the university to present to them, like land issue.' Researchers may also be asked to study hot topics at length. Increasingly, NUoL is being asked to focus research explicitly on hot topics. For instance, a NUoL postgraduate coordinator said:

we have six PhD program, see, six PhD program in our university, and then the government asking that the topic needs to be addressed to the national issue. It should be the national hot topic that you need to do research.

Hot topic research often involves providing an 'answer' and 'a way out' of a difficult and pressing situation.

When it is a 'hot ... hot spot', like that. They have to organise a committee called a Taskforce to go and research and analyse urgently to produce a rapid answer. For example, there was a problem with banana exports in the north, right? There were various chemicals involved and the Ministry ordered us to go and research it. And we had to do it urgently because that was a 'hot topic' and we used the government budget. In this case, we had to follow the directions or guidance from them, right? But if it is long term research, that is sponsored internationally, then in some cases it can answer 'policy' and in some cases it will not provide an answer (for policy questions) and that's that. There are two situations.

This interviewee, and other researchers we spoke to, took care to point out that there are different tempos to research, just as there are for policy. Hot topic research is rapid and very likely to contribute to policy processes. But there is also long-term research and basic research. A leader of NUoL and other important research portfolios that we spoke to underlined that he saw value in supporting both basic (pure and/or experimental) research as well as seeing more research focused on hot topics raised in the NA (applied or policy research).

3.2.7 Two realities

Bartlett (2013:6-7) writes that:

the Government of Laos continues to operate as an organisation engaged in a revolutionary struggle. Policies take the form of sweeping directives and ambitious targets, which are implemented through campaigns managed by Party members. These campaigns require the urgent mobilization of human and financial resources from wherever they are available....

These include both the 'hot topics' discussed above, but also periodic mobilisations organised by the Party, often under slogans and mottos. These include 'The Four Breakthroughs' and 'The Three Builds', to mention two that were influential during our research. Like hot topics, these can be rolled out with a sense of urgency, with resources abruptly redirected towards these special efforts and donors often asked to contribute. Unlike hot topics, however, these do not emanate from the

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comments of people or industry, but from the Party. As such, they can be quite hard for outsiders to understand. One example is the slogan, which we heard many times in our ethnographic work, that Party members needed to strive to be transparent, strong and resolute. This appeared to be a call for anti-corruption and professionalism, but the exact meaning probably could only be grasped by going through Party training and attending Party meetings.

These Party mobilisations are overtly political. Whereas hot topics are often due to complaints about the impact on people's livelihoods and/or wellbeing of a given topic, and are phrased as technical problem awaiting a solution, these mobilisations are driven by ideology and political commitments about the kind of society the Party is dedicated to building. They are 'policy as politics' as opposed to evidence-based policy. Government workers are typically tasked with implementing policy. Many, especially in the sectors we researched, are also technical specialists. However, many of them are also Party members, and in that sense engaged in politics. Bartlett (2013: 5) has argued that this creates:

Two 'realities', the technical and the political. The relationship between these realities is like the two sides of a coin, or parallel universes. Government staffs inhabit both realities, but projects like LEAP are only designed to address problems and opportunities in the technical reality.

Although usually the role of the Party is thought of in terms of leadership (broad policy) with the GoL responsible for implementing these directions, the Party also has a role in implementation. Kaysone (1997: 121) said:

An implementation effort shall be treated as a duty of each and every personnel and Party member because each and every one has a duty to lead and organize the general public to implement all plans and policies of the Party and the state within their responsibilities.

Many staff of Ministries, universities and research institutes are also Party members. one NUoL researcher explained:

it is like you cannot separate them at all. The Party work is often part of day-to-day work, not separate. Party meetings often take place at one's place of work and during working hours as part of one's work. Often the head of the Party Unit is the head of the division or department – it is the same person. The Party work is about leadership and directions. The government work is about implementation.

Party meetings take up about one day out of every five for Party members who also work in government offices or institutes. These competing demands can be difficult to balance. Another researcher we spoke to had recently left a Ministerial position. He explained that he enjoyed research and policy-making, but he could not tolerate the politics involved in working in these fields in Laos. He had left to become a private contractor, but remained a Party member. He, however, was an exception: the other researchers and policy makers we interviewed were both Party members and employees. One's standing in the Party is a significant factor in one's capacity to influence outcomes. One researcher recalled a previous instance when a minister was, unusually, not a member of the Politburo:

It you can recall at the time of Mr. Sitahang, He was the minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. But he was not the member of the central political party, so it's hard, because the (agricultural) issue is not raised in that important meeting. But now is good is that the Minister is the member of the Central Party. And now the Minister of Education is from the University of Laos. It's from the National University. And he's now a member of the political party. So he's quite knowledgeable of the social issue. He was the Dean of the social faculties, Faculty of Social

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Science. At that level, so that is the one who will raise the issue for research. And of course, we need him to go and come back, so we can see him, discuss with him and address our voice to him. Raise the issue with him. I think that there are many ways to get in. This is what they call policy advocacy, isn't it?

This interlocutor is underlining that having contacts among people in high-ranking positions in the Party is an essential part of advocating for policy impact. Most members of the NA are also Party members. One article in *Khosana* newspaper described these two roles as burdens that required significant energy to carry out at the same time. It reported:

Aims of the Party must be appropriate to the spirit of the people. This means that everything is for the collective benefit of the multi-ethnic people. The leadership capacities of our Party-State have taken the direction in building the government to be a state of strong law of the people, with the people and for the benefit of the people. The abilities of the Party are seen in the quality of the movement of the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assemblies, representatives are of the Party and represent the people. They must have enough energy to carry the two important duties such as: 'Those who lead and those who serve, who love the People's Party well.' Thus, the National Assembly representatives have only wisdom but must also have political resolve.' (Amphai 2021: 36).

All this underlines that fact that, in Lao PDR as in other countries around the world, policies are never a matter of evidence or technical questions alone. Policies can be driven by political considerations, and in Laos, the main driver of politics is the LPRP. As one ACIAR researcher commented: 'it's all about people at the end of the day, is that people are the decision makers, and sometimes people will sidestep good science for a political outcome.'

3.2.8 Policy churn

And you may know that now, the Ministry of Science and Technology is demolished, because they didn't see the linkage between academic research and the national policy.

(Ethnographic interview)

While our research question implicitly foregrounded the question on how research could change policy ('impact' it), the reality of conducting our project involved participating in an ambience where policy change was all around us. Interviewing policymakers, we often found ourselves interviewing people who were not certain how long their departments and jobs would last, or who had changed roles two or three times in recent years. Researchers were not untouched: during the period of our research the funding and mandate for research in Laos was undergoing significant change. The Ministry of Science and Technology was abolished, and its component parts divided to relevant Ministries. Research institutes were relocated to the Ministry of Education, with the one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) earmarked for research also allocated to that ministry. An unmet demand for more policy-relevant research is one of the factors behind this change. One interviewee said:

Now, the government have allocated one percent of GDP for the research. But the point is that the research result not really supplied for the policy development. So that is why they decided to have these institutes to be under the Ministry of Education, and that the money will be allocated to the university to do the research, based on the government interest, and what they're aiming for, is that to get the research from the university, to feed the development or policy.

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The changes were ongoing as we were writing this report. As we were concluding it, we heard that as part of the slashes to government officer jobs, all the research institutes were slated to be unified in one institute, the 'Institute of Science'. This was planned to include NAPPA, the peak training body for Party members. At time of writing, this consolidation underway but was also receiving significant pushback from NAPPA, who were asserting their continued independence from the other institutes.

Policy churn is characteristic of policy processes in Laos (see Hot Topics 3.2.6, Two Realities, 3.2.7). This is also a result of the commitment to frequent inspections and feedback sessions of existing policies. Should any given policy be found to be not working, or resulting in new problems, that policy could be updated or even dissolved. Kaysone (1997:193) said:

we need to enhance our inspection to scale up good practices and correct mistakes in time.

According to Kaysone's political philosophy, policies must be continually monitored and modified in light of results on the ground. The Lao literature review found that newspapers carried reports about policy change in response to negative feedback and inspections. For instance, President Thonglun (2020:2) made a speech at the NA about the electricity rate where he said 'the price rises, because the price is not reasonable and if electricity is not readily available to improve production and the lives of the people already, we hold that our electricity policy must not be correct'. In another news article, it was reported that Agriculture and Forestry legislation was updated in response to people's feedback (Phouthen Pasaxon, 1-4 Jan 2020:7). These changes are consonant with the culture of policy-making processes in Laos, where change is a prominent feature.

Part of the ethnographic reality of policy churn, the two realities, hot topics, and collaborative meetings, is the phenomenon of time poor bureaucrats. The policymakers we spoke to were uniformly busy. Some of our interviews were interrupted by calls and visitors. Our access to the footage of the NA was hampered not so much by secrecy (it appeared that the tapes were available on request, provided the request was approved) but by the sheer difficulty involved for our Lao team of coordinating with the right people and persisting when an obstacle was encountered (the wrong recording, for example). It was exhausting for our Lao team to run the letters and chase up with the right people and battle through the traffic to show up at the right places at the right times: in this case, persistence paid off, but also took its toll. I argue that busyness is not a trivial matter: instead, it is a key characteristic and constraint of policy-making in Laos. It shapes policy, and it shapes the uptake of research in policy. Busy policymakers may feel they do not have time to reach out to scientists to ask for help, and researchers may feel they do not have time to research.

In an excerpt from one ethnographic interview:

Speaker 1: 'You want to do research yourself but you can't because you are caught in a knot.'

Speaker 2: 'Yes, that's right. Going to a meeting, making policy.'

In one ethnographic observation of a policy-making meeting, we saw the Minister deliver some much-anticipated comments on a draft document. From an ethnographic note:

The Minister spoke in an unhurried manner and remained uninterrupted. He holds a PhD from Australia, and he did mention some contrasts he had seen between how Lao people approach a problem and how Australians do, but he did not introduce any scientific evidence. Rather, his guidance was all about the style and structure of the strategy document, not the contents. He explained he had only skimmed part of the strategy as he had not had time to read it: perhaps that is why his comments were so focused on quite superficial and stylistic concerns. Although he

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did deliver what comments he had with great gravity, he also explained he could not stay for long: he had another engagement. He left the meeting after speaking for twenty minutes or so.

This problem was identified by Kaysone (1997:151), too, who said: ‘*qualified technical staff are deployed to ministries where they end up with either no jobs to do, or working on routine administrative tasks. The situation leaves no technical staff doing research or study*’. While Kaysone could see the conflict between administrative duties and research or technical work, I do not think he could have predicted the degree to which busyness would come to characterise the phenomenological experience of being a policymaker or researcher in Laos today. Busyness is a very real barrier to the production of quality policy and to the impact of research on policy. While it is often noted that policymakers are busy (as when researchers are exhorted to write short policy briefs that busy people can quickly read) ethnographically this phenomenon must be problematised. Perhaps it is not the length of research reports, but the busyness of people, policymakers included, that is the true barrier here?

Busyness is part of the lived and embodied reality of policy churn. In our interviews, we spoke with researchers and technical staff who were uncertain and time poor as they dealt with news of the changes impacting their departments and jobs (see below). A delegate at the NA spoke of how frequent changes to customs policy led to confusion on the ground, and declining revenue collections. She noted that, in a context of revenue scarcity, it may be wiser to stick with one policy for long enough to extract some benefits from it, before considering yet another change. This is consonant with findings from the literature review, for example Lea (2020), who has argued that often what is needed is not more policy change, but the patience and skill to extract some good from existing policy. Unfortunately, often influence and leadership is confused with changing policies (Lea is speaking specifically of Australian policy culture). In relation to our research question, the phenomena and negative impacts of policy churn are worth taking seriously, as they raise the question of whether ACIAR is indeed best advised to encourage researchers to pursue ‘policy impact’ in the sense of changing policies and thus contributing to churn. Alternatives to consider might be that researchers aim to demonstrate their ‘leadership’ on certain issues and ‘influence’ over certain outcomes or show through their research how some good can be extracted from existing policy (working at the level where implementation is problematic), rather than a narrow focus on changing policy.

3.2.9 Emulation and outstanding examples

The newspapers and other media channels feature ‘Great work and outstanding people’ articles which provide examples of people who have been doing great work. One of the regular columns in Khosana, ‘Good Job, Outstanding Person’, for instance, offers portraits of individuals and their successes. Examples include:

- A young businesswoman who runs a successful jewelry business in Bokaeo province. She acknowledges the Party broad policy in providing opportunity for her to make a show case of her business overseas (Thon Phomthikon. 2021, as listed in 8.1.1.3).
- In the same issue, we see another success story: two villages, Tayong and Panae villages of Savannakhet province, received funding from local philanthropists, to conduct project helping the villagers in stepping forward close to eliminating poverty. The philanthropist made a remark that their action is according to the Party’s broad policy (in conjunction with the need identified by the District). (as listed in 8.1.1.3.)
- In a different issue, another story tells of a government officer who used his weekend (or other time outside office hours), to run a Japanese melon farm. He recognized that the Party broad ‘nanyobai’ (policy) encourages government officers to explore ways of improving their living conditions, or earning extra income, by using their time outside office hours effectively (Phetnamnung 2021, as listed in 8.1.1.3.).

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Interestingly, even though in these examples people are engaged in essentially private activities (growing vegetables in their spare time, engaging in philanthropy) in a way that is not by any means materially supported by the government, nonetheless both emphasised government ‘nanyobai’ (policy). This is nanyobai in the sense of broad directions in Party-State leadership and advice, especially insofar the advice relates to how problems can be solved and people’s living conditions improved.

The issue of outstanding people was also raised in the NA during the comments made by delegates. One NA delegate was concerned that ‘nanyobai’ (policy, in this case meaning support or rewards) had been mandated for outstanding people in the NSEDP, but that she could not see the relevant budget line to pay for this support. This resonates with what a MAF employee told us in an ethnographic interview: ‘if there is not budget, there is no nanyobai.’ This NA representative was concerned that these outstanding people would not receive the rewards they were due. In this case, she was using the term to speak of veterans who had provided outstanding service during the war.

Identifying outstanding people, praising them (including in newspapers and through awards and ceremonies) and recommending that others emulate them is a very entrenched part of the political cultural of Lao PDR. Kaysone himself is held up as a person to emulate. The continued emulation of his work is reflected in citation practices that continue to use his words and phrases: sometimes directly attributed to him, sometimes repeated as mottos or sayings that have entered everyday language as common wisdom.

He advocated that Party members act as models for others to copy. He also recommended establishing pilots or examples of initiatives (such as collectives) so that others could learn about the policy by visiting successful examples. He said (1987:106):

If there are no pilot locations or models as reported, where would we draw lessons from in order for the farming masses to see examples and thus follow?

Smith et al. (2022:17) note that in one ACIAR project, success was evident in ‘busloads of people’ coming to view the demonstration site. These included DGs and ministers and the Ambassador. What the ethnography makes clear is that this is not simply a case of the effectiveness of having ‘something to look at’ although that may be part of the story. The bigger story is how demonstration sites like this are compatible with emulation. ACIAR research that provides good news stories and demonstration sites that people can visit may chime with an existing political culture where emulation is an entrenched part of the political philosophy.

It is notable that both project areas included in the study with most policy impact in Lao PDR (fisheries and forestry) also shared in common a demonstration site. In the case of the fisheries, this was located in a village that was very involved in the project, including hands-on involvement in experimental work. The ethnographic and Lao language review shows that emulation is an important feature of Lao politics. That is: not all policy movement is from the top down. There is also an important lateral movement, where ‘outstanding and excellent’ examples are reported widely. Outstanding and excellent people are featured in newspapers. Families and villages are regularly identified as ‘models’ for others to emulate. Reporting often takes the form of ‘good news stories’ of someone or a group doing things well and succeeding. This contrasts with much research and policy work, where the first step is to identify a problem and then solve it. In the emulation model, by contrast, research and policy is about identifying what works, and publicising the good news and inviting others to come and visit in order to learn more and emulate.

4 COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Thinking beyond the policy brief:

Many ACIAR researchers are familiar with or have been asked to write policy briefs. However, our literature review showed that there may be shortcomings to an overreliance on policy briefs. Collaboration ought to begin with the earlier stages of the research.

In terms of dissemination, other audiences could be targeted. The periodicals identified in the Appendix 1 are evidently intended to be read by policymakers. Even if it is true that Laos is not generally a 'reading culture', these may be read more than some policy briefs. *Khosana* is evidently aimed at District and perhaps Provincial staff, whereas *Alun Mai* is targeted at high level policy makers. *Khosana* especially prints 'good news stories' about everyday people doing something well that could be emulated. If ACIAR has a successful demonstration site—such as the fisheries fish ladders—it might be worth pitching a media release to a periodical like *Khosana*.

In addition, the Lao literature review revealed that much news is handled through online platforms (YouTube, Facebook) and many of the Lao news outlets and Party organisations have channels on these platforms. It is possible that these venues would be interested in content prepared in the Lao language about certain ACIAR projects, especially ones that share good news stories about successful projects that have truly inspired local Lao people.

2) Rethinking where policy impact happens

The close study of ACIAR documents, reported in Smith and Kanowski (2022), showed that when ACIAR researchers and staff discussed policy impact in Lao PDR (either hoped for or achieved) what they often meant was impact at a ministerial level (mention of DGs, Ministers and Departments is frequent in Smith and Kanowski 2022), NAFRI (which Smith and Kanowski note was often assumed by Australian researchers to be a policy-making centre) changes to law and legislation, or adoption of ACIAR research by a big players such as the ADB (as in the celebrated case of the Fisheries projects, as reported in Smith and Kanowski. 2022). This emphasis on Vientiane-based influencers may be lop-sided, detracting from attention to the provinces (including the Governors and line ministry staff there, but also and importantly the People's Provincial Assemblies) and the representatives of the provinces in the NA.

The Lao literature and ethnographic review of the newspapers showed the importance of these provincial bodies and representatives. In particular, the provincial and NA representatives have an important role in being conduits between the people and the government. These representatives also must comment on government policy. Therefore, they are often in need of evidence to inform their feedback to the government. At the same time, they are potentially a very good source of information for ACIAR about 'hot topics' and areas of concern for the people in their areas.

Likewise, when successful demonstration sites are established, these could be publicised among district and provincial staff and Assembly Representatives, the relevant NA members, and relevant ministerial staff, ideally through a high-level organised tour. A tour has the added benefit of underlining the collaborative, consultative approach appropriate in a context of democratic centralism. Field visits to demonstration sites where success is discussed would have the added benefit of continuing and enhancing ACIAR's legacy of small-scale and local-level interventions, but with the added knowledge of how these can be scaled up to contribute to wide-spread change.

3) Rethinking what policy impact looks like

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In the case study analysis, it was evident that sometimes ‘hot topics’ directly influenced research directions, with the Lao government approaching ACIAR for research findings to address a hot topic. An example is the forestry projects, where a PM order abruptly halted logging exports in response to a sense of emergency around the depletion of forest resources in Laos, and ACIAR research was used to inform the policies in the aftermath of that sudden decision. In this case, the ‘hot topic’ style of politics was a useful entry point for ACIAR research to find traction in policy making circles. But the ‘hot topic’ style also has significant drawbacks. During our study, we saw repeated and ample evidence of policy churn. DOPLA, which we at first thought may be the site for the ethnographic study, was no longer in existence by the end of our study. The NA is kept very busy with changes to law and legislation. The National Agenda had been introduced to the NA, bringing sweeping changes to government spending and revenue collection. The Ministry of Science and Technology was abolished, and the one percent of GDP dedicated to research was redirected to the Ministry of Education, which itself was commencing under a new minister. In short, it was a tumultuous time. This gave a strong impression that Laos is already rich in policy and policy change, as seen in restructures, changes to funding, and changes to measures and regulations. This raises the question: is it ethical or advisable to add fuel to the fire with direct efforts at further policy change?

Some ways forward are suggested by the ethnographic and Lao language material. In Lao newspapers reporting of outstanding people, for instance, ‘policy’ did not mean just the laws and Party directions, but also the advice and suggestions from the Party about how people could improve their own lives. Here, policy change is about how everyday people changed how they did things: started a business, started a philanthropic venture, or started a weekend gardening project. Policy here is something akin to inspiration and know-how. Perhaps ACIAR, too, could extend the meaning of policy to include not just how things are on paper, but how people actually do things.

Another way forward is suggested by the case study material. As one ACIAR researcher who had been involved with significant research with policy impact in Lao PDR commented, she felt she had not been able to ‘close the loop’ by returning to follow up to see if the policy changes she was involved with did end up improving things on the ground, even though her research had involved interviewing small holders and people at the local level. Perhaps one principle for policy directed research should be: when research is explicitly targeted at policy change, and succeeds in attaining policy change, it is expected that researchers and the funding body, after a reasonable amount of time, will also follow up with those most affected by the policy change to assess its impacts. Policy change for its own sake is not the goal, so if it is attained, some kind of follow up on the impacts seems the most ethical stance. As Kaysone said: there is no leadership without inspection (1997: 193).

4) Thinking research and policy with the social sciences

This research was, to our knowledge, the first time the Faculty of Social Sciences at NUoL has been involved in an ACIAR project. Throughout this report, I have highlighted examples of where social science has been useful:

- ACIAR researchers have noted the importance of ‘society’, ‘cultural’ factors and ‘belief’ (as mentioned in 3.1.2 on corruption) but these concepts ought to be used with care to avoid stereotyping. Involving trained social scientists, rather than social science concepts on their own, is a reasonable means to avoid such pitfalls.
- I have argued that local level consultations are important for ACIAR researchers. Social science methods are appropriate here and trained social scientists may have access to methods that move beyond the standard format of meetings and may be more effective in establishing rapport and a productive consultation.
- Kaysone Phomvihane included the social sciences in his list of scientists that ought to be involved in policy-making processes. However, in our research it was evident that to date

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there has been little involvement of NUoL or other social scientists in policy circles. However, this may change with the current Minister of Education, a trained anthropologist, overseeing a fundamental restructure of how research is funded.

- NUoL social scientists have not benefitted from as many external linkages as other faculties and as a result have an overall lower level of education and training. They would thus benefit particularly from the capacity building and training elements of ACIAR research.

This project was also unusual for including a review not only of English language literature, but a Lao literature review. Additionally, a significant proportion of the budget was allocated to translations of key documents. Many of the interviews were bilingual or in Lao, with translations made afterwards. Given our specific research question (policy processes) this was perhaps only to be expected. However, it did raise some insights that may be relevant to other ACIAR projects. First of all, working in two languages made us attentive to difficulties of translation. These were significant, impacting almost all of the core terms of our research question. In our case, we had the time and the interest to explore these. But we speculated how often problems of translation occur in other ACIAR projects, but without the time or the resources to unpack these. Given the problems we found with translation, as a novice to ACIAR research, I wondered how the treacheries of translation were handled in other projects where researchers do not usually have extensive skills in Lao language or the time to carefully work over local language materials. I learnt that often it is Lao counterparts and technical staff who bear the burden of translation. This may be an unacknowledged role of a person in fact involved in the project for their technical expertise. Often, they value the chance to practice their English skills. But translation is also tiring (physically) and unsatisfying (involving reaching for the best compromise on the fly, rather than saying what you really wanted to say). When misunderstandings compound, or people feel that translation has garbled the message, relationships in the project team may be strained. (That said, high quality translation has its own dangers for relationships in the project: sometimes ignorance really is bliss. Also, our team reflected that professional translators are not necessarily the answer: they introduce their own tensions to a research team). The question of translation seems fundamental to how ACIAR projects proceed, yet the Case Study materials (project reports, reviews) had little to say on the fact that universally, research done by ACIAR is research done in at least two languages. Perhaps addressing this question head on is one way to move forward with research that is more sensitive to social science methods such as attention to local political philosophy, local concepts and values. At a minimum, I would recommend discussing the question of translating (who will do it? What if they need help? Etc) at the commencement of any project.

5 CONCLUSIONS

What are the determinants of policy-making and research impact in Laos? I have provided several, interrelated answers to this question.

First, the structure of the Lao political system is a significant determinant. The LPRP is the main policy-making body in Lao PDR. It provides leadership on broad policy directions, guidance on implementation, and political training for bureaucrats and leaders. It is difficult for research to impact Party directions, as meetings are open only to members. However, there are important channels of feedback including the mass organisations, grassroots consultations, and the fact that many GoL personnel are also Party members. The key policy-making elements of the GoL include the PM and Deputy PMs, ministers and their ministries, and the NA. Ministries have their own research institutes (this is currently under restructure) and furthermore usually have relationships with donors who contribute research funding. Links between the NA and researchers are less well established, but increasingly necessary as the NA—as a conduit between constituencies and the GoL, and as an inspector of the GoL—is becoming an increasingly important venue for policy directions, such as ‘hot topics’. NA members are generally highly educated and they are required to frame their

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comments in an objective, supported manner. An opportunity currently exists for researchers to explore how to impact policy by forming better links with the NA.

Second, the political philosophy animating the political system is a significant determining feature. The core principle of decision-making in Laos is democratic centralism. LPRP and the GoL are in principle ‘of the people, with the people and for the people’. This means that all policy is supposed to be for the benefit of the people, and indeed improving livelihoods and addressing problems as they arise is a major focus of policy in Laos. It also means that policy ought to be extremely consultative, with opportunities for a diverse range of people to voice their views and comments before a decision is made. Scientists have opportunities to contribute to these consultations and researchers should also take care to be consultative in their own research if they wish to have policy impact. Under democratic centralism, the end point of consultation is an agreement. The emphasis is on unity. Researchers who want to attain policy impact should present their recommendations in a constructive manner that acknowledges common ground. In addition, the LPRP is committed to equality among all the people in Laos: the goal is that it should not matter if one lives in the city or the countryside, uplands or lowlands, everyone should have access to the same standards of living. Researchers whose work aligns with these goals, such as improving rural and remote livelihoods in significant ways, is much more likely to attain policy impact. The political philosophy of Laos has generated unique concepts. For instance, the word ‘policy’ has come to take on the additional meaning of help, subsidy, incentive, support or waiver. Researchers wanting to impact policy may find entry points into policy may wish to take care in how they use this word: sometimes, a more specific word (such as strategy or law) is more appropriate.

Third, lived realities of policy-worlds are an important determinant of policy-making and research impact in Laos. Often, policy is a response to an urgent problem. ‘Hot topics’ raised in the NA or other means of popular feedback may gather sudden importance and elicit an urgent response. The right research at the right time can thus quickly find significant policy impact. However, hot topics can be hard to predict and many research funders have limited means of finding out about hot topics in a timely manner. Many bureaucrats and researchers in Laos effectively live out their professional lives in two realities (Bartlett 2013): they are both technical staff—specialists in their disciplines—and also political Party members. They can face in their daily work lives tensions between their technical work and priorities and the political drive behind policies. Policy churn is an entrenched feature of Lao policy-making settings. This contributes to certain characteristics of the lived reality of policy-making: busyness, policy complexity, uncertainty. Researchers may find that policy impact is hampered when policymakers are too busy, or the topic researched is no longer ‘hot’ by the time the results are ready to share. Researchers wanting to impact policy may find entry points into policy by engaging in the political culture of emulation and the promotion and sharing of good news stories and outstanding results.

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- ເຫລັ້ມ 2: ກ່ຽວກັບການສ້າງເສດຖະກິດໃນສະໄຫມຂ້າມຜ່ານກ້າວຂຶ້ນສັງຄົມນິຍົມ. 1987. ວຽງຈັນ: ສຳນັກພິມຈຳຫນ່າຍ ສປປລາວ. (10 chapters)
- ເຫລັ້ມ 3: ກ່ຽວກັບການດຳເນີນປ່ຽນແບງໃຫມ່ຮອບດ້ານ ທີ່ມີຫລັກການຢູ່ ສປປລາວ. 1997. ວຽງຈັນ: ສະຖາບັນການເມືອງແລະການປົກຄອງແຫ່ງຊາດ. (9 chapters)
- ເຫລັ້ມ 4: ກ່ຽວກັບການສ້າງແລະຂະຫຍາຍລະບອບປະຊາທິປະໄຕປະຊາຊົນ. 2005. ວຽງຈັນ: ຄະນະໂຄສະນາອົບຮົມສູນກາງພັກ, ຫ້ອງການຄົ້ນຄວ້າທິດສະດີ ແລະ ພຶດຕິກຳ. (15 chapters)

YouTube sites (from [ໂທລະພາບແຫ່ງຊາດລາວ ທຸລ 1 LaoNationalTV](#) & [ລາວພັດທະນາ Laophattanews](#)):

[ບັນທຶກກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX ພາກເຊົ້າ \[22-03-2021\]](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX ພາກບ່າຍ \[22-03-2021\]](#)
[1st Meeting of the 9th NA](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX \[23-03-2021\]](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX \[24-03-2021\]](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX \[25-03-2021\]](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX ພາກບ່າຍ \[25-03-2021\]](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ພິທີປິດກອງປະຊຸມຄັ້ງປະຖົມມະລືກຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX \[26-03-2021\]](#)

[NSEDP 5 years \(PM speech\) ລັດຖະບານ ຊີ້ແຈງແຜນພັດທະນາເສດຖະກິດ-ສັງຄົມ 5 ປີ 2021-2025 \[24-03-2021\]](#)

[ທ່ານ ພັນຄຳ ວິພາວັນ ນາຍົກລັດຖະມົນຕີຄົນໃໝ່ ສະເໜີວິທີ ການແກ້ໄຂບັນຫາ ຂອງລັດຖະບານຊຸດທີ 9 \[26-03-2021\]](#)

[“ເຮົາບໍ່ເຮັດແມ່ນໃຜຊິເຮັດ?” ທ່ານ ພັນຄຳ ວິພາວັນ](#)

[ມາຟັງວິທີແກ້ໄຂ ແລະ ການຕອບຄຳຊັກຖາມຂອງລັດຖະມົນຕີກະຊວງແຜນການ-ການວັງທຶນ ຕໍ່ສສຊ ໃນກອງປະຊຸມສະພາຊຸດທີ IX](#)

[ທ່ານ ມະໄລທອງ ກົມມະສິດ ໄດ້ຮັບເລືອກຕັ້ງເປັນ ປະທານອົງການກວດສອບແຫ່ງລັດ](#)

[ວິໄສທັດປະທານອົງການກວດກາແຫ່ງລັດ ຄົນໃໝ່ ທ່ານ ຄຳພັນ ພົມມະທັດ](#)

[ລັດ ກວດພົບ ມີຜູ້ສໍ້ລາດບັງຫຼວງ 762 ຄົນ ເປັນພະນັກງານລັດ 301 ຄົນ](#)

[ວິໄສທັດຂອງປະທານສານປະຊາຊົນສູງສຸດ ຄົນໃໝ່ ທ່ານ ນາງ ວຽງທອງ ສີພັນດອນ](#)

[ບັນທຶກ ພິທີ ໄຂກອງປະຊຸມໃຫຍ່ ຄັ້ງທີ XI ຂອງ ພັກປະຊາຊົນປະຕິວັດລາວ \[13-01-2021\]](#)

[XI National Congress of LPRP – Opening ceremony](#)

[XI National Congress of LPRP – Closing ceremony \[15-01-2021\]](#)

[ກອງປະຊຸມສະໄໝສາມັນເທື່ອທີ 10 ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ 8](#)

[ມື້ທີ 2 ຂອງກອງປະຊຸມສະໄໝສາມັນ ເທື່ອທີ 10 ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ VIII “ ຕອນບ່າຍ “ \[29-10-2020\]](#)

[ມື້ທີ 3 ຂອງກອງປະຊຸມສະໄໝສາມັນ ເທື່ອທີ 10 ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ VIII “ ຕອນເຊົ້າ “ \[29-10-2020\]](#)

[ພາກສ່ວນຊີ້ແຈງຂໍ້ຊັກຖາມຂອງສະມາຊິກສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ \[29-10-2020\]](#)

[ມື້ທີ 2 | 25 -06 -2020 ກອງປະຊຸມສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ສະໄໝສາມັນເທື່ອທີ 9 ຂອງ ສະພາ ແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX](#)

[ມື້ທີ 5 ກອງປະຊຸມສະໄໝສາມັນ ເທື່ອທີ 10 ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ VIII \[02-11-2020\] ສະມາຊິກສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ປະກອບຄໍາເຫັນຕໍ່ບົດລາຍງານ ການກວດກາລັດຖະບານ “ ຕອນບ່າຍ “ \[30-10-2020\]](#)

[ກອງປະຊຸມສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ສະໄໝສາມັນເທື່ອທີ 9 ຂອງສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ ຊຸດທີ IX. 2020.](#)

[ທ່ານນາຍົກຕອບຂໍ້ຊັກຖາມຂອງ ສສຊ 11 Dec2019](#)

[ເບິ່ງກວ້າງຄິດໄກໄປໃຫ້ຖືກ ບົດໂອ້ນລົມຂອງທ່ານນາຍົກລັດຖະມົນຕີ ຕໍ່ຂະແໜງພະລັງງານ ແລະ ບໍ່ແຮ່ . June 2019](#)

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Amphai Akkhalat (MA) 2021 ປທ. ອໍາໄພ ອັກຄະລາດ. 2021. “How should the leadership of the party as a ruling party be expressed? ຄວາມສາມາດນໍາພາຂອງພັກ ໃນຖານະພັກກໍາອໍານາດຄວນສະແດງອອກແນວໃດ?”. 35, no. 235: 36-39.

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Phetnamnungເພັດນ້ຳຫນຶ່ງ. 2021. “A government officer who using his outside office hour to improve his family economy ລັດຖະກອນຜູ້ນໍາໃຊ້ເວລານອກໂມງການ ສ້າງຄວາມຮັ່ງມີໃຫ້ແກ່ຄອບຄົວນອກເວລາ”. 35, no. 234: 30-33.

Alun Mai:

Phankham Viphavan (Dr) ປອ. ພັນຄໍາ ວິພາວັນ.2020. “Raising the role & responsibility of PTPCC according to the new vision/change ຍົກສູງບົດບາດວຽກງານໂຄສະນາອົບຮົມຕາມທິດສ້າງການຫັນປ່ຽນອັນແຂງແຮງ, ເລິກເຊິ່ງ ແລະ ຮອບດ້ານ”. 35, no. 239: 7-10.

Sonsai Siphandon (Dr) ປອ. ສອນໄຊ ສີພັນດອນ. 2020. “Some of the fundamentals provided for the restructuring of the economy ensuring that development is in line with the direction of stable and balanced growth ບາງພື້ນຖານທີ່ໜັກແໜ້ນໃຫ້ແກ່ການຫັນປ່ຽນໂຄງປະກອບເສດຖະກິດຮັບປະກັນໃຫ້ການພັດທະນາໄປຕາມທິດເຕີບໂຕທີ່ໝັ້ນທ່ຽງ ແລະສົມດຸນ”. 35, no. 239: 11-19.

Somphoi Phommachak ສົມພອຍ ພົມມະຈັກ. 2021. “ Building the party to be transparency, strong and insurmountable to lead the country in the new era ສ້າງພັກໃຫ້ບໍ່ອ່ອນໄຫວ ເຂັ້ມແຂງ ໜັກແໜ້ນ ເພື່ອນໍາພາປະເທດຊາດໃນໄລຍະໃໝ່”. 36, no. 253: 35-39.

Thonglun Sisulit ທອງລຸນ ສີສຸລິດ. 2020:1. “Focus on 6 key issues to develop the energy and mining sectors to achieve greater success. ເອົາໃຈໃສ່ 6 ບັນຫາສໍາຄັນ ເພື່ອພັດທະນາຂະແໜງພະລັງງານ ແລະ ບໍ່ແຮ່ ໃຫ້ມີຜົນສໍາເລັດໃຫຍ່ຫຼວງກວ່າເກົ່າ”. 35, no. 240: 10-15.

8 APPENDIX 1: LAO LANGUAGE LITERATURE REVIEW SAMPLE OF DOCUMENTS

8.1 Description of each of the main Lao sources

The following literature sources were identified gradually and painstakingly. It is noteworthy that this kind of Lao literature is hardly reviewed in English-language scholarship, and there are few existing frameworks for reading or filtering these. Also, the Lao state is a prolific producer of texts so part of our problem was how to make selections and draw relevant conclusions from these. Below are some annotations of each of the main sources, and themes that are relevant to the project.

8.1.1 Publications by the Party Central Committee

Documents from the LPRP Congresses

Title:	Document of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress ເອກະສານກອງປະຊຸມໃຫຍ່ຂອງພັກປະຊາຊົນປະຕິວັດລາວ
Established:	1955
Publisher:	Central Party Organising Committee
Frequency:	Every 5 years, sometimes 4
Issues included in this review:	The NLA holds the documents of the Congresses held between 1982-2011.
Contents:	<p>These Documents are released after the Congress meeting of each term and report on the proceedings. These Congresses bring together the very high-ranking Provincial and Central Party Members at the end of each term, and at the beginning of a new term. Each term lasts for 5 years, or sometimes fewer.</p> <p>The Congress usually runs for 2 to 3 days and falls in the first quarter of the year. The Congress votes for the new Central Party Committee members, discusses the work of the past term, and identifies the work that remains outstanding and the tasks that will be the focus of the new term. They also discuss internal Party matters, such as Party regulations and codes of conduct.</p> <p>The general structure is that an agenda item is raised and then commented on by Congress members. This is followed by a resolution on the agenda items. This is why the phrase is commonly heard/read that: ກອງປະຊຸມມີມະຕິເປັນເອກະພາບກັນ 'the meeting was united in resolving...'. This means that the Party representatives were given the chance to give their opinions and thoughts on a given agenda item, and after that a decision was made which now needs to be adhered to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>mati</i> means idea/opinion/solution○ <i>ekkapaph</i> means united/solidarity

The products of these meetings are the ‘resolutions’ (*mati kham sang*). Usually there are about 10 or 11 resolutions produced for each term. In addition, the member who is voted in as Secretary of the Party, who is usually also the President of the nation (this has been the norm since 2006), will address the Congress, and this address will be included in the Document.

These Documents of Congress are very important for understanding the broad vision and plan for the nation (one meaning of the term ‘policy’). It is notable that it is a requirement that these proceedings be published widely. The results of the Congress are reported not only in these ‘Documents of Congress’ and posted on the internet, but also in media such as *Alun Mai*. These Documents are often cited by Lao writers who wish to demonstrate their familiarity with current political theory. Citations to Documents of Congress are frequent in media reports (such as *Alun Mai*) and in theses completed as part of Political theory training.

Style:

The style develops over time. The earlier reports (1982-1991) are quite engaging and short. There is a sense of vision, sincerity and passion in these documents. The language is inviting to read, as it is well-written and incorporates interesting proverbs and examples from real life. Much of it was transcripts of speeches.

There is a noticeable break during the period 1996-2011: the Documents become more formulaic, bureaucratic, repetitive and much longer than earlier Documents. This period maps on to the leadership of Chunmaly and Khamtay Siphandon. Slogans here were used occasionally, as they were under President Kaysone, but seemed to be more empty of sincerity and were not as convincing or engaging. Indeed, Documents during this period seemed to resist being read. These Documents did not tend to cite Kaysone’s thought. The 2016 and 2021 versions were not available on the websites and due to COVID restrictions during our research period, and we unfortunately found it impossible to obtain these.

Structure and format:

Part I:

Secretary of the Central Committee presents the political report:

1. Achievements in the past 4-5 years.

This report always covers four areas: politics, security, social and economics.

2. What was not achieved as planned from the last Document.

This section covers ‘outstanding issues’, the reasons they were not yet resolved, and a plan for resolving them going forward.

3. New priorities.

Usually, the meeting discusses the government’s draft 5-year NSEDP, and any other specific or broad policy/direction/scheme within the next 4-5 years or longer (for example Three Builds, Four Breakthroughs).

The meeting can also address much broader and longer-term plans, too.

Part II:

Secretary of the Central Organisational Committee will give a report on:

4. Party members rules & regulations.

Discussions on any whether any rules or regulations need to be altered or new rules established. Any changes need to be debated and agreed on.

5. Election of new members to the Politburo & Central Committee for the new term.

8.1.1.1 Mati Kham Sang

Title: *Mati Kong Pasum Khop Khana Bolihan Sun Kang Phak* (Colloquial: *Mati Kham Sang*).

Resolutions of the Meeting of the Complete Central Party Committee Orders (Colloquial: Resolved Orders).

Publisher or author: Central Party Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. There are about 60 members to this committee this year (in the past there have been up to 70). These members are elected at the National Congress.

Frequency: Each 6 months 2016 (2016-2020).

Issues included in this review: 11 issues produced in the period 2016-2020, which fell under Term X of the Central Committee.

Structure and format: These are very short. Most are three or four pages. These are densely written pages that are essentially very condensed minutes of meetings that go on for 3-4 days.

In very condensed form, each of the agreements that were made at the meeting are reported. This point is always emphasized: that the agreements are the result of the 'unity' of the meeting (*pen ekaphap*).

Content: Each of the agreed points usually refers to 'Directions to solve problems' (*thid sii kee pen haa*) but the 'problems' are not usually specified.

Rather, these are directions given on a very broad level, such as resolving that work on the National Socio-Economic Development plan would be continued and carried out by the relevant authorities (authorizing the authorities to do their responsibilities). For instance, it is often 'resolved' that each of the members of the Committee will apply themselves to transforming the resolutions of the Congress into action through the creation of laws, policies, regulations and projects; that due preparations will be made before the election of the next NA and cabinet; and congresses of the mass organisations. These can be peppered with important key words, such as instructing Party members to build 'grassroots politics' and the new government to continue with

‘*sam sang*’ (the three builds direction) or CPC members to carry out their work in line with the ‘four breakthroughs’. Even though these *mati* can be quite condensed and broad, and therefore hard to interpret, it is precisely because they are such that they are so important. If one wants to grasp the current Party philosophy and approach, the *mati* are indispensable. Broad policy directions can be identified here, precisely because only the most important ones will appear. Often, the latest resolutions instruct Party members to ‘continue’ with various resolutions in the past.

8.1.1.2 Alun Mai

Title of Periodical:	New Dawn: Journal of theory and behaviour of the LPRP (<i>Alun Mai: Valasan thitsadi lae phuttitkam khong phak pasason pativat Lao</i>).
Established:	1985
Publisher:	Propaganda and Training of the Party Central Committee (PTPCC).
Frequency:	Monthly.
Run	2000 print copies and since 2020 on the PTPCSS website.
Distribution:	Not for sale. These are delivered to government offices and relevant government agencies, and the Library of the National University of Laos.
Issues included in the literature review:	2013-14 & 2020 issues are examined for <i>Alun mai</i> (total of 24 issues).
Structure, format and style:	Each issue of the journal consists of about 8-10 pieces of writing, organized under 4 thematic sections: 1) Theories and politics (including security), 2) Economics, 3) Society and culture, and 4) Foreign affairs. Most articles are densely laid-out, with full pages of text, especially when discussing theory and politics. Contributions dealing with other themes may be laid out in a less dense style, perhaps enlivened with colour pictures.
Citation practice:	Some citations are included, particularly in theoretical and political essays, and specific pieces on laws or legislation. In general, citations are unrepresented. This is a common practice in other literature since culturally the authorship is regarded as the guarantee of the work.
Typical topics:	Noticeably aligned to policy at the national level, with some at the provincial level, and only occasionally mention of the town/District level. Engagement with the locals or the people is not presented here (instead, see <i>Khosana</i>).

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Authorship: Some regular journalists contribute to the journal as employees of the PTPCC. However, every issue features guest authors, ranging from very high-level members of Politburo, Central Party Committees, to subject or discipline experts, and departmental heads from various ministries. A small number of pieces are verbatim from speeches, especially when the guest author is an honourable such as the President or PM: when such high-ranking people are concerned, the article is most often a piece of writings as opposed to a speech.

Readership: Likely for high-ranking Party members who are already highly trained in political theory and hold influential positions who need to keep abreast of the latest developments. It is not very practical in orientation, but more theoretical. It often discusses questions of how to be a good leader and the qualities of high-level leaders.

Examples of contents of Alun Mai

Example 1: PM speaks about work of propaganda committees

Author: Phankham Viphavan (Dr) ພັນຄຳ ວິພາວັນ:
Current role: Prime Minister of Laos
Volume, issue and page: Feb 2020, pages 7-10).
Headline: Raise the roles & responsibilities of Propaganda and Training work, vigorously, sincerely and completely following the revisionist direction.

Summary/Quotations: A speech Phankham delivered at the PTPC meeting about that organisation that argues that the quality of the activities of the propaganda committees at the central and local levels much be improved in order to serve contemporary politics.

Example 2: Siphandon speaks about economic restructuring

Author: Sonsai Siphandon ສອນໄຊ ສີພັນດອນ
Current role: Minister for Planning and Investment, Vice Prime Minister
Volume, issue and page: Feb 2020 pp. 11-29
Headline: Some resolute fundamentals to improve the restructuring of the economy, ensuring that development is in line with the direction of stable and balanced growth (Feb 2020)

Summary/Quotations: Build tangible conveniences to help small-medium enterprises such as: tax incentives (*hay nanubay*); provide various technical advice; give concessional interest rate; and so on.

Example 3: Sisulit writes about energy and mining

Author: Thonglun Sisulit
Current Role: Former PM and current General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party
Volume, issue and page: 35, no. 240: 10-15

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Headline:

Effort on 6 important problems to develop the energy and mining sectors to achieve greater success. (Thonglun 2020:1)

Contents/Quotations:

This article makes two important points: first, that managing water resource requires work across ministries: such as MoAF, MoNRE, MoT. Second, Thonglun also mentions that an example of policy is the practice of reducing electricity prices for the agriculture sector. These two viewpoints were also offered in the interview our team conducted at the Department of Policy and Legislation, MoAF.

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8.1.1.3 Khosana

Name of Periodical:	<i>Valasan Khosana</i> (Propaganda Journal)
Established:	1986.
Publisher:	Propaganda and Training of the Party Central Committee (PTPCC)
Frequency:	Monthly.
Run:	2000 print copies and since 2020 on the PTPCC website.
Distribution:	Not for sale. These are delivered to government offices and relevant Government agencies, and the Library of the National University of Laos.
Issues included in the literature review:	All 2020 issues were examined: a total of 10 issues. Older years were available.
Structure, format and style:	<p>Each issue is usually comprised of roughly 10-12 articles. Similar to <i>Alun mai</i>, pages are dense with text in theoretical and political pieces are normal. But, compared to <i>Alun Mai</i>, theoretical and political themed contributions are fewer, and take up less space than less formal articles. Colour pictures are included throughout. These often serve to depict everyday <i>pasason</i> (people) and their lives as relevant to the stories. Multiple are stories often organised under four regular section headings. Some samples of section headings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Understand and disseminate important national and international days.'• 'Disseminate guidelines and the implementation of policy guidelines.'• 'Knowing propagating and disseminating works.'• Good job, outstanding person.
Citation practice:	Similar to <i>Alun Mai</i> .
Typical topics:	<i>Khosana</i> links party policy to the <i>pasason</i> (people, the public) by showing how policy is important in everyday life. Each issue ranges over a breadth or mix of topics. The emphasis is mainly on direct involvement with the town and individual level. Stories often draw on examples of practical things that happen in everyday life, especially stories of people doing a great job who could be emulated by others.
Authorship:	There are regular authors who work for the journal and PTPCC itself. There appear to be some contributions from honourable guests (such as high-ranking party leaders such as seen in <i>Alun Mai</i>).
Readership:	This periodical appears to be targeted at local level officials. It contains advice, instructions and up-to-date guidance on how they

are to best act in official roles, and gives examples of people who are doing exceptionally well according to Party guidelines, either local officials or ordinary people. It seems to be pointing the way to success through showing local officials what the right path is, as defined by the Party.

One sees that the writings are somewhat didactic in style, aimed at keeping hands-on officials up-to-date and link political theory to practical problems officials might be encountering. The tone also seems to be aimed at inspiring them to fulfill their duties, spreading success stories and praising people who doing well according to Party guidance.

Examples of contents of Khosana

Example 1: Exhortation on collecting feedback from ordinary people

Author: Thon Phomthikon
Current role: Regular author for Khosana
Volume, issue and page: Sep 2020:28-31.
Headline: Vice Chair of the PTPCC guides work and thought about social commentary in Saysombun Province.
Section: Understanding the work of propaganda and training.
Summary/Quotations: The work of collecting the state of society's thoughts and comments is one of the important tasks of the Party's political work and thought. And it is the direct responsibility of PTPCC at every level to report to the level above and ask for directions to solve (any problems). The main duty of the work of collecting the state of society's thoughts and comments is to collect the state of society's thoughts and comments, relating to the Party, directions, policy plans and governance of the state, and defamatory statements by ill-intentioned people, other various social problems.

Example 2: Description of a person who has done outstanding work

Author: Phetnamnung ເພັດນ້ຳຫນຶ່ງ.
Current role: Khosana journalist
Volume, issue and page: 35, no. 234: 30-33
Headline: 'A government officer who uses his hours outside the office to improve his family economy'
Section header: Good job, outstanding person.
Summary/Quotations: A story, with a real-life example, of progressing from a 'family economy' to a 'commerce economy'. The article argues that it is because these people follow the party policy guidelines they are successful.

Example 3: Other occasional section headings that regularly appear in Khosana

- Propaganda for planning a desirable lifestyle and combating social problems
- Exchange views (this section might include pieces on business, issues and challenges regarding environment-specifically about forest, health problem-specially pandemic).

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- Creative behaviour (this heading consist of writings about good behaviour/story of individual/district that should be applauded).
- Monthly report of road accidents in every province and municipalities

8.1.2 Publications published by the PM Office

8.1.2.1 Nak Bolihan

Name of periodical:	<i>Valasan Nak Bolihan</i> (The Executives magazine)
Established:	Approximately 2010.
Publisher:	Prime Minister's Office/Cabinet Office
Frequency:	Monthly (note it is currently suspended, latest print copy in NLA Sep 2016. We were unable to find more recent copies through our research team in Laos. It was not available on the website of the PM's Office.
Run:	Not available.
Distribution:	Not for sale.
Issues included in the Literature review:	2013-2016 (the only issues held at the NLA).
Structure, format and style:	<p>A very glossy magazine-style periodical. In this period, ranging from 2010-2016, Chunmaly was President and Part Secretary and in general there was a turn perhaps away from Kaysone's Spartan approach to an embrace of the signs of success, influence and prestige. This can be seen in the pages of this magazine which has lots of photographs of mostly men sitting in meetings and wearing Western-style suits and Chairman Mao-style silk suits, and women in office-style clothing (silk skirts).</p> <p>Each issue consists of four parts covering broad themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Nanyobai, strategy and legislation: report or writing of Party direction and guidance especially taken from mati-khamsang, commemorating important National Days, the cabinet monthly and/or specials meetings, new legislations that passed through NA, and social-economic conditions.2) Government activities inside and abroad: Report of PM or ministers and their activities around the country or abroad (in particular to do with economy, ASEAN and other foreign affairs).3) Outstanding development situations: Reports on social-economic conditions at provincial/town levels4) Knowledge (or general interest)

The reports on cabinet meetings and new pieces of legislations were particularly useful for our review (basically the first part of the magazine). The presentation is easy to read, and you can understand the content more easily than the more dense style of the PCTPP journals. There is lots of content about meetings and how urgent matters are dealt with.

However, this kind of information could also be obtained from various websites or newspapers. Similar content, perhaps on less glossy paper but very similar in terms of the information, was available at the time from the Lao People's Liberation Army newspaper and website, *Viengchan Mai* newspaper, and *Pasason* newspaper. When this glossy *Nak Bolihan* was published, it was a period when inequality was rising in Laos, after a long period where egalitarianism had had been the ruling ethos. This magazine reflects a new kind of confidence among the ruling class to show, and perhaps even flaunt, their privilege. It seems to be presented mainly for public relations purposes, although the exact audience is unclear. Likely these magazines were provided to government offices in Vientiane and Provincial offices.

Pictures published in *Khosana* journal or website of PTPCC are strikingly different from those in *Nak Bolihan*. In current issues of *Khosana* one sees farmers or business persons with big smiles, and pictures of their farm and/or products, as if inviting readers to do similar. In *Nak Bolihan*, by contrast, one sees pictures of high-level leaders on official occasions wearing luxurious clothes and doing things that ordinary people would not usually aspire to do.

8.1.3 NAPPA theses

The National Academy for Politics and Public Administration is tasked with running training courses for Party members. People (e.g. researchers) involved in ACIAR projects often do NAPPA training while working on the projects. Sometime this can be seen somewhat as a n inconvenience to the project, e.g. if this person is a key researcher or leader and Australian researchers are also bogged, then their dedication to NAPPA education for a significant period can be perceived as a hinderance. However, as is the case with both Somvang and Chanh Samone, we can see in their theses, graduation and subsequent promotion that this can potentially elevate the profile (credibility perhaps) of ACIAR research and the potential for it to penetrate policy. Also, while these people are off doing training, their 'juniors' take on much of their work (the work load shifts downwards). This may expose more junior people to opportunities.

There are several grades of training at NAPPA. These included Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. The fourth and highest level is '45 days training' and this course of study concludes with a thesis. As part of our literature review, we read two theses that were produced through this training in relation to forestry policy. The first we consulted was by Somvang Phimmavong (2021) and it cited another thesis, by Chansamone Phongudom (2018), which we also obtained and read. These theses were both good examples of how new work builds on the old. Both theses included extensive references to *mati kham sang* (resolutions of the Party Congress) from as early as 1977 (Term II) to 2016 (Term X). These resolutions pertain to the role of the Party and the Party's concern with improving the living conditions of the people, to eliminate poverty (Chansamone 2018, pp. 10-14). The use of these resolutions indicates how the broad guidance from the peak body of the Party is

used as a reference point. Policy at this level is always ‘for the people’ and we never found an example of someone disagreeing with it. In these theses, there was no criticism of the overall direction of policy, although the authors did suggest improvements at a lower level. For instance, both commented that there is still a lack of understanding of Party directions. Some officials still ‘don’t understand.’ It was also common to identify areas where policy had not been successfully implemented.

The way the word ‘nanubay’ (policy) was used in these theses was interesting. It did not necessarily appear mostly in the sense above, of broad directions of the Party-state, but rather it was usually used as a word to describe the kinds of incentives, support and assistance that might be offered to researchers to facilitate and improve their own work. Both authors identified limitations on research in contributing to policy goals. They both said that there was not enough budget allocated to research. This was sometimes phrased as not enough ‘nanubay’ offered to researchers so they can do their work properly. They also noted that the coordination between various departments in the Ministry can create misunderstandings and delay. The Planning and Cooperation Department can become a bottleneck, because everything goes through that Department. Even when research results are finalised, they must pass through this Department before they can be disseminated. Both theses recommended technical and procedural solutions to the challenges facing Forestry researchers.

8.1.4 Selected speeches of Kaysone Phomvihane (Red Books)

Name of series:	<i>Niphon luak fen</i> (Selected Speeches).
Date:	1985-2005.
Publisher:	State Publishing House
Volumes:	Vol. 1 On the National Democratic Revolution (1985) Vol. 2 On building the new era economy: The passage towards socialism (1987) Vol. 3 On the implementation of comprehensive reforms based on principles in Lao PDR (1997) Vol. 4 On the Establishment and Expansion of Lao People’s Democracy (2005).
Volumes included in the literature review:	Initially, we reviewed only Volume 3 and selected only excerpts (such as short quotes) for translation. These preliminary results justified the full translation of selected chapters which were referred to in the main body of the report. The results of the preliminary Lao-language review of V. 3 are the focus of this section.
Structure, format and style:	Compilations of speeches by Kaysone mostly delivered at the National Party Congresses, Central Party Committee meetings, and other official occasions. There are certain phrases that tend to be repeated, almost like recitations, which distinguish these from everyday speech or writing. This seems to be partly a result of these being formal addresses, but also Kaysone was formulating of a new orthodoxy for how social problems and governance would be referred to. Not all of these were taken up or endured (<i>chintanakaan mai</i> seems to have fallen out of use, for instance) but many have become part of <i>phassaa kaan mueang</i> (the language of politics) in contemporary Laos.

At the same time, these speeches are often very readable (if taken in small chunks). Kaysone often used colloquial Lao phrases and terms. He often simplified the language so that it was easy for many to explain (this contrasts to contemporary formal language, which may use more Pali-derived terms and so on).

The speeches are peppered with memorable aphorisms that tend to sum up his point. For instance, ‘without inspections, there is no leadership’. This does not sound very catchy in English, but in Lao it draws on a structure of parallisms and rhyme to be quite lyrical and memorable. This quotation is often attributed to Kaysone, but Kaysone attributes it to Lenin (‘as Lenin pointed out...’ Volume 3 Chapter 3, Selected Speeches, page 193).

Kaysone frequently coined new concepts. An example is as *lat ti ueay ing* (practice of leaning), which was used to describe people who don’t ‘pull their own weight’. This became quite a common phrase used for people to think about situations they observed in society. His writing can also draw on figures of Lao literature and mythology, such as his famous phrase: ‘young poeple are like San Sin Xay new generation’. This suggests that young people need to improve themselves through hard work, independent and struggle. Kaysone’s speeches can be quite inspiring.

Citation practice:

In all the volumes, there are frequent citations of Lenin and Marx. There is also citation of Ho Chi Minh and other socialist theorists. Statistics are cited, but without mentioning the source. Scientific evidence is lauded but not cited.

Typical topics:

Very dependant on the context of the speech. Ranges from very broad level leadership to quite detailed comments.

Readership:

In my assessment these volumes function as the canon of Lao political theory. They are still invoked today to legitimate the Party programs and ideology. Throughout the reading of the periodicals mentioned above, phrases and quotations of Kaysone were repeated. For instance, it was Kaysone who said ‘Frugal is a major policy of our Party-State’ (1982:73). During our research, the PM announced a series of ‘frugalities’ such as closely monitoring use of government fleet cars and he forewarned that there would be more cuts of this nature.

It is reasonable to say that Kaysone’s collected speeches are a canon (paralleling Buddhist canonical Tipitaka or Pali canon). The texts provide a source of saying and advice with authority. Many of his speeches were studied, analysed, and quoted by various generations of Party members, including the graduates from national universities and institutes.

These can also be regarded as policy statements by Kaysone. The relevance is that statements such as these (even as early as 1982

speeches) are still repeated today (such as in the periodicals reviewed here) as guidance for the Party members. It is difficult to be sure if Kaysone coined these phrases: perhaps he was echoing phrases developed earlier in the revolution, or translated from Vietnamese or Soviet inspirations. What is clear is that these texts continue to be read today in the course of political training, and they remain a source of inspiration and, frequently, emulation in the sense of repeated phrases, mottos and quotations.

Examples of contents of Luak Fen

On the sciences and research:

Kaysone stressed the importance of science for building the country and advocated the establishment of appropriate government organisations. For example, in relation to relying on sciences and research, he said:

‘In addition, the government may establish Economic and Science-Technology Councils, including many elements that come together, with the aim of consulting with the opinions of various business people, intellectuals, and scientists before formulating and promulgating policies and regulations. (Speech delivered in 1986, cited in Selected speeches v. 3, 1997:488). ‘

This may be the first indication that, with the new direction in Party thinking, the government would adopt tangible steps towards creating pathways for science results to inform policy. While this may have been a goal of socialist governance from the beginning, in the early years of the regime this was not really possible because of the post-war conditions of Laos. A colloquial term (also used by leaders) for the period 1975-1985 ‘*laynya hum pad phe song khaam*’ (L: the period of recovery from wounds after the war). It was not possible to consider investments in science at this time. But Kaysone’s speech in 1986 indicates the turn to a new, more aspirational era.

From Kaysone Phomvihane, Selected Speeches, vol 3:

‘To turn the Party’s policy directions and plans into state laws, regulations, domestic and foreign policy, into procedures, social-economic administration, and expand science and technology.’ (Kaysone, 1997:152) (listed under ‘roles of responsibilities of the state).

Must regularly collect voices and opinions of people (feedback) from every class of all people towards the party’s policy directions...(Kaysone 1997:181)

The New Imagination (*chinnatakan mai*) will tell us that democracy is the foundation the collectivist project. When that is so, how broad and wide will democracy be? That is how collective centralism will be raised upwards. Democracy is under the leadership of the collectivized centre... (Kaysone, 1997:184-189)

We must strengthen democratic rights and collective ownership rights of and for the masses... in order that policy planning and Party-State policies, originate and start from the calls, desires, aspirations and wishes of the working people... strengthen (encouraging) the public to give their opinions and views to the Party and State in various policy plannings... strengthen the masses to see ‘good job outstanding people’ (Kaysone 1997:187-88)

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In the event that significant issues arise that necessitate changes ... relating to policies that have already been announced: these must be returned during reporting, and discussed by the committee... The situation that whoever is available at the time just issues spontaneous oral orders must be utterly avoided... (A situation such as that) is against the principle of democratic collective centralism (Kaysone 1997:191)

From Kaysone speech to the Party National Congress III, 1982.

Frugality is a major policy of our Party-State (1982:73)

Strive to increase solidarity on every front... (with) countries in the socialist circle. That is a long-term policy, unchanging and appearing as a principle of our Party and State (1982:92)

The leadership of the party, at all times, is the premier decisive factor in any victory

... (we) must stay close with the masses of various ethnic groups, firmly, have the current policy guidelines, have revolutionary idea right to the very end, have transparent, resolute and strong organisation (1982:109).

... the great revolutionaries teach that ‘You must take care of the party unity like your own eyes’... (1982: Pp 114)

... (we) must resist the style of work where we do things simply because we can, and resist holding on to work and holding on to tasks to one’s self alone (one brother) (1982:119)

... No inspection really means no leadership... the inspection is to increase the efficacy of the guidance ensuring that agreements are implemented and put more effort on tasks that are not done in a timely fashion (1982:119)

Supplemental source on Kaysone

Title:	<i>The construction of remembrance of Kaysone Phomvihane during 1975 – 2010 A.D.</i>
Author:	Kittisak Chinsaeng
Date:	2015
Published:	PhD thesis published as monograph
Reason for inclusion in review:	To build on and extend understanding about the importance of Kaysone’s canon.
Summary:	The author argues that the LPRP constructed the remembrance of Kaysone through physical evidence such as monument, busts, museums, and memorial places in various provinces (after his death); though the author recognises that it is not culturally appropriate to build memorial artefacts if the person were still alive. Additionally, the author argues that from evidence that he canvasses, it is evident that some historical facts have been removed or tarnished, intentionally in his view (in this, the author draws on literature outside Lao PDR, especially English and Thai academic works). For example, he argues that Kaysone and the Party failed in managing the economy (specifically between 1978 to 1987) and this lead to a significant number of Lao people escaping to third countries. This thesis does touch on why the Party needs to have a figure like Kaysone to strengthen their

socialist legitimisation. The usefulness of this work is draws on substantial vernacular works (both Lao and Thai) in relation to the LPRP, and documents the efforts that have gone into elevating Kaysone's works to the status of a Lao Socialist Canon. I also appreciate the author's recommendation for further study on other socialist figures such as Nuhak Phumsavan, Khamtai Siphandon and Souphanuvong in Party's and people's views, a topic which has barely been touched in the wider scholarship.

9 APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY OF LAO TERMS

Lao	Lao Romanization (using Library of Congress Romanization Tables)	English
ນະໂຍບາຍ	nanyobai	policy
ມະຕິກອງປະຊຸມ ມະຕິກອງປະຊຸມພັກ	mati kongpasum mati kongpasum phak	resolution of (any) meeting resolution of Party Central Committee
ແນວທາງນະໂຍບາຍຂອງພັກ	naeothang nanyobai khong phak	directions from the Party
ສອດຄ່ອງ	sotkhong	Conform (to resolutions or directions)
ຜັນຂະຫຍາຍ	phanhanyai	adopt and enhance
ແຜນການ	phaenkan	plans
ຄໍາສັ່ງ	khamsang	order
ຍຸດທະສາດ	nyutthasat	strategy
ແຜນແມ່ບົດ	Phaen mae bot	master plan
ກົດຫມາຍ	kotmai	law
ນິຕິກຳລຸ່ມກົດຫມາຍ	nitikam lum kotmai	legislation under law (sub-laws)
ມາດຕະການ	mattakan	measure
ແຜນພັດທະນາເສດຖະກິດສັງຄົມແຫ່ງຊາດ	phaen phatthana setthakit sangkhom haeng sat	National Socio- Economic Development Plan NSED
ຄະນະລັດຖະມົນຕີ	khana latthamonti	prime minister cabinet
ກະຊວງ	kasuang	ministry
ສູນວິໄຈສາກົນການກະເສດແຫ່ງຊາດອອສເຕລລີ	sun vichai sakon kankaset haeng sat Otsatelia	ACIAR
ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດ	sapha haeng sat	National Assembly
ສະພາແຫ່ງຊາດສາຍຮ້ອນ	sapha haeng sat sai hon	National Assembly Hotline
ສະພາປະຊາຊົນແຂວງ	sapha pasason khwaeng	Provincial People Assembly
ຜູ້ແທນປະຊາຊົນ	phuthaen pasason	Assembly member
ປະເດັນຮ້ອນ	paden hon	hot issue
ຫາງສຽງປະຊາຊົນ	hang siang pasason	feedback (from the people)

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ອະນຸຍາດ	anunyat	approvals (research permission)
ຄົ້ນຄວ້າວິໄຈ	khonkhua vichai	research 1) to use a scientific method and collect data, 2) to look for/ gather information on an issue, 3) to look into it (consider your case if you complain)
ພື້ນຖານ	phunthan	local level
ການເມືອງ	kanmuang	1) politics; 2) relationships between people

10 APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLES FROM DOCUMENT TRANSACTIONS, KHOSANA ISSUE

The Lao literature review turned up a fascinating issue of *Khosana* journal from 1992. The issue is somewhat outdated, but as a ‘snapshot in time’ it is exceptionally interesting reading for anyone with an interest in Lao policy making. We commissioned a translation, and it is also exceptional. I have it included here as a sample of the translation work funded by ACIAR for this project.

Cover Image: Ting Cave – Luang Prabang, a cultural and nature-based attraction full of inspirations.

Khosana Third Quarter, 1992

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Issues Regarding Party and Democracy

(Continued from a previous issue)

K. Viengsavanh

Presently, democracy has become a political issue of significance for regimes with different political ideologies in their fight for survival. Therefore, the definition of the term democracy has evolved to denote two different things.

- One political regime defines democracy as a system with numerous political ideological roots and parties. This regime also argues that democracy must manifest in the form of liberal democracy with freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of political association. In other words, anyone can say and do whatever they want without a need for a governance structure, leadership, regulations, or laws.

- Another political regime, on the other hand, defines that a true democracy does not necessarily need numerous ideologies-parties. This regime understands that a true democracy is one that is characterized by having a form of leadership, centralization and a regulatory and legal framework that govern the scope for speech or any other activities.

According to the two aforementioned perspectives, how do we decide which interpretation is correct?

Pertaining to the author’s perspective and interpretation, the following issues shall be raised for scrutiny:

1/- Liberal democracy without any governance structure, leadership, regulations, and laws will become anarchy, or in a more severe case, this democracy will inherently transform into a dictatorship. The author would like to offer the following scenario. There are two people or two groups or multiple groups with different opinions on one issue. They will raise and debate on this issue. Initially, the level of intensity in such debate may not be that serious. However, if the issue becomes more complex, then the intensity of these debates will rise and devolve to the point where each side is not willing to listen or agree with one another. The situation now becomes one where each person and each group cannot reach a consensus because of their conflicting views.

Furthermore, no one can decide who is right or wrong, and this will ultimately move to the point where there is a use of force against each other. The side or group that is stronger thus becomes the victor on the premise of force. The experience of other countries with this form of democracy demonstrates in clear terms that liberal democracy with no boundaries will lead to a dismantling of solidarity and unity and a demolition of a country. This results in the public being faced with greater hardships without any form of reliance and the dwindling of their trust. Finally, an absolute power then falls into the hands of one individual or one group who then selfishly forces others to follow them.

I believe that the situation will not stop there. It will devolve to a point of killing each other. If so, then it is safe to say that such democracy has become a dictatorship.

2/- Democracy with a governance structure, leaderships, regulations, and laws are a form of democracy that will bring everyone to a common understanding on ideologies, awareness, and actions. Such democracy will create a momentum to propel a society forward because democracy will become both the objective and the goal. The following scenario shall be raised for the sake of comparison. In a certain society or country that is governed by centralized democracy with all directions, policies, plans, regulations and laws formulated by the people, enacted by the people and truly for the benefit of the people.

This means that before directions, policies or laws are developed, there is an organization that conducts research to identify the overall direction, then this will be brought forth for public consultation so that they all can voice their opinions in a free and democratic manner on whether these are right or wrong or whether these are sufficient or insufficient. Then, such relevant authority shall take further steps in revising them by incorporating feedback from the public which will then be brought forth for adoption and official promulgation.

This process illustrates how centralized democracy works and the centralism itself ensures fully functional democracy; in other words, it is a form of democratic centralization and democracy under a centralized leadership.

Democracy without centralism is a form of anarchy. On the other hand, centralism without democracy is also a problem of absolute power. Both of these are an immense danger to societal stability.

Democracy and centralism are considered as one issue with two dimensions. They are indivisible. The goal of centralism is to create a unity while democracy aims to expand knowledge and elevate creativity, as well as expanding and harmonizing all strengths into one under a unified leadership.

3/- On behavior. It has never been observed that democracy serves all classes and their members in a society. Each class has its own democracy with its own unique characteristics and ultimately serves the benefits of that class. This is not different from issues regarding the party, as mentioned earlier. Although there is a political regime that exerts the view that democracy should be free with no boundaries, this is just a form of deceptive discourse, in truth. In terms of practicality, any actions that conflict with their interests will then be viewed as being undemocratic. Then, they will use their power for the purpose of threatening and dismantling. Yet, any actions that are in line with their interests but conflict with the interests of the public will still be viewed as democratic although such democratic actions rely on the use of threats and forces; they will consider these actions as actions that are for the overall good of democracy, nonetheless.

This behavior is clearly observable worldwide. Various events that have taken place in various countries such as: Grenada, Panama, Angola, Pakistan, Iraq, Israel, Cambodia... all demonstrate a question of 'what is true democracy?' And who has true democracy.

At this juncture, we can thus conclude that the issue of party and democracy are intertwined.

However, let us turn to the fact that having democracy is not related to a system of one or numerous parties. One party or numerous parties both can and cannot have democracy. It is entirely based on the views or the formulated policies of a particular party who is responsible for their implementation to create tangible benefits.

The problem at hand is that a ruling party will be the one formulating directions and laws that will lead and govern such country and society in order for a society to enjoy peace and stability and for the public to have confidence and trust and actively contribute towards a prosperous growth of economy, culture, and society.

In determining whether a party has or does not have democracy, we must observe policy directions, laws and practical implementation of such party. If policy directions and laws developed by a party in question transparently serve for the political, socio-cultural, and economic benefits of the majority of people; then this means that such party does truly have democracy. More broadly, laws that guarantee rights, freedom, and democracy for the public will translate into stronger democracy for the people.

On the contrary, whether there is one party or multiple parties, it is not true democracy if policy directions and laws are formulated to serve the interests of one specific class, one individual, or a specific group. Nevertheless, there is democracy being enjoyed by such specific class or group. If so, then democracy characterized by class is therefore a double-edged sword, is it not? The author would like to raise this question for everyone to consider and reach an accurate answer on your own.

Imbuement and Comprehension of Measures Regarding Agriculture and Forestry

Editor: Khosana

Although our country faced droughts, floods and pests which have caused severe damages during the wet season of the previous year of 1991, due to diligence and resoluteness of farmers and with assistance of the government, the damages resulting from these natural disasters were mitigated to ensure the lowest possible impacts. Rice production was able to achieve a total of 1.2 tonnes. Growing various crops and raising livestock have also expanded in which the value of exports of livestock reached about 15 million USD. Specifically, during the previous dry season of the year 1991-92, the land area for rice cultivation increased by 17% when compared to the period of 1990-91, rice harvested during the dry season also achieved effective yields in which many regions achieved a yield of 4 – 5 tonnes per hectare. The most important highlighting factor is that there was about model families that started to establish intensive rice cultivation, animal husbandry and cultivation of other crops for commercialization. This phenomenon took place in various places namely: Savannakhet, Vientiane Capital and others. Aside from these achievements, another important development was the introduction of measures to halt unregulated logging which slowly formalizing wood processing businesses towards compliance with rules and regulations and addressing a handful of problems and issues.

Nevertheless, when compared to the present situation, demands and actual capabilities, it is still observed that the pace of growth of our country's agricultural sector is still slow and not able to effectively ensure food security. Agricultural commercialization has yet to be expanded while relevant sectoral authorities have not focused on and provided support to agricultural activities to match its important status as the most important battle front of the country.

Furthermore, various government's agricultural extension policies are still inconsistent namely: policies on taxation and credit schemes. In more severe terms, necessary policies such as policies on land and price guarantee for agricultural products and so on have not been established in a timely manner. We still lack detailed projects that effectively aim to support farmers to transition towards secure livelihoods. Therefore, slash-and-burn agriculture has yet to be reduced, and land in some areas for such activities has increased. Forests have been recently regenerated were also damaged, and there is also a delay in the allocation of forest lands. Presently, the allocation of land and forests for the public to use has yet to be completed or widely implemented.

All the deficiencies raised above have to be addressed with concerted efforts focusing on addressing fundamental issues as follows:

a) – In depth imbuement of the Party’s policies on Agriculture:

1. All levels and sectors must view agriculture as the most important battle front, this is a responsibility of the entire party and the people, it is not the sole responsibility of an agricultural sector or farmers.

2. The growth of an agricultural sector must be comprehensive starting from raising crops to produce food, industrial crops and fruit trees and animal husbandry for various types of livestock. An expansion of agricultural activities must be promoted in all 3 landscapes namely: plains, plateaus, and mountainous regions.

3. A growth of an agricultural sector must start at a farming household level and a transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture. This is an objective demand that is of necessity for our country.

4. A comprehensive growth of commercial agriculture must be intertwined with a manufacturing industry and a service sector that promote rural development and socio-economic groups in various areas.

b) – Comprehension of key measures for agricultural expansion:

1. Promote intensive agriculture and improve the productivity of rice cultivation to address food shortages and ensure food security for the years to come; furthermore, farmers should also be encouraged to participate in diverse production activities such as: animal husbandry and raising crops demanded by domestic and foreign markets, as well as focusing on building and expanding model families. During the wet season of 1992, areas that have appropriate means must lead farmers in implementing intensive agriculture; areas that have model families should encourage even more broader expansion.

2. Promote an expansion of commercial networks that provide services for both ends and a processing industry to promote farmers’ production. The State shall be responsible for developing policies that stimulate and promote businesses in various economic sectors to provide services to farmers in a manner that ensures appropriate benefits for all relevant parties. The trade authority is responsible for identifying foreign markets for the exporting agricultural products produced by farmers. One important aspect is to pour in efforts to attract foreign investments into an agricultural sector and an agricultural processing sector.

3. Improve a banking sector’s agriculture credit schemes and revise agriculture and land policies so that they can be used as a true leverage for stimulating and promoting comprehensive agricultural production. First and foremost, there needs to be research conducted on the interest rates and loan terms specifically for agricultural production, as well as appropriate regulations and document requirements. Research should be conducted on how to establish an agriculture promotion bank specifically for mobilizing domestic and foreign capitals to invest in the agriculture – forestry sector with a sound focus and an appropriate interest rate. Utilize diverse credit schemes for farmers to create opportunities for those who have collaterals to access such finance to be used for expanding their operations and increasing productivity. Urgently revise agriculture policies to reflect the situation of each area; furthermore, an appropriate land policy needs to be established that prohibits foreign nationals to buy or possess land in whatever shape or form. Anyone who has no intention to participate in agricultural production and has an intention to acquire land for speculation purpose shall not be permitted to possess any land.

4. Technical agriculture officers shall be assigned to work in close collaboration with the grassroots production bases as well as serve and provide services for farmers. These officers shall be responsible for providing guidance and encouraging farmers to engage in practical implementation and a creation of tangible benefits. Then, they shall be responsible for drawing upon experiences and best practices of the people, compile this information and use this to improve their own capabilities which they then will be disseminated to a broader audience of farmers for further implementation.

5. The State must continue to invest in developing necessary infrastructures that will facilitate agricultural production and put in efforts to increase a revenue generated by an agricultural sector to

be able to achieve 5.5% and rice yields of 1.6 million tonnes for the year 1992. Such investments must be translated into projects and detailed plans; and identify responsible agencies that will manage such activities from the beginning to the end as well as projects with specific focus.

This is the precise policy perspective and measures that we must comprehend and together implement to create tangible benefits with an aim to stimulate an expansion of our country's agriculture – forestry production, to graduate from a least-developed country status, and lift the people from poverty as well as improving their living conditions and well-being./.

Countering a War of Peaceful Conversion

Peaceful conversion is a new form of war that is a severe threat which aims to dismantle – abolish the revolutionary party and government, as well as annihilating the revolution without the use of weapons but through the use of such the following means:

- Bring a war against socialism into socialist countries; transition from prevention to infiltration. The imperialist role is just to support these movements externally.
- Take control of the people of each generation for the purpose of long-term dismantling and to establish a political movement to combat a revolution; dismantle and abolish the party and a governance regime.
- Utilize all legal and semi-legal overt and covert methods and exploit all gaps and opportunities that facilitate such actions such as through an economic mechanism that was made possible through policies to open for foreign relations, cooperation, assistance, investment, and so forth.
- Utilize political, economic, and socio-cultural, and military measures to pressure and threaten when necessary, as well as to support and mobilize oppositions within.
- Conduct psychological warfare and use it as a weapon to defame and eradicate a socialist ideology, to create false information, and to incite an abandonment of revolutionary principles. This also includes using all methods for persuasion and bribes to entice government officials and people to follow them and deceptions; spread western liberal democracy, a multi-partied regime, and western principles of human rights and lifestyles.

The process of initiating psychological warfare includes the followings:

- Foment and establish oppositions of communism and socialism with the aim to establish a movement against an expansion of the party and regime.
- Create a socio-economic crisis and conditions that facilitate an environment for reactionary movement against socialism and the party, as well as seeking to mobilize and open a path to overthrowing.
- When a socio-economic crisis elevates into a political crisis, all movements against communism shall then be garnered while all measures and methods will be employed to topple communist leaders, to abolish the party, and to ultimately change a regime.

Therefore, it is apparent that the strategy of peaceful conversion is a class conflict that is a fierce struggle of life and death which aims to eradicate socialism and all progressive movements in the world. A war of peaceful conversion is a more dangerous threat than a war involving weapons because it can kill a person inside by eradicating revolutionary ideologies, spirits, and principles. This means annihilation of revolutionary qualities. Whenever we are less cautious, it will then pop back to destroy us so quickly that we could not address in time, as in the Soviet Union and other eastern European countries.

Is a strategy of peaceful conversion being employed against the Lao People's Democratic Republic? This is of course an apparent issue – because the balance of power in the world is currently shifting towards a grim outlook while a global trend continues to be complex without any benefits for us at all. Therefore, the imperialists and oppositions have thus decided to attack us by utilizing all kinds of cunning and serious methods to eradicate the leading party and our people's democratic republic. They have used methods outlined as follows:

On politics, ideologies, and psychology, they have focused on activities to diminish a party's influence with an aim to ultimately abolish it. Of these tactics, an important method utilized is to tarnish the roles and diminish the influence of our leaders; fractionalize solidarity amongst leaderships of the party at all levels; distort our party's and government's policies; conduct campaigns to discredit our achievements in order to cast doubts on and distrust in our ideology.

They have used all means in order to exploit loopholes created due to our own inexperience and limitations in opening the country for broad economic and foreign cooperation, as well as applying a state-regulated, market-based economy.

In terms of religion, they have tried to promote the proliferation of foreign religions specifically the swift proliferation of Christianity by attracting and converting people to this religion through humanitarian assistance, providing reliefs to victims of natural disasters, establishing schools, providing medical treatments, and donating supplies and even handing out 100 – 300 dollars in cash to families. Presently, and specifically for Christianity, there are a total of 177 churches, 47,000 priests and followers, and 538 Fathers. They have divided and differentiated themselves from those who practice other religions, restricting followers of Christianity from carrying out citizen duties such as barring the youth members from their conscription, restricting the people from conducting their village obligations during Christian holy days and others that violate laws and regulations of our country.

Another important issue to attend to is their efforts to fractionalize solidarity among multi-ethnic Lao people. Campaigns were initiated to foment misunderstandings and animosity towards one another. Promote narrow views on ethnicity. Declare self-independence and governance, and convince multi-ethnic Lao people to leave our party and government as well as dismantling the traditional solidarity amongst our sibling multi-ethnic Lao people within our Lao national community.

They have tried to gather intelligence in order to assess the situation by means of exploiting our policies to open up and broaden for foreign relations and cooperation, investment, tourism, cultural exchange, trade, assistance, and others. In some instances, they sent armed forces and spies to operate, established a long-term intelligence network hidden within the grassroots people and within the party's and state's organizations to identify strengths, weaknesses, conflicts, and other deficiencies in order to exacerbate and exploit them to achieve the overarching goal of peaceful conversion. [They] try to create social unrest and disruption. The most important issue at hand is the support and assistance provided by them to the Lao oppositionists in order to encourage them to conduct armed campaigns to attack and seize locations of strategic importance, commit arson targeting the people's rice granaries and homes and local offices, as well as carrying out attacks and robberies along important routes.

What is described above is a strategy for peaceful conversion against our country which is implemented in combination with political, psychological, ideological, socio-cultural, economic, and military measures.

Although our enemies have used all means of peaceful conversion at their disposal against Laos, we were nevertheless able to aptly prevent the war of peaceful conversion waged against our country in a secure manner. National independence and political and social stability were also maintained because the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Lao people with the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party did not turn a blind eye and let them stoke a flame as they wished. We had our own appropriate and swift countermeasures such issues by: conducting broad political – ideological campaigns and activities to disseminate the party's and state's directions and policies for our officials, warriors, and the people. This was to ensure that they can see through the tactics of peaceful conversion utilized by our enemies as well as understanding our own countermeasures; we have been attentive towards working at the grassroots level and strengthening the national defence by focusing on implementing the guiding directive of quality as the root that firmly establishes and

develops all 3 types of armed forces and achieve political imbuement as a priority. Nevertheless, we still face challenges and difficulties that have not been addressed as much as it should have been.

Therefore, in order to counter a war of peaceful conversion, we will have to implement various directives and measures starting first with the imbuement of several fundamental principles namely:

1/- Countering a war of peaceful conversion is an intense and complicated class struggle that is a matter of life and death.

2/- Countering a war of peaceful conversion is a long-term and comprehensive endeavour that will require the use of various means.

3/- To counter our enemy's strategy of peaceful conversion, we must mobilize our revolutionary essence and posit ourselves not at the receiving end but in the position of taking proactive, continuous offenses.

4/- We must know how to take advantage of opportunities, and in the same light create such opportunities to take an offence in order to stifle and dismantle our enemy's forces. At the same time, we also need to expand and strengthen our own forces to ensure that no opportunity slips away from our hands. We must be resolute and determined and ensure that we are never yield and waver.

5/- We must be firm and steadfast in addressing all internal issues and gaps such as an abuse of power, a violation of the people's rights, corruption, and other phenomena. Such issues must be tended to and addressed in a swift manner so that no opportunity arises for our enemies to take advantage of.

Aside from an imbuement of the above principles, ensuring a firm comprehension of the following directions is essential:

1/- Strengthen the party in terms of firm political and ideological stability and organizational structure. Enhance solidarity and unity at a higher level pursuant to the Party's fundamental policies and regulations starting from the highest leading organization and the leadership of the party at all levels. All of these must be based on a foundation of intensifying and enhancing solidarity of the people of all classes and ethnicities.

2/- Promote socio-economic growth; gradually address and improve livelihood and well-being of the Lao people, government officials, military personnel and police. Address social issues - unfairness, inter-ethnic conflicts, and people's doubts on authorities, and other issues.

3/- Improve governance and people's democracy at all levels. Of this, the most important aspect is to strengthen and build national and public security armed forces so that they can be an effective and powerful instrument that serves to protect and maintain national independence and sovereignty, as well as social and political stabilities.

We shall establish detailed measures to counter a strategy of peaceful conversion as follows:

1/- Take actions to lead political and ideological education in a continuous manner. This is of utmost importance. It is a daily battle front and a forefront of activities to which we must be aggressive and proactive.

2/- Build and strengthen the party and party members at all levels in order to become true key leaders.

3/- Implement measures and strategies to transition to a grassroots level in order to strengthen it holistically.

4/- Build and strengthen all types of armed forces.

5/- Attach importance towards promoting economic growth and improve the livelihood and wellbeing of the people materialistically and culturally.

6/- Attach importance towards ethnic and religious affairs.

7/- Enhance and improve foreign relations and investments.

8/- Strengthen a leadership role of the National Defence and Public Security Committee.

If we can implement these directions and measures mentioned above in a concerted manner, a victory will surely be ours.

A Substance of Political Ideology for the Last 6 Months of 1992

By: J. Phaivongmixay

Political ideological imbuelement is an important activity that must be conducted on a continuous and regular basis because a political ideology is directly related to leadership. Therefore, all leadership organizations and leaders must be attentive and attach importance to enhancing a political ideology. Currently, a political ideology in terms of substance and form must be based on a new paradigm shift. What is this new paradigm shift?

- In terms of location, importance and means for an ideological work, this has already been presented in issue 24th.

- A clear ideological objective must be defined where the scope must not be too broad. For example, a political ideological work for the last 6 months of 1992 must ensure that all aspects of ideology, directions and policies comply with the 5th Resolution of the V Session of the Party Congress to form a revolutionary willpower and for practical implementation by the mass while mobilizing patriotism and affection for a new regime in order to enhance solidarity of our people and countering all tactics of peaceful conversion utilized by the enemy. This is an objective of political ideological work must be accomplished.

- Conducting political ideological work for each period must be closely coordinated with the Party's political role and responsibility as well as the local governing authorities.

The substance of the fifth resolution of the Party Central Committee to be disseminated and imbued in party members and the mass includes 4 fundamental substances as follows:

1/- The Party's Central Committee had assessed a global situation issued the following conclusions. After the Soviet Union and socialist countries in eastern Europe had collapsed, the world has thus changed for the benefits of the imperialists, to which smaller nations will be subject to aftereffects arising from threats and influence of power of stronger nations. In Southeast Asia, there has been a movement towards broader and open relations whilst fighting is still occurring in this complexity. Nevertheless, the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam continue to stand firm in their steadfast commitments towards the realization of socialism which we can rely on in order to safeguard and develop our nation. Our party's foreign policy continues to adhere to the new paradigm shift and promotes openness which has contributed to the success of increasing allies and decreasing enemies.

2/- On national defence and public security: the Party Central Committee made a summary of our enemies' activities that aimed to dismantle and destroy our new regime. For instance, they took advantage of an opportunity to wage a war of peaceful conversion after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Socialist countries that aimed to create disruptions on many fronts. Therefore, the 5th Resolution of the Party Central Committee's Congress identified priorities of national defence and public security including orientations towards strengthening all sectors at a grassroots level, ensuring consciousness and cautiousness in order to counter enemy tactics and implement state's laws in an active and effective manner. This also ensures social peace and stability and creates the opportunities and conditions that gradually facilitate enhanced development of our country.

3/- Economic Development:

In terms of economic development, our Party has formulated directions for economic development aiming towards expanding commercial production and strengthening a transition towards market-oriented mechanisms.

- On agriculture: this is the first priority battle front and must be tackled in a holistic manner by transitioning from subsistence agriculture towards commercialization starting from and focusing on developing farming households. Commercialization of an agricultural sector must aim towards

increasing production and trade and improving quality which will then improve livelihoods and well-being of people...

- The party and state have formulated a new policy for rural development aiming to initiate a new paradigm shift of society. This policy area is of strategic importance which aims to promote a transition from a subsistence economy towards a market-oriented economy. Rural development is a responsibility of an entire society, governmental organizations, and people. The party and state have policies to incentivize and provide support to those who contribute towards rural development.

- On industry, our party promotes an open policy for foreign cooperation, investment, and the acceleration towards improving internal structures for consistency with a new mechanism.

- Regarding trade, our party promotes a policy for legitimate trade in compliance with the relevant Laws and regulations and proactive prevention of illicit activities with an aim towards improving livelihoods and well-being of all ethnic groups for peace.

- On banking and finance, our efforts are geared towards addressing monetary policies in order to facilitate production businesses such as an expansion of the agriculture – forestry sector. Transition towards a fiscal management in a unified and centralized manner, as well as improving tax and customs duty regulations.

- Foreign cooperation: our party views foreign and economic cooperation as a necessary objective; therefore we should not stand idle in terms of cooperation. Our position must oppose an outlook against cooperation and overreliance on assistance and loans. International cooperation must ensure mutual benefits and respect for one another's laws. Promotion of investment must have a clear focus, clear identification of roles and clear responsibilities to ensure effectiveness.

- In order to transition towards a new mechanism, we must improve the people's knowledge and understanding of a market-oriented mechanism, macroeconomic adjustment, and economic management. Engage in an organizational restructuring and enhancing of government's management role gradually by continuing to develop a comprehensive legal framework for to manage economy. Facilitate an improvement of state-owned enterprises that lack effectiveness to transition towards other forms of ownership while being selective and responding to societal demands.

4/- Organizational Improvement:

Our party aim to improve our organizational structure to ensure effective implementation of roles and responsibilities. With this in mind, improvement of organizations and structures shall focus on establishing sound rules and regulations that facilitate enforcement and compliance to a labour law and other relevant laws and promote a rule of law in societal governance. In parallel, organizational improvement aims to differentiate and separate clear roles and responsibilities of a government in terms of leadership and management, as well as macro-level and micro-level management roles. Such restructuring will also be accompanied by the improved deployment of officials. Improvement of organizational and personnel structures must be undertaken under the premise of ensuring firm solidarity. In order to ensure success, our party has identified the following policies and guiding directions: ensuring the succession planning and expansion, ensuring verity and suitability, conducting detailed research and exploration, exercising caution, as well as ensuring the benefits of an institution and individuals are protected during the reorganization or restructuring processes. These actions must be implemented under the principles of a new paradigm shift on party building, personnel development, political ideology strengthening, a party structure building, macro-level organization development, and party's leadership maintenance in order to increase effectiveness upon completing an organizational restructuring.

The aforementioned issues are some of key messages of 5th Resolution of the V Session of the Party Congress as well as a substance on awareness raising and education for the party and people, as well as further disseminating and broadly implementing from this point onwards until the end of 1992.

Furthermore, implementing campaigns for awareness raising and education must be done in collaboration with each organization's routine work and mandate. Political ideological work must be streamlined in routine work in order to ensure consistency between ideology and actual behavior. All

leadership institutions at all levels and all leaders are responsible for implementing political ideological activities in order to a thorough application of such principles and ideologies on all fronts. Accomplishing success on political ideological work will translate into strengthening our material force.

Laos-Vietnam Short-term and Long-term Cooperation

P. Mek

A friendship and solidarity between the two parties, two states, and the two peoples of Laos and Vietnam were established since ancient times. They have evolved to a fine tradition of existence and expansion of both countries. This combination of solidarity and cooperation is rare, special, and comprehensive with a firm basis in which no enemy can dismantle. This has been proven to be the utmost truth through practical observation of the past and the present. The two peoples of our nations went through thick and thin and have helped each other through sacrificing flesh and blood. To continue to improve and expand this traditional relationship to be more fruitful and flourished for stronger and more effective cooperation, the governments of our two countries have identified short-term and long-term cooperation projects outlined below:

I – Annual Cooperation for 1992

- 1./ The Lao government proposed the Vietnamese government to provide a grant for VND 11 billion for the purpose of human resources development and for Lao students to study in Vietnam.
- 2./ Based on the memorandum of an official dialogue between the Politburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam in October 1991, Laos shall inform a number and identify a timeframe for the current Lao students studying in Vietnam by June 1992 to the Lao-Vietnam Cooperation Commission deliberate a new direction.
- 3./ Vietnam is prepared to provide technical experts as per the requests of Laos pursuant to Vietnam's capabilities to provide assistance in economic, cultural, scientific, and technical domains to Laos.
- 4./ The two governments shall create favourable conditions for implementing joint projects in relation to agriculture, forestry, transportation, energy, and other construction works.
- 5./ Agree to establish favourable conditions for trade and commerce between the two countries and utilize various forms of trade and commerce and other measures in order to prevent customs evasion and illicit trades that violate the laws of each country.
- 6./ Delegate duties to the relevant ministries to organize meetings and resolve outstanding debts by the end of June 1992.
- 7./ Establish favourable conditions for relevant organizations to participate in bidding processes for activities using third-party funding in their country in accordance with international rules and regulations on bidding and on a basis of quality assurance and traditional mutual cooperation.
- 8./ Conduct study visits by two delegations on economy, culture, science, and technology topics in compliance with immigration regulations of each country. For other governmental organizations, the visiting organization and host organization must inform each other 1 month in advance on the topics and the detailed itineraries. The visiting delegations shall pay for round-trip air tickets while the host delegation shall pay for lodgings, meals and domestic travel arrangements.
- 9./ Urgently discuss a development and an exchange of documents to agree on strategies and mechanisms for comprehensive cooperation and a new framework of cooperation in relation to aliens, marriage, immigration, legal assistance, customs, payment settlements, and other issues which shall be proposed to the Commission for consideration and approval by third quarter of 1992.

II – Economic, Cultural, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between 1992 – 1995

- 1./ Increase economic, cultural, scientific, and technical cooperation to promote effectiveness, mutual benefits, stability, and security.

- 2./ Promote cooperation between line ministries, sectors, provinces, capital cities, and grassroots units of the both countries in accordance with each other's laws and authorization from their own government.
 - 3./ Promote cooperation in the field of agriculture, forestry, industry, manufacturing, post, transportation, construction, commerce, tourism, education, information, technicality, environmental protection, and other areas.
 - 4./ Vietnam continues support Laos by constructing and maintaining roads in its territories that border and connect with Laos in order to facilitate goods in transit as well as the allowing the use of existing sea ports in Danang, Heua Lor, Son Haiy, and others. In addition, the two countries also agree to conduct research on means of cooperation to construct and use the Honla port and No. 12 Road in accordance with each other's country's and international laws.
 - 5./ Delegate ministries, sectors, provinces, and the capital of each country to coordinate with one another to create detailed cooperation projects that are practical and effective in many ways. Then, propose to the Commission for cooperation of each country to consider and create favorable conditions for actual implementation.
 - 6./ Economic, cultural, technical and scientific cooperation must be based upon a detailed signed agreement and on the principle of equality with mutual benefits and respect for the laws of each country and traditional relationships. For large-scale cooperation, implementation must be carried out on a step-by-step basis, with a sound focus and proper evaluation to draw lessons learnt.
 - 7./ Strive to create a conducive environment for the use Vietnam's technical expertise and labour, Lao resources, and third country's funding in accordance with the laws of each country and international laws.
 - 8./ Vietnam shall continue to support Laos in the field of education and engineering for Lao students and Lao civil servants who are currently studying in Vietnam through previous agreements. From an academic year of 1992-1993 onward, Vietnam shall be prepared to provide assistance in terms of technical expertise, teaching-learning, curriculum development and other documents pursuant to the request of Laos in order to reduce the number of new students and officials that will be sent to Vietnam. Vietnam shall continue to provide assistance in terms of human resource development by receiving students at a university and post-graduate level as well as training government officials.
 - 9./ Vietnam shall continue to ensure preparedness in providing technical support based on Laos' requests, including experts from the Party, government, and mass organizations. However, such assistance must be recorded in a cooperation plan, the relevant organizations of the two countries shall be delegated with the responsibility to proceed to sign the technical cooperation agreement.
 - 10./ Continue to delegate responsibilities to discuss, develop, and share documents on strategy and mechanisms to the relevant organizations of each country, as well as hastily conducting consultations to determine detailed measures to strictly implement national border regulations between the two countries, especially in the areas of natural resource extraction, immigration, and border control for the purpose of creating friendly and secured borders between the two countries.
 - 11./ The Chairperson of the Commission in each country shall facilitate and manage the implementation of actual cooperation and coordinate with one another to create mechanisms and a harmonized cooperation policy between the two countries.
- The direction of these short-term and long-term cooperation aims to strengthen the special friendship and solidarity between the two countries in order to ensure firmness and stability, as well as to safeguard and contribute towards prosperity of own countries.

Sibling Countries

P. Souknavong

A political foreign policy that was approved by the V Party Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party states, '...[Laos] will continue to implement a policy of peaceful coexistence

based on a principle of stable neighbouring countries towards the Kingdom of Thailand and all countries in the region.’

In order to implement a spirit of this foreign policy, the government of the Lao PDR has enhanced friendly relations and cooperation between the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Thailand in various areas. This is apparent through an official exchange of high-level delegations of the government and military delegations as well as official exchanges in the field of economy, commerce, and technical expertise. Furthermore, the cross-border movement of people between the two countries has also expanded – particularly after the official visit of Princess Debaratanarajasuda Sayaboromrajakumari to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in March 1990 and the official visit of Kaysone Phomvihane, the President of the Lao PDR, together with his spouse to Thailand in response to an invitation of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit of the Kingdom of Thailand to officially visit between the 6th to 11th of January 1992. The visit by President Kaysone Phomvihane and the Lao delegation received an honourable and warm welcome by the King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit, members of the royal family, the Thai government, and Thai people. This visit was considered as a historical visit for Thailand that was conducted on the basis of friendly sibling countries.

The official visit by President Kaysone Phomvihane to Thailand was of utmost significance which not only demonstrated friendly relations between sibling countries but also an entry to a new era of better cooperation. This also raised awareness of the Lao and Thai peoples specifically on the similarities in terms of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and traditions and the fact that both countries are sibling countries since ancient times. As King Bhumibol Adulyadej stated: ‘... Our countries and cities are located closely with one another, our peoples also respect and practice the same religion, culture and traditions, so much so that we are known as close relatives.’

This official visit elevated relations between Laos and Thailand to the highest level. It is an important milestone for the era of cooperation between our two countries, which is an era of understanding and sincerity that forms a foundation for continuous cooperation and contribution towards development of our countries; President Kaysone Phomvihane also stated in the Gala Dinner at the Grand Palace in Bangkok:

‘if we uphold high regards to our relationship as sibling countries and as countries with long-term relationship, remove prejudice towards one another, and firmly abide by Buddhist principles and the five principles of peaceful coexistence; any emerging conflicts between Laos and Thailand can all be addressed in a concerted manner.’

After the visit of President Kaysone Phomvihane to Thailand between the 18th to 21st of February 1992, His Excellencies Khamtai Siphandone, the Prime Minister of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, led the delegation of the Lao government to officially visit the Kingdom of Thailand in response to the invitation of His Excellencies Anand Panyarachun, the Prime Minister of Thailand, in which the delegation received a warm and honourable welcome extended by the Prime Minister of Thailand. On the occasion of this official visit, both Prime Ministers negotiated and signed a friendship and cooperation treaty between the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Thailand which would form a basis for ensuring sustained and long-lasting relations of the two governments and peoples.

His Excellencies Phao Bounnaphon, the Lao Minister for Foreign Economic Relations and His Excellencies Mechai Vilavaidya, the Minister to Thailand’s Prime Minister Office, also signed a tourism cooperation agreement for the year 1992 between the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Thailand. This agreement aims to expand tourism between the two countries and ensure effectiveness on the basis of the respect of independence, equality, sovereignty, and mutual benefits.

The official visit by His Excellencies General Khamtai Siphandone to the Kingdom of Thailand on this occasion concluded successfully and was an important historical milestone in elevating and

strengthening friendly relations and cooperation on the basis of understanding and trust as sibling countries between the governments and people of Laos and Thailand.

The signing of the friendship and cooperation treaty by the two Prime Ministers and the joint declaration of Laos and Thailand will serve as a firm foundation to strengthen friendship and mutual trust between the people of Laos and Thailand for mutual benefits of our people. Furthermore, this will also contribute towards a maintenance of peace and stability and an expansion of cooperation between countries in the region.

Despite the good relations between Laos and Thailand as mentioned above, there are still various issues that both countries have yet been able to address such as border issues, addressing exile oppositions' movements and other existing problems. Due to these problems, both countries must strive to normalize and elevate our relationship to ensure peace, friendship, stability, and legitimate interests of the two countries.

Curiosity: Southeast Asia's Secret to Success

Compiled by: J. Phaivongmixay

Pursuant to the research papers published by foreign countries, Southeast Asia's success is attributed to the following factors:

Southeast Asia is currently undergoing a transitional phase which is observable through the changes in economy where there are emerging economies all over the region. Shortly put, Southeast Asia is proactively striving, and there is so much knowledge and academic potentials that will pave the way towards a bright and prosperous future.

Various economists and politicians have predicted that the approaching century will be known as the Pacific century. They have also stated that the Asia-Pacific region, led by Japan, shall become a trade hub characterized by economic expansion and a new era for the world economy. Forty years after the Korean War and almost a decade and a half after the Vietnam War, the situation of the Southeast Asian region shows that there has been a reduction of tensions and an enhancement of economic growth. Japan's capital and approach have demonstrated its success worldwide. 'The Four Small Tigers' of East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) are currently garnering their efforts to compete with Japan; and in the future, these will include Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China and possibly Vietnam.

Competition is rapidly increasing amidst the atmosphere of accelerated growth. In the past, these countries only played a role of providing raw materials to colonialist countries. Now, however, they have diversified their economy as well as modernizing their factories that was previously labor-intensive.

Why is Southeast Asia able to make large strides and almost level itself with Western industrialized countries while the regions of Africa and Latin America were not able to achieve a similar progress?

There are different answers based on the situation of each country. This is because, in Southeast Asia, there is a diversity in terms of nationalities and political regimes. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all principle.

The region is not only influenced by two foundational cultures (Sino-Indo cultures) but also by the penetrative force of various religions. Recently, the region was highly influenced by western cultures to the point that leaders in the region expressed concern for the preservation of Asian traditions and values which may have already ceased to exist.

During the last two centuries, Southeast Asia received migrants from China who have fled the country due to internal conflicts and persistent hunger. This has resulted in a region gradually transforming into a society and economy characterized by Chinese principles. The success of Southeast Asia's economic growth is thus attributed to the diligence and sound wisdom of Chinese migrants or in other terms Chinese aliens.

The traditions and culture of the countries in this region ensure the protection of rights and encourage the subtle governance of conflicts. A peaceful consensus is the highest social value and goal which is being gradually and constantly enhanced. Since early childhood, people learned about their social responsibilities and were always taught that: we cannot apply the same approach for all situations; as time passes, we also have to be able to adapt. A high level of political stability is an important condition for good economic growth.

The growth of numerous countries in Southeast Asia demonstrates that, whatever method or form, if it is utilized appropriately, it will translate into successful achievements of economic growth. On the other hand, if utilized inappropriately, then it will result in destruction.

This experience is of extreme importance especially when any country aims for economic prominence. A successful economic strategy of the government of Singapore or Lee Kuan Yew and Indonesian President Suharto's 'New Order' Policy both transition to an era that emphasizes economic cooperation and growth. These policies have contributed towards improved well-being of most of the people living in the small island of Singapore as well as the larger Indonesia. At the same time, it is also observed that these two countries have an ever-growing middle class of intelligentsia with free thinking, who increasingly want to be involved in politics and urges for a balance of power.

After the two decades of economic growth and global integration, countries in the region of Southeast Asia at the present are currently transitioning to become export countries characterized with a large number of intellectuals, Asian-like centralism of governance, and a free society similar to the West. The new imagination related to the secrets to Southeast Asia's economic success is an issue of curiosity for the entire world. That is why it is being presented here for further research and study.

Infiltration of Foreign Industrial Espionage in American Companies

Compiled by J. Phaivongmixay

Presently, a conflict amongst oppositions in the Pacific Ocean has caused difficulties for American companies. But the more concerning issue for these companies is their trade secrets being sold by their oppositions.

The issue of industrial espionage is not a new topic, and it is not always considered illegal. Today, American companies have ventured out to all corners of the globe, but these companies have an obvious weakness which is being caught by the traps of foreign industrial spies. According to investigations conducted by the American Council for Industrial Security in 1991, of 165 companies surveyed, 37% of those companies have become the subject of attacks. The losses in terms of stolen technical trade secrets were immense. Over 30 companies have explained that each year the damages attributed to stolen commercial and technical trade secrets are valued in billions of dollars. IBM's Computer Manufacturing Factory has been targeted by Japan and France for quite some time. The estimated losses amounted to billions of dollars due to stolen technical information and some computer parts.

Taking part in such economic espionage activities are not only professional spies in this field but also intelligence agencies of countries who are American allies as well. Mr. Patrick Wessel, an official of the U.S. Government Accountability Office stated that: 'We have found various foreign intelligence agencies, to some of whom we have never paid attention, but have found that they are operating actively in the US.' The Director of the CIA Robert Gates warned that: 'Various foreign intelligence agencies operating at the present are those who we consider friends to the US, but presently they are currently looking for methods to deploy their operatives to infiltrate hi-tech American companies in order to ransack briefcases of American businessmen for secret documents when they travel for business abroad'.

According to statements of American agents, the French intelligence agency (DGSE) has been the most arrogant, and they have installed covert listening devices on the seats of businessmen on airplanes as well as searching their hotel rooms. 3 years later, the FBI submitted a letter of protest to

Paris after they have found out that French intelligence agents tried to find means to break into the offices of IBM and Texas Instruments representatives for the purpose of searching for technical trade secret documents and sending them to their French competitors. Nevertheless, the letter of protest sent by the US fell on deaf ears. In 1992, the budget of French intelligence agency increased by 9% for the purpose of hiring more than 1,000 new agents. In one of the recent CIA reports, it was stated that French intelligence agents have been dispatched all over the US to find trade secrets.

Nevertheless, the French is not the only one who is operating. The American National Security Agency (NSA) suspects that British agents have wiretapped and intercepted foreign telephone conversations of various American companies. The agents have conducted investigations and suspected that groups of retired Argentine agents and police have installed over 500 covert listening devices in foreign businesses and their organizations in Buenos Aires and fed that information to Argentine companies. Recently, consulting companies in Mane has been exercising caution towards their competitors due to actions of Arab agents. Japanese engineers have also disguised themselves as students in American universities and relayed information back to organizations in Tokyo on research being conducted in their respective universities. An official from Monsanto company (American) said: 'please be cautious when dealing with Japanese delegations visiting manufacturing factories or a certain meeting. They will be videotaping everything and collecting every piece of leftover paper and documents'.

The situation of industrial espionage in the United States has intensified to the point that the FBI and the CIA must increase their countermeasures.

The director of the CIA even made a vow to defend American companies by sending an advance notice on efforts of infiltration characterized as an action of the 'enemy,' the US Department of State has begun its pilot project allowing members of the board of directors of various companies to carry the same mobile phone American government official have been using when traveling abroad. American companies have also been improving their security and defense systems. Kellogg company has ceased its reception of foreign guests for its Battle Creek project in the state of Michigan because foreign agents were able to photograph equipment at this site. The Kodak Eastman Company is conducting an exercise to identify important and classified documents in the same manner being undertaken by the Government. Lotus Computer Company is conducting a headcount of its night-shift workers, because the company released the following statement: 'our computers and their parts have been continually getting smaller in size which makes it easier for one person to hand it to another and sneak it out'.

Due to an increase in foreign industrial espionage, American companies will have to utilize tremendous resources in protecting their trade secrets; Lao businessmen must learn the tactics and methods on how documents and national economic and trade secrets are stolen and smuggled. Even the United States, a major power, and its intelligence agencies can still be infiltrated by foreign intelligence agencies which resulted in multi-billion dollars losses. Now, we all must be cautious and try not to lose a lot of money here.

11 APPENDIX 4: DETAILS OF SOURCES USED FOR ANALYSIS OF THE NA

Often NA speeches and sessions are featured on Lao news, such as *Lao Phathana News* and *Lao National News*, and these news outlets often share broadcasts on their YouTube channels. Two members of our team spent many days searching through Lao news YouTube broadcasts to look for examples of extended footage of the National Assembly. The results were disappointing, in that most of the clips available were very short. Most of them included only a few seconds or minutes of speech as a clip or example but not the whole speech. Likewise, comments from members and Standing Committee representatives, and ministers presenting to the National Assembly were on YouTube but usually tantalisingly brief. The extended clips were typically of ceremonial situations, such as the Opening Formalities or the reception of an official guest. The actual meaty discussions of policy issues were not typically broadcast in any length. Sometimes the news reader would provide a summary, but these typically were very brief and contained none of the emotion that might arise in the actual speeches being reported on. However, from these clips it was evident that people were having important discussions at the NA, so our resolve to find a way to observe these in more detail was strengthened. Also, these clips sometimes gave us clues for specific documents we could try to identify, such as the ‘Five works for Agriculture’ that came out in response to the National Agenda. We were successful in selecting about six hours of the highly relevant materials on YouTube for the 2021 NA sessions. These included:

- Speeches from the Prime Minister and President;
- Sections or parts of ministers’ speeches;
- Comments from NA members & Standing Committee,
- National Agenda (August Session, with Prime Minister speaking about the debt crisis and drug abuse)

From among these, we selected the following for close analysis and/or translation:

- President Thongluon:
 - o End of 8th Government speech (outgoing as PM)
 - o President acceptance speech (incoming as President)
- Prime Minister Phankham:
 - o PM’s response to comments on the NSEDP (March Session)
 - o PM’s response to comments on the National Agenda (August Session)
- Report by the Head of the National Taskforce on COVID-19 (August Session)
- Standing Committee comments on the response to COVID-19 (August Session)

In one clip, we observed the process of voting in the NA and noted that it is an anonymous vote through an electronic system (representatives press a button, and the results are shown live on a screen and then announced by the Chair).

Reviewing these materials, we felt that something important was missing from our understanding of the NA process, which was the moments when comments on policies and plans were commented on by the NA members. One of the Lao team members knew people who worked as a ‘journalist’ at the NA. She offered to ask him what happened to the video recordings that are routinely made of NA sessions where policy is discussed. She quickly found out that the videos are kept by the Ministry of Information and Tourism and are accessible, but that gaining access required quite some persistence and included obtaining letters of permission from NUoL. Obtaining the footage was made even more

difficult by continuing COVID-19 lockdowns. However, the team persisted and were successful in obtaining the footage of the comments from the NA floor during the March session where members commented on the NSEDP. The clips amounted to about one hour of footage.

We considered obtaining this footage an extraordinary achievement for our project. We were able to observe how people present their views in the NA: how they frame their arguments (indeed, they are not framed as ‘arguments’ but as views and cooperative contributions to a common goal) and what debates in the NA look like (answer: they don’t look like debates, but like a collaborative and constructive sharing of views and opinions).

Our Lao team also kept auto-ethnographic notes on the process of obtaining this footage. While the footage was not classified and was technically a record of a public proceeding, nonetheless we discovered that there are significant barriers to researchers interested in understanding policy processes in obtaining access to records like these, not so much because of secrecy but because of bureaucratic tangle involved in obtaining them.

Four members of our team conducted a review of available news sources reporting on the NA. They found that the most valuable source for detailed reporting on the NA was the ‘The People’s Representative Newspaper’ *Phouthen Pasaxon*, the newspaper published by the NA. This newspaper is published every four days, so on average there are seven or eight issues in a month. Each is eight pages long. The first page always contains general news about the NA such as receiving new guests of honour or ambassadors, and the high-profile activities of the various committees (broad duties). The 2nd and 3rd pages contain information about the more regular activities of the members and committees. Pages 4 and 5 are dedicated to the Provincial Assemblies. Sometimes the national representatives return to their provinces and discuss matters with them there. Page 6 is always miscellaneous items, such as poems celebrating a special day (like Women’s Day), health tips, current affairs, brief summaries of main events. Page 7 is a summary of laws and legislations that are new or updated in the NA. Page 8, the back page, is dedicated to international news (very short updates) and also includes current currency exchange rates, and the number for the NA hotline, police and emergency.

These were available on the website of the NA as PDFs, but the records there appeared to be incomplete (not all issues were on the website, or broken links). Our team downloaded all the issues that were available for 2018, 2019 and 2020. This produced the following collection:

- 2018 (72 issues),
- 2019 (80 issues),
- 2020 (52 issues),
- (We did not look at 2021, as we switched to Youtube for that year).

The research team reviewed these looking for evidence of proceedings in the NA and the Provincial Assemblies and discussion of ‘hot topics’ in agriculture and forestry or policy making, how policy change is initiated and carried out, and how research evidence is used in reasoning about policies.

From among these, they selected articles particularly relevant to our research:

- 2018: 39 articles,
- 2019: 41 articles,
- 2020: 31 articles.

Eighty articles were particularly relevant to our research. These were uploaded into an NVIVO library for analysis and coding. This added to our ethnographic approach of identifying key concepts,

terms, and hot topics, as well as our ethnographic analysis of how viewpoints are presented and justified.

One of the unexpected findings of this effort was that the newspapers are available online, but the online archives are not permanent. The newspapers that our team downloaded in the second quarter of 2021 were not available six months later. This is an important methodological consideration for future researchers who may want to use newspapers as a source for understanding policy directions in Lao PDR.

Another important finding was that we discovered that newspapers are not commonly read, even by academics (such as those on our research team). In auto-ethnographic reflections on the process of reading the newspapers, our research team reported that the newspapers were uninviting to read even for highly-educated native speakers. The headlines of the articles were often poor guides to the contents of the article, which led to our team feeling frustrated that they could not tell at a quick glance which articles were relevant to our interests. Often the articles were not structured clearly (there was rarely a summary at the beginning, or a clear introduction, evidence, and conclusion) but rather were written in a meandering, literary style quite common in Lao magazines. Our team felt they needed to read each article to the end before deciding what the author was really trying to say and if there was anything useful in the article, and even then it might not be clear what the overall key point of the article was. Also, the text was laid out quite densely, with few images.

At this point in our investigations, we became curious about the full range of activities that happen at the NA. We had seen speeches and periods for ‘comments’. But were there periods of debate, as with an Australian parliament? Again, using their personal networks, the Lao team were successful in obtaining the detailed Agenda for the 1st National Assembly general meeting (5-7 & 9-10 Aug 2021).

The following information was obtained from this document:

- The meeting ran over five days;
- There was a dress code (people were to dress either as ‘international’ or ‘ethnicity’);
- Each day scheduled five hours of meetings (plus three hours of breaks), thus totalling 25 hours for the entire session;
- This session was dedicated to considering the National Agenda that had been proposed by the government as an urgent response to the nation’s economic difficulties and drug problems;
- The NA was addressed by:
 - o The Prime Minister (gave a full report on the solutions proposed in the National Agenda);
 - o The Vice Prime Minister (full report on economic problems and solutions);
 - o A Representative of Parliamentary (standing) Committee, who gave comments on the cabinet report on solutions to economic problems.
- Then, the NA members were invited to give comments:
 - o First, the NA Chair gave guiding comments on how NA members were to offer comments;
 - o Then five sessions were dedicated to comments from NA members (the first was half an hour, then 1 hour 15 mins, then another session of 1 hour 15 mins, then two more sessions each for an hour, so in total five hours);

Ethnography and Literature Reviews

- Each of the relevant ministries then provided ‘Clarifications’ (these were each presented by the Minister and ran for twenty minutes each). Then each minister would respond to questions from NA members. The Prime Minister would then have an opportunity to respond to or expand on the Minister’s comments.
 - o Ministry of Planning and Investment;
 - o Ministry of Finance;
 - o National Bank of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic;
 - o Ministry of Industry and Trade;
 - o Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry;
 - o Minister of Natural Resources and Environment.
- The final slot was occupied by a Conclusion from the NA Chair
- The closing day featured a handover ceremony of the NA building from Vietnam (dress code, again)

NB although there was live broadcasting planned from the National Assembly for Lao TV, the Agenda made it clear that no live broadcasts were scheduled for the sessions of debate and clarification noted above.

One of our major findings from this (and confirmed from our other ethnographic sources on the NA) was that it is not useful to look for ‘debate’ in the NA. Instead, the pattern is that the leaders (PM, Vice PM) will present reports or proposals, and then the NA will offer ‘viewpoints’, and then relevant ministries would respond to these with ‘clarifications.’ All of these were framed as ‘*sang san*’ (constructive). Typically, the leaders (Standing Committee for the relevant topic, Prime Minister, Chair of NA) would ‘summarise’ the comments or questions from the NA member. It was these summaries that were more likely to be broadcast (along with formalities like the closing ceremony). These ‘summaries’ included elements of what we might think of as debate (such as some areas of improvement or concern that had been identified) but the emphasis was always on a group working towards a common goal, not on any division or factionalism.

The National Agenda was tabled in the NA in 2021 in draft form outlining how the government prosed to respond to what were presented as urgent issues that could become emergencies if not swiftly addressed. It was different from the NSEDP plan in that it was proposed to guide action in the immediate future (next two years) and it had a narrower focus, concerned specifically with the debt crisis (partly sparked by Covid-19) and drug use. Note that when the draft National Agenda was tabled in August 2021 session of the NA, it had already been endorsed by the Politburo and Central Committee.

Key elements of the Draft National Agenda included:

- Identifying the problems and the relevant Ministries concerned (in the case of debt Ministry of Planning & Investment, Lao PDR Central Bank, MoAF, MoIT and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment;
- Proposals for updating and improving tax laws (improving revenue);
- Two new decrees: a Decree on Thrift (to reduce government spending), and a Decree on Enhancing Management of and Preventing Leakage from State Budget Revenues.

We were unable to obtain video footage on YouTube clips of the MoAF minister presenting the ‘Five Works’ for Agriculture that was part of the National Agenda discussion at the National Assembly. However, we did locate a newspaper article from which we extracted the information.

Ethnography and Literature Reviews

We had some questions about political philosophy underlying policy making in Lao PDR, such as the principle of democratic centralism, so the Lao team arranged for us to have an interview with a scholar who holds a PhD in political philosophy and who had published extensively on Marxist-Leninist thought in Lao PDR. We also obtained his articles.

We were very fortunate to be able to secure interviews with policymakers, including former NA members and Ministers. However, they asked for their comments to remain anonymous. Throughout the process of attempting to study the NA under the challenging conditions presented by COVID-19, we encouraged all members of the team to contribute personal reflections of the processes and their own prior experiences as part of an auto-ethnographic approach.

12 APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLE OF NA COMMENTS BY DELEGATES

00:00 – 00:10	To comment on the Prime Minister’s presentation on the draft 5-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan,
00:11 – 00:21	first off, I would like to respect the comments from more than 20 members of the National Assembly.
00:21 – 00:32	And I would like to share my personal opinions regarding the presentation in both part 1 and part 2
00:33 – 00:51	On some points, I agree with the NA President’s probing questions, but on others, I would like to add further, to ensure that the current government administration performs its duty harmoniously and in unity with the members of the 9 th Legislature of the National Assembly.
00:51 – 01:10	We are a new committee in the 9 th Legislature of the National Assembly, and the current government administration is also new as well, which was approved by the National Assembly yesterday.
01:12 – 01:26	Regarding the 8 th NSEDP that the PM summarised, I agree with many issues and the explanation of all the targets in full detail.
01:27 – 01:48	I fully agree with the PM summary. As in the plan, some indicators were exceeded, and some were not reached according to plan or what was approved by the 8 th Legislature of the National Assembly.
01:49 – 02:15	These were due to global impacts such as global economy, natural disaster as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, which had put our economy in a difficult situation and therefore causing the targets and indicators to fall behind the plan.
02:17 – 02:26	And first off, I also would like to say that I’m in the same opinion as the delegates who visited the local communities at the grassroots level,
02:27 – 02:45	where the actual livelihoods of the local people, not only in the 2 districts identified by the government as poor but in other districts and villages as well, are in serious situations.
02:46 – 02:56	When we visited the people in many areas as delegates to disseminate our achievements, we felt sorry for them.
02:57 – 03:12	If we compare with the urban areas, we could say that urban citizens have already graduated from poverty. However, people in rural areas have not.

03:13 – 03:17	I would like to share some points with you all about poor people.
03:17 – 03:22	In my personal perspective, there are 3 types of poverty in our people.
03:23 – 03:34	Firstly, it's a poverty due to a lack. This means a lack of food, not enough medicine and poor conditioned housing. That's one type of poverty.
03:35 – 03:46	The second type of poverty is perhaps due to insatiability, always wanting more, causing misery and endless struggle.
03:46 – 04:00	The third type of poverty is due to always comparing to others who are better off. Even when they already have enough, but they never feel equal. So they still feel poor.
04:01 – 04:11	Nevertheless, the type of poverty that our party government is focusing and trying to address is the poverty of the people in remote and rural areas due to lacks in many aspects in their livelihoods.
04:11 – 04:20	How are we going to solve it? This is quite a serious problem for the government administration who are governing our country.
04:20 – 04:40	And as representatives of the people in this legislature, we are ready to work alongside the current government administration to do whatever we can to drive our country out of the status of underdeveloped country, and help our people to graduate from poverty in due time.
04:41 – 04:55	And with regards to part 2 pertaining the direction of the 9 th NSEDP that the PM presented yesterday,
05:00 – 05:14	in the 6 targets that this government is focusing on addressing, I would like to emphasize on the 2 nd target, item 1, 2 nd bullet point.
05:15 – 05:28	I understand that vocational education is the key to address the education problems.
05:28 – 05:35	Because we have to see why we are building people's capacity. We train a lot of teachers, but many didn't get work placement.
05:37 – 05:52	There are also a large number of working age youths, but less than 5% are recruited into the government structure.
05:53 – 06:00	And the rest about 90% are the ones who drive the economy, and they are in working age group.
06:01 – 06:06	This group, since they are not in the government structure, they didn't have any income.

06:06 – 06:19	So they had to find work in factories, companies or some of them had to find work in other countries. And some became entrepreneurs.
06:19 – 06:33	According to the PM presentation, the target for vocational training is to reach higher than 5%, which means 6% is already considered higher.
06:34 – 06:42	So in my opinion, I would like to propose to re-set the target to be reaching higher than 10%. If that's possible.
06:43 – 07:02	Because having students learning in vocational schools or vocational education is key to address problems with unemployment, social ills or jobs creation. And it will drive our economy to be stronger.
07:03 – 07:05	This is similar to other countries where vocational education is taken very seriously.
07:06 – 07:22	Also, I would like to request the government to implement measures to encourage and make it trendy for our children in lower secondary schools in Grade 9 to enter vocational schools in various fields related to areas that have potentials to develop our country's socio and economy.
New Person	
07:23 – 07:29	Please allow me to comment on the 5-year State Budget Plan 2021-2025
07:30 – 07:39	In the draft plan, the government had attentively evaluated and set out several measures that I think are quite comprehensive.
07:40 – 07:52	Nevertheless, to further ensure that the government financial management and state revenue collection are carefully conducted and expected targets are reached, I would like to share some points as follows.
07:52 – 08:04	Firstly, throughout the past period, Ministry of Finance on behalf of the government had paid attention and put efforts in continuously and systematically improving financial legislations.
08:04 – 08:17	However, from our observations and evaluation, it could be seen that the legislations produced have not been implemented in the local or the grassroot level, which are our target groups, the entrepreneurs or business units in a thorough or broad manner yet.
08:17 – 08:27	This had allowed some business units to be able to hide their incomes [and evade taxes] causing an inability to collect revenues according to the budget plan.

08:27 – 08:38	To address this problem, I would like to propose that we should put more efforts in disseminating the legislations that we have endorsed in each period.
08:39 – 08:47	The second issue is regarding the use of modern tools in financial management, in particular the management of revenue collection.
08:47 – 08:50	Many of the NA members have already pointed out and I also agree.
08:50 – 08:57	Therefore, regarding this issue, I think there should be a clear timeframe on it should be completed.
08:57 – 09:03	Because in the past, we only talked in general terms, and after a long time, we still haven't seen any results.
09:03 – 09:07	Having said that, there have also been many achievements by the Ministry of Finance. So I would like to extend my congratulation.
09:08 – 09:20	The third issue is related to the problem with revenue collection, on the aspect of legislation, particularly the laws, and more specifically the Law on Customs.
09:21 – 09:29	Some changes were made to the 3 vertical sectors for a certain period, where Customs were divided into zones.
09:29 – 09:38	However, after a period of time, even though some effectiveness could be gained, there were a lot of difficulties.
09:39 – 09:44	So some improvements/changes were made again, where custom ports or checkpoints were transferred to be under provincial administration.
09:44 – 09:54	But then only after a while, changes were made again, and now it is called Customs Bureaus or Inspection Office. I'm not sure but I think it's similar to zones.
09:54 – 10:06	Right now, there are still some difficulties. And near the end of the term, I saw that there were plans to make changes/improvements again in Provincial Customs.
10:06 – 10:13	I think it is all very good, but it might be better if we could stick to one change long enough to see the results first, and not go back and forth too quickly.
10:13 – 10:18	Because revenue from customs is the state revenue that's collected in the local levels and it's a large one.
10:19 – 10:24	If revenue from customs can't be collected according to the target, it will impact to the overall revenue, as it covers the majority of the state revenue.
10:25 – 10:31	So these are the issues related to things that impact the revenue side.
10:33 – 10:40	The fourth issue is related to incomplete and unclear revenue base.

10:42 – 10:50	The numbers of enterprises from the financial sector and industry and commerce sector don't match.
10:51 – 11:11	The presented draft 5-year Budget Plan 2021-2025 showed that VAT base is increased by 13,943 units in a total of 136,521 units, which is 13.9% of the total number of business units, which I think is still very low.
11:12 – 11:23	If we re-investigate all these 136,000 units, I believe we can increase our revenue.
11:23 – 11:30	Because in the past, we could see that the collaboration between these 2 sectors is still not very harmonious.
11:30 – 11:37	The Commerce sector in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce is the one issuing enterprise certificates, but there is no reviewing if those enterprises are still in operation or not.
11:38 – 11:42	On this, I have some learnings from Khammouan Province, where there were some investigations conducted.
11:42 – 11:46	It was found that some enterprises have already closed their operations, and some are not in operation. However, our numbers still remain the same.
11:47 – 11:57	So I think this is an urgent work that needs to be implemented to avoid criticism from the society judging that financial sector is unable to collect revenues fully.
11:58 – 12:01	The Industry and Commerce sector had issued a lot of enterprise certificates, but why the financial sector cannot collect from all of them.
12:02 – 12:06	But the feedback is reasonable from the investigation that was done once before.
12:06 – 12:14	So I think to be sure, there should be more investigations and survey regarding this issue, because it's considered very important for state revenue collection.
12:14 – 12:18	If we don't have correct revenue base, it would be difficult to have a correct budget plan for each year.
12:20 – 12:34	Now onto the fifth issue regarding this revenue base, I would like to propose to the government to pay attention to the land information.
12:35 – 12:42	Because from our observation each year, revenue from lands is considered a stable revenue.
12:43 – 12:47	However, in reality, the collection of this revenue in the local levels are still not good enough.

12:47 – 12:58	Especially, if we're not talking about other provinces, from my observations in my own province, I could see that the level of revenues collected at the district level is very low, mostly because we still collect revenues using old data.
12:58 – 13:02	There have also been changes in categories of many pieces of land.
13:02 – 13:14	Because according to the Law on Land, many of them have been changed to construction land, which consists of 3 categories namely: construction land for services, construction land for industrial factories and construction land for trade services.
13:14 – 13:16	The fees and charges for these categories are different.
13:16 – 13:21	However, we still collect fees and charges according to the old land register, and the amount is very low.
13:22 – 13:32	This is a lesson from the implementation of the 3 built policy, where we think that the revenue will double if we put effort in re-investigation.
13:33 – 13:41	All the Lands along the roads now have owners, but not all are paying fees. I can guarantee.
13:42 – 13:50	The last issue is related to the management of enterprises in the central and local levels.
13:51 – 14:01	Some parts are clear but some areas are still confusing. Especially for business units that register in the central level or in Vientiane Capital, but operate in another province.
14:01 – 14:08	But when comes time to pay taxes, they would pay at the place where they register. This has created some difficulties.
14:08 – 14:12	I would like to propose that, ideally, if they operate in a local area, they should also pay fees/taxes in that area as well.
14:14 – 14:30	With regards to this NSEDP, I would like to encourage the government to continue focusing on the prioritized plan, in particular the plan to eradicate poverty, especially for those living in the Xebangfai plains, which is regarded as one door in Yommalath district.
14:30 – 14:38	If the government continues to ensure that this project is implemented effectively, it can address the problems of poverty for the people in that area.
14:38 – 14:41	This project is very effective because it provides water to people free of charge.
14:42 – 14:45	That is all that I would like to share. Thank you.
New Person (Female)	

14:46 – 15:03	Based on the questions from the NA President, I would like to share some comments on the 9 th 5-year NSEDP which outlines overall objectives, main directions and responsibilities, main outcomes and outputs, as well as the projects large and medium, etc.
15:04 – 15:10	But first of all, I would like to share my agreement with previous comments from all members of the National Assembly.
15:10 – 15:23	Now, I would like to comment on some aspects on page 12, item 3 regarding the reforming of the economic structure to build internal strength and moving towards self-reliance and self-sufficiency.
15:24 – 15:30	I fully agree with this direction, and I am very happy with it.
15:30 – 15:47	However, I would like to propose to the NA President that, we can't really reform only the economic structure solely, we have to also reform or develop our existing human resources as well, along side each other.
15:47 – 15:53	So that our economic structure will be effective in order for us to be self-sufficient.
15:53 – 16:02	Because everything including revenue collection depends on people or the human resource who are performing those duties.
16:02 – 16:06	So that was the first issue that I would like to propose to the President.
16:06 – 16:11	The second issue that I would like to share is regarding education.
16:12 – 16:20	Education is the work that produces human resources, educates people and provides people with knowledge and capacity.
16:20 – 16:30	In the past, our party-government have invested heavily in this area to develop human resources. And we have produced many.
16:31 – 16:49	However, as many of you have also commented, we should also look at if we have evaluated the quality of our human resources, what are areas of improvement and what areas we should focus on to further develop them.
16:49 – 16:51	So I'd just like to comment on this issue.
16:51 – 17:05	Because there have been quite a lot of educational institutions starting up in our country, but I'm not sure if we have assessed them and their curriculum already or not.
17:07 – 17:20	Why do I bring this point up? It's because we have produced a lot of human resources and supported them for further education both within and outside of the country. And many have completed their education with quite a good level.

17:20 – 17:26	But have we made use of them most efficiently already? I'd like us to look into this.
17:26 – 17:31	As a representative of the people, I trust the leadership of our country.
17:31 – 17:37	However, if we focus more on this issue in education, I think we will achieve good results.
17:37 – 17:47	Because we can't only reform in one area, we have to reform human resource in parallel as well. So they both improve together at the same time. And that was the second issue.
17:47 – 17:58	The third issue is related to the evaluation of the NSEDP and the plan going forward regarding the labour and social welfare.
17:58 – 18:08	I could see in the evaluation section that there are policies (incentives) for people getting good results from their work, which is good.
18:08 – 18:15	But I don't see this in the 5-year plan at all. I did do my homework. I read it thoroughly back and forth, but I couldn't see.
18:15 – 18:24	In fact, there should be something in the 5-year plan indicating how many people getting good results from their work are planned to receive the incentives and how much budget is required.
18:24 – 18:33	In my home province, in Attapue, there are a lot of this problem, similar to what Xaysomboun delegate shared this morning that they hadn't received either.
18:33 – 18:39	So I would like to ask for this to be included in the plan, if that's possible. That's my comment on this second issue.
18:39 – 18:53	Also, in skill development as well, we still lack monitoring and evaluation after vocational trainings or skill development have been conducted.
18:53 – 18:57	We haven't assessed the quality of the results to learn where we should improve.
18:57 – 19:02	So I would like to propose to the President that we should pay attention to this issue.
19:03 – 19:11	The fourth issue, I would like to comment on the measures and mechanisms to implement the outputs in the NSEDP.
19:11 – 19:21	In particular, I would like to emphasise on the rural development and poverty reduction for our people of all ethnicities, especially on the restoration of damages caused by natural disasters.

19:21 – 19:33	The implementation is still very slow. Like in our province in Attapue, many of you here might have been there already and seen the impacts from the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy dam collapse.
19:33 – 19:40	The construction of permanent housing to compensate the effected families haven't even finished until now. There are many families who are still living in iron accommodations.
19:40 – 19:47	The improvement of livelihood is also not sufficient enough. But I could see this as a measure in the plan, I am very happy.
19:48 – 19:54	In addition, it can be seen that the development of infrastructure and others is still poor.
19:55 – 20:02	There are 5 districts in Attapue province, but Sanamxay district where the dam collapsed still don't have paved roads. They still have dirt road.
20:02 – 20:08	After the dam collapse, we got an iron bridge which was proposed by the people.
20:08 – 20:19	I'm also happy that there was a request for proposal (for bidding) and there will be an investment in a paved road. However, the paved road won't reach the provincial municipality area. They said that it will cover only half.
20:19 – 20:28	So I would like to propose here to the President. I have been a delegate for the 3 rd time already and I have always proposed to have a paved road into the province.
20:28 – 20:35	Because Sanamxay is also a base station for our revolutionary party in the southern part, but the road is still in poor condition.
20:37 – 20:42	I know that there is a plan to build it as a socialism district, but we still haven't received anything until now.
20:42 – 20:53	So I would like to sincerely propose to the president. If there is anything you could help us, please. We would like a paved road to the province, not only halfway.
20:53 – 20:58	Because the distance is only 35 km and it's also a national road.
20:59 – 21:02	That is all for my comments. Thank you, the President of the National Assembly,
New Person 4	
21:03 – 21:14	As a representative of the people of all ethnicities as well as a representative of the Lao Veterans Federation and all Lao veterans throughout the country, please allow me to share some comments.

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21:15 – 21:25	But first of all, I would like to show my respect and agreement with the report from the government regarding the direction and plan for the next period.
21:26 – 21:37	And my respect and agreement with the comments from National Assembly members.
21:38 – 21:52	I would like to share further regarding the direction and plan on the 6 overall objectives, in particular the 3 rd objective. I will not go into the others.
21:53 – 22:01	The 3 rd objective has 6 outputs, [which I would like to focus on] especially output 3, 4, and 5.
22:02 – 22:10	I noticed that they specify only women, children, youth, and workers in enterprises.
22:11 – 22:28	So I think, would it be appropriate if we could specify further to include the development of political and social organizations, especially the Lao Veterans Federation under the Lao Front for National Construction, as it's not clearly specified.
22:29 – 22:43	Or a specification somewhere that provides a direction to promote access to personal development for Lao veterans based on their duties to foster solidarity and protect their rights and benefits.
22:44 – 22:59	Lao Veterans should be upheld as a role model for protecting and enhancing the true essence of fine heritage of the revolution, where they contributed and were a driving force in the protection and development of the country.
23:00 – 23:16	Previously, we only had basic understanding on why we established the Lao Veterans Federation, but if we look more deeply, it is very meaningful to the democratic political system of the people in our country, that is our party-government leadership nowadays.
23:18 – 23:21	We could say that if it weren't for them in the past, there wouldn't be us today.
23:26 – 23:31	So in general, I would like to see a direction that involves the work of Lao veterans more.
23:31 – 23:44	Because we have been established for more than 18 years now, but the organization has a very low development level and hasn't received enough attention.
23:44 – 23:53	So in this 9 th administration, I would like to request the party-government and the National Assembly to help taking care of this organization better than this.

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23:54 – 24:02	As many NA members commented that there will be policies (incentives) for a certain number of devotees to the country.
24:02 – 24:11	I could see some of those details in the plan as well, in the targets and indicators.
24:13 – 24:24	Like in one paragraph about allowances for veterans who served in the battles during the revolution, the target is to provide this incentive to 950 veterans.
24:24 – 24:29	But this is only an incentive, not about development.
24:29 – 24:33	It should be something like how to develop this organization to serve the country, or how to make use of the organization. We still don't have this.
24:34 – 24:38	So I would like to request to explore on this point further. Thank you