HIV Vulnerability and Population Mobility in the Northern Provinces of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic
New publication from UNDP South East Asia HIV and Development Project

“HIV Vulnerability and Population Mobility in the Northern Provinces of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic”

Reflecting the cultural backdrop of varied ethnic groups, as well as the socio-economic context of the northern provinces of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, this publication mapped the HIV vulnerability along the major land transport routes crossing four northern provinces with links to China, Myanmar and Thailand. This assessment provides insightful findings, which are applicable as references for HIV preventative interventions for multiple sectors, including: transportation; education; health; and infrastructure development.

Of note, since the completion of the Lao PDR assessment in December 1999, all three recommendations made by the assessment team to UNDP have been initiated.

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Manager
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HIV Vulnerability and Population Mobility in the Northern Provinces of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

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in collaboration with;
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The National Committee for the Control of AIDS, and UNDP Vientiane

Manager: Lee-Nah Hsu
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Foreword

In collaboration with national agencies in countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the UNDP South East Asia HIV and Development Project (SEAHIV-UNDP) is conducting mapping assessment of HIV vulnerability as it relates to mobile populations.

This Lao PDR assessment is part of that process and given that assessments have been conducted by other agencies in the eastern and southern provinces, at the request of the Government of Lao PDR, this study concentrates on the four northern provinces of the country.

Similar studies have or are now being conducted by SEAHIV-UNDP and its national partners in South China (Guangxi), Viet Nam, Cambodia. Together the findings of these assessments will contribute to the understanding of the situation in the Greater Mekong Sub-region as a whole. The situation in Thailand has already been extensively studied by major universities and NGOs in Thailand.

The SEAHIV-UNDP would like to thank for their full collaboration in undertaking this assessment the National Committee for the Control of AIDS (NCCA) especially its director, Dr. Chansy Phimmachanh, Phil Marshall, of Lao PDR HIV/AIDS Trust, UNDP Lao Country Office, especially its HIV Focal Point, Gitte Gronnemose, and the author, James Chamberlain.

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Credit is also due to the local provincial staff members who assisted with the research.

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Map of Transportation Routes in the Lao PDR

Legend:
- National Road Project
- National Road
- River
- Point of section
- Road Number
- Source of fund
- Location of bridge
- (Year of start and finish)
- Length of project

Scale: 1 cm = 50 km

Local = Fund of Lao Government
IDA = International Development Agency
ADIR = Asian Development Bank
SIDA = Swedish International Development Agency
AUSAID = Australia Fund
KFW = Germany Fund
JICA = Japan International Cooperation Agency
UNDP = United Nations Development Program
PART I INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

A. Introduction

All indications are that the Lao PDR is about to become the hub of land transportation for the Greater Mekong Sub-region, and most especially for the northern portion of this region. Roads passing through Lao PDR link Thailand, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Viet Nam and, by extension, Malaysia and Singapore. These same roads will also connect ports on the Indian Ocean to ones on the South China Sea and to the sea routes there, effectively opening new channels of communication between South and East Asia. Northern Lao PDR in particular will be the nexus of a road system that links China, Thailand, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. Within these opening channels of communication lies an enormous potential for the rapid spread of HIV.

In addition, these infrastructural developments are culminating at a time when Asia is experiencing the heavy impact of globalization coupled with a social crisis of considerable dimensions. The positive effects of economic growth are being questioned in the face of increases in poverty and income inequality. In particular, the role of the participatory process is emerging as a primary means of redirecting economic planning so that growth becomes more equitable. Roads providing access to previously remote areas bring with them both the promise of economic growth and the potential for exploitation and victimization of poor families. The risk of HIV spread is one of the social costs that must be borne in these circumstances.

The report analyses the risk potential for the spread of HIV in northern Lao PDR along Route 13, the main highway of the country, focusing on burgeoning sectors of commerce and business enterprise which cater to mobile segments of the population and on the patrons of the same establishments. Information was obtained by means of participatory social research utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary form of data collection. The report is organized into three parts: Part I provides introductory information and an overview of the study results, and Part II presents the methodology and a summary of information obtained in each of the four provinces. Part III contains recommendations.

1. History

Geographically and historically, the outstanding transportation feature of mainland Southeast Asia is the Mekong River. Beginning in eastern Tibet, near the source of the Yangtze, it flows diagonally from northwest to southeast, down the length of Yunnan to Cheng Hung, passing the ancient royal capital of Louang Prabang, the approximate midpoint of the mainland, and continues south along the entire length of Laos, through Cambodia and Viet Nam where it finally empties into the South China Sea. The ethnicity of peoples currently inhabiting its banks shifts gradually from the predominantly Tibet-Burmese Lisu, Minchia, and other Loloish in Yunnan; Lue and Lao from Sipsongpanna to Champasak; to Cambodian, Cham, and Vietnamese. In northern Lao PDR, Austroasiatic groups of the Khmuic and Palaungic branches are always nearby.
Old trade routes following the Mekong and others from the northeast crisscrossed at Louang Prabang the capital of the Kingdom of Lane Xang since at least the 11th or 12th centuries, a Kingdom whose eclectic array of cultural influences bears testimony to its central predominant position in antiquity. With the rise of the maritime states in Southeast Asia in the 16th century, the central powerful position of the state of Lane Xang declined, the old overland and riverine routes unable to compete with the new world of ocean based shipping.

Now, however, at the commencement of the 21st century, in an interesting case of history repeating itself, the overland routes are increasing in economic importance, and once again northern Lao PDR is the nexus. It is not surprising that Route 13, the focus of the present study, indeed parallels the Mekong from the old Tai Lue principality at Meuang Sing (near where the Mekong enters Lao PDR from China), to Champasak, likewise an ancient kingdom, in the extreme South of the country, linking China with Cambodia.

In 1911 Viceroy Tiao Bounkhong, Lao representative to the Council of the General Government of Indochina in Hanoi, proposed to the council a need for the construction of roads linking Louang Prabang to Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and Sam Neua. In that same year, construction was begun on Route 13 under the direction of Phagna Meuang Say, and was completed to Xieng Ngoen, the first district south of Louang Prabang (Khamchan 1968). But it was not until 1926 that the continuation of the route was marked from Xieng Ngoen to Sala Phou Khoun by the French engineer Lhermite (op.cit.). The road was finally completed sometime later but fell into a state of disrepair in the 1950s. It was re-opened in 1966 under the direct supervision of American engineer George Wagner and has remained open ever since.

At the present time, Route 13 extends the entire length of the country, from the Cambodian border in Champasak Province to Louang Namtha Province in the North. The road bifurcates at Ban Na Toey on the Oudomxay-Louang Namtha provincial boundary, Route 13B going North to the Chinese border at Bo Ten, and 13A continuing on to Louang Namtha and Meuang Sing.

2. Geography

For the purpose of social research it is most convenient to use the following system of regions as opposed to the three physically based divisions used elsewhere. The system adopted here assumes socio-cultural criteria to be fundamental and intuitive, followed by history (there were four kingdoms, Lane Xang in the North, Meuang Phouan in the East, Vientiane in the Center, and Champasak in the South) and administrative practice (which links VTEM, VTEP, and XSPZ). The four provinces targeted by the present study are highlighted below. Percentages of minority populations for each province are provided based upon the 1995 census disaggregated by ethnicity and reanalyzed into ethnolinguistic families.

The northern region has a more developed system of highways linking neighbouring countries, and it is noteworthy that this has also been the case historically.
Table 1: Regions and provinces of the Lao PDR (Total 1998 Pop. 4,966.9 Th.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Pop Th</th>
<th>Minority %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORTH</td>
<td>Phongsaly</td>
<td>PSLY</td>
<td>165.9</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louang Namtha</td>
<td>LGNT</td>
<td>124.6</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oudomxay</td>
<td>ODXY</td>
<td>228.2</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>BKEO</td>
<td>123.3</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louang Prabang</td>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>396.1</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xaygnaboury</td>
<td>XBRY</td>
<td>316.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,354.9</td>
<td>87.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL</td>
<td>Vientiane Municipality</td>
<td>VTEM</td>
<td>569.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vientiane Province</td>
<td>VTEP</td>
<td>311.1</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xaysomboun Special Zone</td>
<td>XSPZ</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>938.8</td>
<td>49.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST</td>
<td>Houa Phanh</td>
<td>HPNH</td>
<td>265.6</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xieng Khouang</td>
<td>XKNG</td>
<td>217.8</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borikhamxay</td>
<td>BKXY</td>
<td>177.6</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khammouane</td>
<td>KMME</td>
<td>295.8</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>956.8</td>
<td>58.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH</td>
<td>Savannakhet</td>
<td>SVKT</td>
<td>729.3</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saravanah</td>
<td>SRVN</td>
<td>278.2</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>CPSK</td>
<td>544.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xékong</td>
<td>XEKG</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>ATTP</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,716.3</td>
<td>50.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Borders of Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE. Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Overview

1. Current Socio-economic Setting

The *National Human Development Report* for 1998, produced jointly by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Statistics Center under the State Planning Committee, notes the following indicators:

- Life expectancy is estimated at 51.7, the lowest in the region (1994).
- Infant mortality is 93 per 1,000, second highest after Cambodia (1994)\(^1\).
- Maternal mortality was 650 per 100,000 live births in 1990\(^2\).
- Total fertility rate for 1995 was estimated to be 7.1, and the annual population growth rate is 2.5 per cent (1996).
- Adult literacy estimated at 60 per cent, third lowest after Cambodia (35 per cent) and India (51.2 per cent) (1994).
- Per capita income in 1996 at US$350, but in 1995 Lao PDR had a real GDP per capita (in terms of purchasing power parity [PPP]) of PPP US$2,571, comparable to China at US$2,935 and twice that of Cambodia at US$1,110, Myanmar at US$1,130, and Viet Nam at US$1,236.
- According to the UNDP Human Development Index, a composite of life expectancy, educational achievement and GDP expressed in purchasing power parity, with values between 0 (lowest) and 1 (highest), Lao PDR ranked third lowest in the region with 0.459, above Cambodia (0.348) and India (0.446). Lao PDR ranked 136 out of 175 countries for which the index is calculated, compared to Thailand (0.833) ranked 59, and Singapore (0.896) ranked 28.
- Based upon the 1992-93 household and expenditure survey, in terms of income, the poverty line was defined as monthly earnings sufficient to buy 2,100 calories of food per person per day plus an allowance for non-food expenditures [not specified]. The national incidence of this food poverty was said to be 22 per cent. (It is noted, however, that the poverty gap index, a measure of the income needed to bring the poor up to the poverty line was only 12 per cent.)
- Disparity of income shares is comparatively low, with the poorest decile at 4.2 per cent and the highest at 26.3. The gini-coefficient is calculated at 0.32, similar to Indonesia (0.32) and Viet Nam (0.34).

\(^1\) However, both the 1995 Census and NSC 1999 indicate 104.
\(^2\) Increased to 656 as of the LSIS 1992-93 (NSC 1995).
a. The economy

In 1986 Lao PDR embarked on an economic reform programme known as the New Economic Mechanism. In the wake of reform, growth in real GDP averaged 6.6 per cent during the period 1986-1997. Inflation remained under 10 per cent, and the kip-dollar exchange rate was fairly stable at about 720-730. However, the economy experienced large current account and fiscal deficits, financed by substantial flows of foreign investment and foreign assistance. With the onset of the Asian financial crisis, foreign investment (much of which came from Thailand and Korea) decreased sharply, along with exports of some commodities such as wood products to Thailand. This resulted in a loss of confidence in the kip, which the government exacerbated by hinting at exchange controls and by rapidly expanding the money supply (by 66 per cent in 1997 and by 110 per cent in 1998). In November 1999 the exchange rate had declined to 7,200 kip (from having reached almost 10,000 kip on the parallel market in August). (Chamberlain 1999)

b. Women and employment

In Lao PDR the impact of the crisis on economic growth has been surprisingly modest, despite the fact that the Lao PDR economy has been closely linked to the Thai economy in recent years. Real GDP grew by four per cent in 1998, compared to 6.9 per cent in both 1996 and 1997 (Asian Development Bank 1999). However, the precipitous fall in the exchange rate and rampant inflation (90 per cent average rate in 1998) have affected various groups differently. Although officially agricultural output grew by 3.7 per cent (compared to seven per cent in 1997), the rate of growth in manufacturing fell from 18.1 per cent in 1996 to 9.3 per cent in 1997 and to 9.6 per cent in 1998. Garment manufacturing has remained strong, however, providing several thousand jobs to a predominantly female workforce. The banking, insurance and real estate sector was particularly hard hit, experiencing a growth rate of –87 per cent in 1998. The construction sector also declined steeply in 1998 (–18.2 per cent). The forestry sub-sector also recorded negative growth (– 4 per cent) as exports of timber shrank in unison with a depressed Thai economy. A bright spot was tourism, which increased substantially in 1998, contributing to growth in the trade sector of 20.2 per cent (compared to 10.8 per cent in 1997). However, the strongest performer was electricity and water, which gained 62.7 per cent in 1998 (compared to –1.9 per cent in 1997), due to the completion of the Theun-Hinboun hydroelectric project.

The employment effects of the crisis, as suggested by the relatively modest overall decline in economic growth, have been minimal. According to one government survey, only one per cent of workers lost their jobs between March 1997 and 1998 (Investment Consultancy Company 1999). Job loss occurred mostly in urban areas (70 per cent) and mostly among males (81 per cent) and among workers ages 29 and under (56 per cent). These employment impacts reflect the pattern of output growth during 1998. For example, the relatively heavy impact on males reflects the gender composition of employment in the sectors hardest hit by the crisis, i.e., banking, insurance and real estate, construction and manufacturing (apart from garments), and the fact that women are predominantly employed in the informal sector (women account for 61 per cent of the self-employed and 87 per cent of unpaid family workers). There is some evidence suggesting that the informal sector share of employment has also increased as a result of the crisis. Among new entrants to the labor force, 25 per cent are self employed or unpaid family workers, compared to only 11 per cent of
workers who entered the labor force one to five years previously (Investment Consultancy Company 1999).

The greatest social impacts of the crisis have been due to the effects of rapid inflation, which has been felt most sharply in urban areas. The fact that as much as 87 per cent of agricultural gross output, which accounts for about one-half of national output, is for home consumption shields much of the rural population (82 per cent of the total) from the effects of inflation. In Vientiane food prices increased by about 50 per cent during 1998. And according to a survey conducted in March 1998, 90 per cent of urban households ranked food as most affected by price increases, compared with 52 per cent of households in rural areas (Investment Consultancy Company 1999). In urban areas, government workers were hardest hit, both due to the relative inflexibility of government wages and to the effects of fiscal tightening. Private sector workers fared better, as increases in their nominal wages kept pace with price changes.

Rural household incomes, which depend heavily on agriculture (60 per cent), have probably increased, even in real terms (especially if home-consumed food is valued at international prices). Rural farmers have developed a thriving business exporting agricultural products to nearby Thailand, whose currency has appreciated significantly relative to the kip. Recovering from a drought in 1997, the agriculture sector has also benefited from government investment that has increased land under irrigation from 12,000 hectares in 1996 to 50,000 hectares in 1998 (ADB 1998).

Urban households, whose main income sources include household-owned businesses (37 per cent) and wages and salaries (24 per cent), have probably experienced a decrease in real incomes. At the national level, these two sources of income have declined sharply, i.e., from 27 per cent and 19 per cent respectively during the period March – August 1997 to 13 per cent and 13 per cent during September 1997 – February 1998. During this period, presumably to compensate in part for income losses from other sources, many households have also received increases in transfers (mostly from overseas workers but also from relatives settled in developed countries, such as The United States and France).

c. Human development

There is very little information yet available on the impact of the crisis on investments in human development, i.e., education, health (including family planning and reproductive health) and nutrition. A possible negative impact on the development of children is of particular concern. Price increases for medicines and school materials (e.g., books, paper, notebooks, clothing) are well documented. However, despite these likely negative impacts, it has to be kept in mind that government incomes were already inadequate prior to the crisis so secondary income mechanisms were already in place, and most Lao people had poor access to education and health services (including family planning) before the crisis as well.3

Data from the most recent government income and expenditure survey indicate that in urban areas the food share of total expenditure increased from 46.9 per cent during the period of March to August 1997 to 48.2 per cent during September 1997 to February

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3 In 1996/97, for example, government education spending was only 2.9% of GDP, while health spending was only 1.7% (Asian Development Bank 1998)
1998 (Investment Consultancy Company 1999). The share of total spending on medical care decreased slightly during the period of the survey, from 1.9 per cent to 1.7 per cent.

**d. Social capital**

Problems with teenagers, including consumption of alcohol, dropping out of school, theft, glue sniffing, fighting and impolite dressing is on the increase. The incidence of these reported social problems is noticeably higher in urban areas, but the availability of methamphetamines was reported throughout the rural North during the study. Cultivation of the opium poppy is also reported to be on the rise in some areas (Chamberlain 1999).

**e. Commerce and finance**

The recent financial crisis which began in Thailand set in motion a series of devaluations of the kip followed by dramatic parallel increases in the CPI throughout the country. These events in turn had pronounced effects especially on the agricultural sector, and the effects here have been positive. Indeed, the crisis has served as a long-awaited catalyst leading to a new breakthrough in prosperity among the majority of the nation's farmers. Lao produce in Thailand is characterized as natural, good tasting, and inexpensive. Paradoxically, artificially raised products of Thailand, such as fish and pork, are priced low enough to compete favorably in the Lao markets, and thus these are being imported into Lao PDR.

Market demand for Lao agricultural produce in Thailand is not restricted to border areas but has extended into the North as a result of much improved road access. With the improvement of Route 13 what was formerly a two-three day journey by barge down the Mekong from Louang Prabang is now an overnight trip by truck. The only distinction between the North and the provinces adjacent to the Mekong is that purchasing is carried out by wholesalers or intermediary traders. As a result consumer market prices are generally lower in the northern provinces visited during the assessment than in the other regions.

The impact of the crisis on the Chinese border differs significantly. Chinese imports into Lao PDR have dropped significantly. Based upon information provided by marketeers, Chinese consumer goods in the central market in Oudomxay which had comprised an estimated 50 per cent of the total goods sold, now comprise not more than 20 per cent, most having been replaced by Thai goods. Hotels in Meuang La, Yunnan that used to cater to Lao businessmen are said to be empty. The Bo Ten border crossing point between Oudomxay and Yunnan which had expanded to utilize 60 customs and police officials prior to the crisis, is, according to sources in Oudomxay, now manned by not more than ten officials at any given time. However, Lao exports to China continue as before, consisting mainly of timber, sugarcane, coffee, peanuts, and sesame, as well as NTFPs including cardamom, *Broussennetia*, broom grass, benzoin, and a variety of medicinal barks.

Tourism has blossomed in the ancient royal capital of Louang Prabang, and has even spread to other parts of the North such as Oudomxay and Phongsaly. Official provincial records estimate the annual number of foreign tourists to have risen from 30,769...
in 1997 to 44,285 in 1998, with an expected 50 per cent increase in 1999. The average stay per tourist is three days and two nights, with an average expenditure of US$200.

But the crisis viewed financially from the point of view of the government presents a rather different picture. According to Souphanh and Leeber (1999), foreign investment dropped sharply from an 88 per cent increase in 1995-96 to –88.35 per cent in 1997 and a further –18 per cent in 1998. This condition appears to be the direct result of the unfavorable official exchange rate of kip to US dollars or other foreign currency effectively preventing the conversion of profits to foreign investors. Likewise, between 1997 and 1998, foreign grant aid decreased by 27 per cent and loans by 19 per cent, placing additional strains on government planning.

Absolute poverty is restricted to remote areas, and in fact one study (Chamberlain 1999) revealed a shortage of labor throughout the country since one of the effects of the devaluation has been a low kip/dong exchange rate prompting an exodus by many Vietnamese workers. Lao workers are in short supply because their efforts are needed on the family farm, and Lao workers have usually opted for jobs in Thailand rather than accept low wages in Lao PDR.

Thus while in the agricultural sector, and in much of the local private business sector, there is a sense of economic well-being, financially, the government of the Lao PDR faces significant obstacles as a result of the economic crisis. The vexing problem for the government is how to stabilize the economy and share in the new prosperity without initiating controls that compromise incentive and the growth of the free market economy.

**f. Regional economic recovery**

The recovery from the financial crisis in the developing countries of Asia has been much faster than expected. The GDP growth slowdown which fell from 6.1 per cent in 1997 to 2.3 per cent in 1998 is expected to rise to 5.7 per cent in 1999 and to continue this rate throughout the year 2000. (ADB 1999a)

Much of the success of the overall recovery has been attributed to openness in trade, labor movement, and direct investment, all of which are still emerging in the Lao PDR, but may be expected to increase in the coming years, considerably enhanced by the road network of northern Lao PDR. The challenge which now faces the developing countries of Asia is to ensure that the global trading system continues to become more equitable in taking into account their interests (ADB 1999b).

There is, however, a social crisis in developing Asia that was progressing prior to the economic crisis which has not been properly addressed. In the Central Asian Republics, for example, the collapse of the socialist system brought extensive disruption to the economies as exemplified in the rupture of social protection systems and traumatic declines in social indicators. Knowles (1999) writes:

... The spectacular performance of China in poverty reduction has also recently stalled. There are therefore now more people under poverty today - that is people whose incomes falls below US$1 dollar per day - in all sub-regions of developing Asia, compared to the mid 1990s. Indeed, overall the incidence of poverty, expressed as a percentage of the total population of developing Asia, is also higher today than in the mid-nineties.
Thus recovery from the financial crisis is taking place concomitantly with the completion of major road projects in northern Lao PDR but is set against the backdrop of an escalating regional social crisis: increasing poverty, exacerbated by socioeconomic disparities within the country as a whole, between ethnic groups, and between sexes.

2. Transportation in the Lao PDR

What began as a crude collection of interconnected dirt tracks and older roads which had fallen into disrepair has, over the last ten years, evolved into an increasingly efficient land transportation network interlinking all five of the neighbouring countries of Lao PDR and by extension all of mainland Southeast Asia. By far the most dense and most complex portion of this network exists in northern Lao PDR where routes connecting Thailand, Myanmar, China, Viet Nam and even Cambodia (to China) intersect. It may be expected that within the next two-five years, as the volume of inter-country and inter-regional commerce increases together with increased traffic flows from trade and tourism, that this region will experience exponential economic growth, particularly in the service sector. (See Map 1) Table 3 below illustrates the degree to which land transport is currently used in the country as a whole for freight trafficking.

**Table 3 - Freight Transport Volumes as of 1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREIGHT TRANSPORT IN LAO PDR</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Road</th>
<th>River</th>
<th>Sea</th>
<th>Air</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Tons</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,029.0</td>
<td>604.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1,663.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSC 1999

It is notable that although the total amount of freight decreased between 1997 and 1998, presumably as a result of the financial crisis, the percentage of shipments by land increased while water transport decreased. Air travel, as might be expected increased as well. A similar trend in passenger transport is shown in Table 4:

**Table 4 - Passenger Transport Volumes as of 1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PASSENGER TRANSPORT IN LAO PDR</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Road</th>
<th>River</th>
<th>Air</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th. Persons</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,009.0</td>
<td>1,599.0</td>
<td>387.9</td>
<td>19,995.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSC 1999
While the decrease in air transportation is to be expected as being most probably due to the financial crisis, the large decrease in river passenger traffic cannot be totally attributed to the crisis and more likely represents a general trend away from river transportation.

3. Northern Transportation Systems

Despite decreased volumes recorded for 1998, the Mekong river remains an important transportation route, both for commercial goods, as well as for passengers. The newly available boat trips from Houay Sai in Bokeo downstream to Louang Prabang are popular and maintain a steady flow of tourists into the country. Somewhat more arduous, because the river North of Bokeo becomes increasingly rocky, is the trip from Cheng Hung in China to Houay Sai. However, the stretch of the river to and from Meuang Mome, a cross border market town servicing Myanmar and Lao PDR, has become a standard economic route. In addition, boats of four nationalities traverse the river from the tri-border of Lao PDR, China and Myanmar.

The Mekong in the North also links Bokeo and Louang Prabang with Xagnaboury and Vientiane, as well as points further South in both Lao PDR and Thailand.4

But the main developments in recent years have been in the area of road network expansion. This system now links four of Lao PDR neighbours — Thailand, Myanmar, China, and Viet Nam — with Northern Lao PDR, particularly Oudomxay, as the hub. The following connections are primary:

**Internal to external connections**

- VTE - Sanakham - Thailand (Loei) / Xagnaboury (Kène Thao Dist.)
- VTE - LBNG - ODXY
- VTE - XBSZ - XGKG - Viet Nam (Nghe An)
- LBNG - XKNG - Viet Nam (Nghe An)
- LBNG - HPNH - Viet Nam (Son La)
- LBNG - ODXY
- ODXY - HPNH - Viet Nam (Son La)
  - PSLY (M. Khoa) - Viet Nam (Lai Chau) [planned]
  - PSLY - China (Yunnan)
  - Bo Ten - China (Yunnan)
  - Nèo Chay - China (Yunnan) [planned]
  - LGNT - M. Sing - China (Yunnan)
  - LGNT - Xieng Kok (Mekong) - Myanmar (Shan State)
  - LGNT - Bokeo - Thailand (Chiang Rai)
  - Pak Beng (Mekong) - XBRY (Hongsa) - Thailand (Nan)

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4 There are, of course, a number of important tributaries to the Mekong in the north, notably the Nam Ou which leads to northern Phongsaly via Meuang Khoa, the Nam Seuang which flows from Pak Xeng and points east, the Nam Beng from Oudomxay, and the Nam Tha from Louang Nam Tha.
International Connections

- Viet Nam - China [Son La/Lai Chau - Yunnan] (via Oudomxay)
- Viet Nam - China [Lai Chau-Yunnan] (via Phongsaly)
- Viet Nam - Myanmar [Shan State] (via Oudomxay)
- Viet Nam - Thailand [Son La/Lai Chau - Chiang Rai/Nan](via Oudomxay)
- Thailand - China (C.Rai - Kunming) (via Louang Namtha)
- Thailand - China (Nan - Yunnan) (via Oudomxay)

It can be seen that the majority of these routes either utilize Route 13 or cross Route 13, mostly at Oudomxay. Figure 1 below illustrates the main routes and the study area provinces of Vientiane, Louang Prabang, Oudomxay, and Louang Namtha.

Figure 1 - Road System of Northern Lao PDR (Source: MCPTC)

Although the volume of traffic in any of these directions is still comparatively low, this will not always be the case and larger flows may be expected in the near future. Because of the economic importance and the consequent large numbers of people who will be traveling, perhaps the single most important route to monitor from an
HIV/AIDS perspective is Route Three, the Lao link, from Houay Sai to Bo Ten, between Chiang Rai and Kunming. This is being developed through the private sector initiative of the Thai owned Economic Quadrangle Joint Development Company (EQJD) who will, if their plan is realized, be granted large concession areas for tourist development. Ultimately the strategy appears to be a circle route beginning in Chiang Rai, through Lao PDR, to Kunming and then back to Chiang Rai via Myanmar. In this way it becomes an extension of the highly developed tourist routes in northern Thailand. Their forecast for the year 2003 is provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5 - Tourist Forecasts for Thailand – Houay Sai – Louang Namtha – Yunnan for the year 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle</th>
<th>Thai-Houay Sai</th>
<th>Houay Sai - LGNT</th>
<th>LGNT - Yunnan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Bus</td>
<td>8,352</td>
<td>300,683</td>
<td>8,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minibus</td>
<td>5,080</td>
<td>81,283</td>
<td>5,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbus</td>
<td>20,838</td>
<td>166,702</td>
<td>20,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedan</td>
<td>19,977</td>
<td>59,930</td>
<td>19,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>54,247</strong></td>
<td><strong>608,598</strong></td>
<td><strong>53,954</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total per day</strong></td>
<td><strong>149</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,667</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But its value as a trade route should not be overlooked since commerce between Thailand and China has increased rapidly, from 735 million baht in 1975 to 58.3 billion baht as of 1994. And the value of trade between Yunnan and other countries has risen from 550 million baht in 1979 to 40 billion in 1994. Exports from Thailand to Yunnan grew from 39 million baht in 1987 to 493 million Baht in 1995. (EQJD n.d.). EQJD has projected that by the year 2003, there will be an annual volume of 29,373 ten-wheel trucks and 48,955 six-wheel trucks traversing Route Three between Bo Ten and Houay Sai.

Even assuming that these figures are based upon vastly improved roads, and that they are necessarily inflated by the company to serve their own interests, they are still alarming considering the current low volumes of traffic and low levels of AIDS awareness in the northern provinces generally.

C. Synthesis of the Current Study

The social impact of improvement to the road network in northern Lao PDR is only just beginning. Many of the roads remain unimproved or are passable only in the dry season. Route Three from Houay Sai to Bo Ten (discussed above) and Route Two West from Oudomxay to Pak Beng fall into this category. Others are only still under construction or only recently completed such as Route Two East from Meuang Khoa to Lai Chau (Viet Nam) or 1B from Meuang Khoa to Phongsaly. Even the critical improvement of Route 13 between Louang Prabang and Pak Mong was only completed in 1997.

This situation differs considerably from the status of social impacts in neighbouring countries such as Thailand or even from other parts of Lao PDR. Route Nine in the
South, for example, the crucial link between Savannakhet and Viet Nam, which will now be upgraded once again under the GMS East-West Corridor Project, has remained open since the French Colonial period, having been maintained by the previous regime and by Russian aid in the 1980s. In this latter instance, there is a well-established service girl traditional “hotspot” at Xéno catering to truck drivers plying between Lao PDR and Viet Nam and even Thailand, and the route is a major one for the trafficking of women between Viet Nam and Thailand (Chamberlain 1999a). There are so far no equivalents to Xéno in the North.

Therefore, from the perspective of social research, the primary goal is the identification of indicative patterns based upon the current situation from which future directions of social change may, to some degree, be anticipated. This section will identify these patterns and offer suggestions as to their implications and ramifications.

1. Pathways of Transmission and Spread of the AIDS Virus

For social research purposes, it is useful to consider three essential parameters of the problem of transmission of the AIDS virus: the establishment which serves as the locus of behavior wherein the AIDS virus can be transmitted; the clientele who patronize the establishment ostensibly introducing the virus from an outside source; and service girls and women who contract the virus and pass it on. Each of these categories has its own distinctive features which were examined during the course of the study.

a. Establishments

The basic establishment types in all four provinces where service women are available are as follows:

**Restaurants/large beer gardens:** These are larger premises with comparatively large numbers of service girls available. Girls sit with the customers and usually drink beer for which they receive a commission from the owner. If the customer and the girl and the owner are agreeable, the girl may go out with a customer for a short time or for the night depending upon what is agreed.

**Small roadside beer gardens:** Locations for small beer gardens are usually on the outskirts of town or even some distance outside of town. Here also, girls, and frequently divorced or widowed women, sit with customers and may be available to go with the customer later if all parties are in agreement. In some instances such places may be in a roadside village where girls participate with the tacit approval of their parents.

**Nightclubs:** In the provincial capitals there are usually nightclubs with live music where customers go to drink and dance. Service girls sit with the customers, drink beer on commission, and may either go with a customer when the establishment closes at midnight (by law in the Lao PDR), or he may "buy her out" by paying an established charge to the establishment.

**Hotels:** So far in northern Lao PDR, hotels rarely maintain service girls. There is some hearsay evidence that Chinese owned-and-operated hotels in Oudomxay may supply Chinese service girls for customers. This was difficult to
verify during the study since the medium of communication is entirely in Ho Chinese a language unfamiliar to the investigators.

**Other:** Vientiane Province has a greater diversity of establishments than the provinces in the northern region. These include a floating hotel located on the Nam Ngeum Reservoir and the Dène Savanh Casino, also located on the shore of the reservoir.

**b. Clientele**

The majority of the clientele consisted of the following types, in descending order of frequency:

**White-collar:** These are public and private sector professionals who are travelling through the province on business. They primarily frequent the restaurants and nightclubs, but may also stop at roadside beer-gardens as well. Most are ethnic Lao, but a few are Chinese and Vietnamese in Louang Namtha.

**Construction workers:** Many of the roads and bridges which are currently under repair or construction support camps for the workers who may frequent nearby small beer-gardens, or interact with village girls in a more traditional manner involving courtship at the home of the girl. Camps are usually either all Lao (mostly from Vientiane) or all Chinese from Yunnan.

**Local residents:** In many instances, local residents frequent restaurants and beer-gardens on special occasions, especially when entertaining or hosting guests from other provinces.

**Truck drivers:** At the present time in the North, trucks are individually owned and the driver/owner contracts directly with traders for shipments of goods and are paid upon completion of shipment. Since their income largely depends upon the frequency and time, and they are usually on the road, overnight stopping at the northern cities is still not well-established. Exports to China are local and are handled by locally resident truck owners who can go and return in one day. Unlike the situation in Savannakhet, Vietnamese and Thai drivers are not yet present. Chinese imports are usually transferred to Lao trucks at the border and so there are few Chinese drivers, but even these imports have dwindled since the financial crisis due to the unfavorable currency exchange. Only in cases of large convoy shipments for large projects do Chinese drivers actually enter Lao PDR but this of course is sporadic. Owners of roadside beer-gardens report that truck drivers are not frequent customers.

**c. Service girls**

Characteristics of service girls differ between the northern region and the central region. In Louang Namtha and Oudomxay girls are predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds and this appears to be the case about 60 – 70 per cent of the time in Louang Prabang as well (based upon establishments visited which probably constitutes a representative sample). Service girls in the North are clearly distinguished by their much higher than average education. Knowledge of AIDS, however, was con-
spicuously absent among the northern group and condom use totally at the discretion of the customer.

In the central region, in Vientiane Province, girls were predominantly ethnic Lao, from poor or distressed families, with lower than average education. AIDS awareness is much greater among the Vientiane group, though use of condoms is still sporadic. Age groups were approximately the same, ranging from 15 to 23 years in each of the provinces visited.

There was some inter-provincial movement of girls mentioned in the interviews though this does not seem to be a definitive characteristic for service girls in the North. It is suspected that currently in Lao PDR the primary movements are between Vientiane and points south and vice-versa, and also from border towns to Thailand.5

d. Mobility

Mobility, which constitutes the pathway of AIDS virus transmission, can then be thought of as occurring in two dimensions. The first is the physical mobility motivated by official and commercial business interests. White collar clientele, construction workers, and truck and boat drivers fall into this category. The second is a type of social mobility engendered among ethnic minorities by the education system whereby literacy and Lao language acquisition allow movement into areas of economic endeavor previously inaccessible by social and cultural barriers. This second type of mobility lends credence to economic theories which cite education as a crucial requisite for economic growth. What must be mitigated here after is the social cost of such growth, in this case, the risk of HIV infection. Ethnic minority girls come from cultural backgrounds which in many cases allow for or even encourage pre-marital sexual relations. Thus the likelihood of transmission from commercial establishments where they have been working to home villages in remote areas to which the girls return frequently poses a considerable threat.

e. Potentials for increased risk

Thailand’s experience is an example of a type of development that could evolve in northern Lao PDR once the road network is firmly in place. The following should be taken into account:

1. In Lao PDR currently there is little social stigma attached to white-collar / blue-collar disparities in terms of patronage. This may be expected to change when labor force structures begin to emerge and a "truck driver class" results. Throughout Thailand this social group tends to frequent high-risk blue-collar brothels which are inexpensive and which are commonly controlled by "dark influences" and not accessible for survey or study. The northern Thailand experience has shown that in addition to unsafe sex, injecting drug use, considered to be a major factor in the AIDS epidemic there, is also a characteristic of these establishments. Illicit drug injection is so far rare in Lao PDR. For the time being Lao sexual behav-

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5 Two girls from a government rural development focal site outside of Oudomxay on Route 13 were reported to have gone to Thailand for this purpose. But this was the only instance of this type of movement reported during the study.
iour, which is more traditional, characterized by antiphonal banter and beer drinking, mitigates against this.

2. Sale and trafficking of women to other provinces and countries is likewise a characteristic of many brothels in Thailand. This is also not yet a factor in Lao PDR but should be regarded as a distinct possibility once the channels of communication are open.

3. Hotel brothels and massage parlors which sell sex are not, as yet, a factor in Lao PDR. However, with the dramatic increases in numbers of tourists being planned, both in Louang Prabang and along Route Three between Houay Sai and Bo Ten, this could change. This is all the more probable since the private sector will be responsible for the development of this route, seen as an expansion of the northern Thailand tourist circuit, which will expand to include Chinese tourists as well.

4. In all scenarios, regardless of the type of establishments that ultimately evolve, the sheer number of women working in the service sector will certainly increase dramatically. At the same time, ethnic minorities who form the main pool from which the girls are drawn will become increasingly vulnerable, all the more so because they inhabit remote areas where health services are meager or not available.

5. Altered sexual behaviour resulting from drug use, especially among adolescents, is already beginning in urban areas in Lao PDR due to the widespread availability of methamphetamines throughout the country. This tendency could be exacerbated with increased outside influence, especially from Thailand.

6. The cultural composition of truck drivers in northern Lao PDR can be expected to change, with increased numbers of Vietnamese and Thais. This will likewise create an increased demand for service girls, and could lead to the establishment of blue-collar brothels. As has been mentioned, there are so far no Xéno-style truck stops in the North. Potential sites here are Pak Mong in Louang Prabang (the three-way intersection where traffic from the South, East, and West converges) which is already leaning in this direction. Another is Na Toey, the junction of Route Three and Route 13.

7. Students, especially the large numbers currently enrolled in the ethnic minority boarding school in Oudomxay (but potentially students in general) who are poor and in need of funds, both for themselves and for their parents, may also be lured into the service girl industry. Here again there are precedents in Thailand.

2. Sexual Behaviour

Interactions between clients and service girls are culturally determined and the structure of the relationship mimics prescribed traditional courtship behaviour with the exception that in the majority of cases in northern Lao PDR such interactions are inter-cultural. However, Antiphonal flirtatious debating, speaking generically, charac-
terizes courting in most of the Asian region and thus, the usual pattern is for service girls and clients to spend several hours engaged in this type of interaction prior to making a decision as to whether or not to consummate the relationship at another location. For most individuals, this form of repartee is an important part of the "service". Indeed this must be considered one of the primary reasons for the demand for educated minority girls in the service girl profession.

As the process of economic development continues to make demands for social change, this more relaxed form of interaction will become more and more of a luxury and may be expected over time to generate the conditions under which new types of establishments offering cheaper and more instantaneous kinds of gratification (as are found in Thailand and already mentioned above).

Little has been written on the sexual behaviour of the many minority groups found in northern Lao PDR. What scant information is available was written many years ago by anthropologists for whom such description was considered only a small part of the total ethnography, so even this is sparse. But the following traits have been noticed in some of the anthropological literature for ethnic groups found in the North:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lue</td>
<td>Premarital sex with tacit approval of parents (Sisawat 1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmou &amp; Lamet</td>
<td>Premarital sexual experimentation is allowed by parents (Izikowitz 1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akha</td>
<td>Premarital sexual freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahu</td>
<td>&quot;A period of premarital sexual activity invariably precedes marriage.&quot; (Young 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao (Iu Mien)</td>
<td>Premarital sex is permitted and expected. A girl's bride price will increase if she has had a child. (La-font 1962)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, not only do these characteristics of sexual behaviour lend themselves to the service girl industry, they are of equal importance in facilitating the spread of the AIDS virus in their home villages which are usually in remote areas.

Surprisingly, although much attention has been paid to the study of marriage and courtship, little has been written on the sexual behaviour of the Lao as an ethnic group. And since the present composition of clientele is predominantly Lao, this represents a serious gap in the research data available to planners.

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6 Care should be taken here in the interpretation of these generalizations. The cultural details of sexual behaviour and courtship must be expected to differ considerably between groups, and especially between lowlanders and highlanders.

7 In Akha society, "adolescent girls must submit to a middle-aged widower selected for their role by the village elders, before they attain marriageable status. ... this individual instructs the girls in the art of love-making and intercourse. A similar role is performed vis-à-vis boys by a widow also selected by the village elders." (Sisavat 1952; also noted by Young 1961)

8 Sexual relations between unmarried Yao girls and non-Yao males is permitted and in the vicinity of Louang Namtha this has developed into prostitution with older women acting as intermediaries. (La-font 1962)
Awareness of AIDS and the dangers of HIV infection were found to be exceptionally low among service girls in the North and moderately better in the central region. In the North, service girls have heard of the virus but do not initiate condom use, leaving the decision entirely with the customer. Much the same conditions prevail in Vientiane Province, although several of the owners there reported encouraging the girls to use condoms and in some cases supplied them for the girls.

Professional clientele on the other hand are more aware of AIDS and the majority of those interviewed reported using condoms and service girls said that this was the case as well. However, most girls said that they did not use condoms when having intercourse with boyfriends.

Posters warning against AIDS and STDs generally were well distributed in government offices and public locations such as bus queues. However, they are rare in the sex establishments themselves. The Provincial Offices of Public Health are responsible for making AIDS awareness presentations and demonstrations of condom use. These were found to have been carried out in many, but not all of the establishments. There are no provincial level facilities in the North for the treatment of HIV patients.9

Condoms are sold in pharmacies throughout the study area, though not always over the counter. Free distribution of condoms, although discouraged by some provincial administrators who fear that this could be interpreted as advocating prostitution, is in fact being carried out by the Provincial Committee for the Control of AIDS. Pharmacies are plentiful in cities and towns, but are less available in outlying establishments. Furthermore, the usual closing time for pharmacies is sunset.

**D. Conclusions**

At the present time in the four provinces along Route 13 in northern Lao PDR it may be concluded that social problems, in particular the problems relating to transmission of the AIDS virus, are still in their infancy. But as discussed above, it is unlikely that this will remain the case for long. As road projects move into their completion phases, border crossings increase in number, and free trade continues to expand as the region recovers from the financial crisis, resultant social problems may be expected to increase exponentially. Numbers of foreign tourists along with drivers of buses and trucks will increase and the demands on the service industry will be great. Most of the road network allowing for this expansion will be in place within the next two years.

At present levels of awareness, the provinces are ill-equipped to cope with such economic growth and the accompanying social costs that will need to be borne. It remains to be seen whether preventative measures can be put into place prior to the onset of what is truly an epidemic in the making.

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9 Nor for that matter are there any in the rest of the country. There are two pilot projects, one in Vientiane at Mahosot Hospital and the other in Savannakhet, funded by WHO for the care and support of people with AIDS.
PART II  Provincial Information

The study which is the topic of this report was commissioned by the UNDP South East Asia HIV and Development Project in collaboration with the National Committee for the Control of AIDS and the HIV/AIDS Trust jointly with UNDP Lao PDR.

The study is characterized as a rapid mapping assessment exercise to focus on the collection of data regarding the behaviour and interactions amongst sectors of mobile populations and the local communities with whom they come in contact, such as in the construction, transportation, trade or service sectors. Its purpose is to provide the basis for targeting of interventions for mobile population linking China and Thailand for the 2000-2001 period. A secondary objective was the training of personnel at the national and provincial levels in the methodology of rapid and participatory research in order to carry out this appraisal and others in the future with strengthened local capacity.

The study focused on Route 13 North (and some secondary routes), in the provinces of Oudomxay, Louang Namtha, Louang Prabang and Vientiane.

A. Methodology

For purposes of the current survey, a variation of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) methodology was considered the most appropriate means of gathering information. Rapid appraisal here is taken to mean a systematic means of gathering and analyzing information within a limited amount of time. Its function is extractive, allowing outsiders to acquire information on local situations. However, rapid appraisals of the kind used for the present study are to some degree participatory in that researchers and target groups are engaging in a dialogue from which information on both sides may be indirectly acquired. The essential tool used for inducing dialogues is the semi-structured interview.

Flexibility and the conscious use of experienced judgment are essential, as opposed to surveys with fixed questionnaires and rigid schedules. In a rapid appraisal there is ample time to pursue questions and new information which arise during interviews. Researchers must be continually aware of potential sources of bias in questioning and be innovative in avoiding them. As outsiders, it is important for researchers to "blend in" with respondents to the degree that is possible in order to understand their conditions.

Situations should be studied as systems, that is, all of the components in their relational and hierarchical arrangements, are viewed together as a non-summative whole. It is a procedure constructed upon an iterative process of rapid and progressive learning from respondents and secondary data. The means of inquiry are exploratory and

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10 This type of appraisal should not to be confused with a PRA (participatory rural appraisal) since the two approaches differ considerably in purpose and process. (The objective of PRA is to assist people in the analysis, planning, and implementation of activities.)
interactive, a systematic dialogue relying upon indigenous knowledge, of villagers, officials, or other informed parties. Differing points of view (individual or group) may be triangulated and compared with existing information. The method then, combines indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge and tools from people of different disciplines and generates new information and new questions, so that hypotheses may be progressively revised.

The present study was centered upon sites as an organizing principle. Identified as significant by local residents were small roadside beer gardens (*haan kin deum*) located in villages along highways, large beer gardens/restaurants (*hong aahaan*), gas-light food stands, nightclubs (*haan banthoeng*), construction sites, boat landings, and bus stations. At the sites, depending upon the type, various categories of person were interviewed, especially owners, service women, customers, workers and drivers from whom similar types of information was elicited. It should be noted here that as is customary in qualitative research the sampling of persons and establishments is purposive and not random. Selections are based upon recommendations and educated judgements of knowledgeable informants who are familiar with the area, and in some cases are based upon availability and access. In addition to target population interviews, information was sought at government offices in each of the four provinces.

The tasks and objectives of the research may be summarized as follows:

### Tasks

1. Collecting and organizing information from existing sources
2. Data collection from government offices in Vientiane and selected provinces.
3. Discussions / in-depth interviews with government and/or NGO personnel.
4. Semi-structured interviews/ target individuals.
5. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1) with key informants.

### Objectives

1. To subsume and understand the type and quality of the data that is already extant.
2. To organize and compile a record of the information that has been officially developed.
3. To assist in the identification of a relevant sample of target groups.
4. To gain access to patterns of mobility, livelihoods, and transportation based enterprise.
5. To assess reactions and follow-up on issues raised in participatory research.

Data collection was carried out by four survey teams comprised of MOPH-NCCA Central and Provincial level personnel, each with a team leader, one team for each province. Sites were selected on the basis of consultations with local residents working for the MOPH at the provincial level.

Because of the considerable diversity in local situations, and for convenience in reference, the results of the assessment are presented here by province. Since, in terms of the number of intersecting routes Oudomxay has become the main city of the North, it is appropriate to begin with this province.
B. Oudomxay

The projected population of this province as of the last NSC publication for 1998 was 228,200 (115,000 female), of which 90.9 per cent are ethnic minorities. Average population density is 14.8 per km². The total fertility rate for the province is calculated at 6.6 with a natural growth rate of 3.3. The infant mortality rate is 88 per 1,000.

1. Transportation

According to the Provincial Transport Department, there are 40 privately owned large trucks registered for the province, including 26 in the 8-12 ton range. The route most heavily traveled is to Bo Ten and China, plied by approximately five trucks per day. This figure can rise, however, if special projects are in progress. During such times as many as 260 trucks per day may come into Lao PDR from China. Traffic to Viet Nam is rare, usually about one truck per month. Average monthly incomes for truck owners/drivers is between 900,000 kip and one million kip, but may be as low as 250,000 during slow months. The destination of Lao trucks in Yunnan is usually Meuang La or Bo Hane. Truck owners are subject to a transportation tax of 50,000 kip per vehicle per month. Goods exported to China include sesame, cardamom, medicinal barks and plants, as well as logs. Imports from China are mostly tractors, tires, and blankets. The main truck stop between Oudomxay and Bo Ten is Na Toey. It is noteworthy that, following the policy of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, all Lao drivers are required to have medical examinations at the hospital every six months.

In addition, there are 185 registered passenger vehicles with seats ranging from nine to 30. Passenger vehicles earn an estimated 117 kip per person per kilometer, thus for example, on the 144 km trip to Pak Beng, a vehicle carrying 20 passengers would be expected to earn 336,960 kip, of which 40,000 kip would be paid to the driver. Refer Table 6 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Going To:</th>
<th>No. of trips per day</th>
<th>Cost Per Person Kip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Ten / X. Hung</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>12,000 / 50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phongsaly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meuang Khoa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak Beng</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louang Prabang</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2  Road System of Oudomxay (Source: MCPTC)
Passengers are said by the Passenger Vehicle Association to be approximately 30 per cent foreign (Chinese, European, African) and 70 per cent Lao. The drivers for the Oudomxay to Xieng Hung trip are all Chinese, but there are rarely more than three-four passengers per trip. The route is kept open because it is subsidized by the Chinese government.

At the Passenger Vehicle Association, AIDS has been a subject of discussion and regular meetings and there have been two presentations by public health officials. The difficulty is that due to drivers being on the road the meetings are never fully attended. The head of the association would like to implement blood testing for HIV and for drugs, especially methamphetamines (*yaa baa*). There are currently no facilities for out-of-town drivers at the bus station and most simply sleep in their vehicles. A new bus station at another location is planned which will include sleeping quarters for drivers. The present location will be developed into a "cultural garden".

A new route will be opened from Oudomxay to Lai Chau (the Northwest corner of Viet Nam) via Meuang Khoa beginning in November 1999. In addition, the road to Pak Beng will be improved, and a new road to the Chinese border in Na Mo District is planned along with a new border checkpoint. South of Oudomxay City, a new road is planned from Meuang Houn to Meuang Phoun in Bokeo. These projects are to be supported through a World Bank loan.

At the Mekong port of Pak Beng, there are nine large boats registered for transporting goods and materials falling into the 10 - 40 ton range. They travel to Vientiane, Louang Prabang, Xaygnaboury, and Bokeo. In addition there are 27 passenger boats (three-seven tons) traveling exclusively to Louang Prabang, and 42 fast passenger boats travelling from Pak Beng to Louang Prabang and from Pak Beng to Bokeo.

Finally, there are two airplane flights weekly to Vientiane; one-two daily to Bokeo, and two-three daily to Louang Prabang.

2. Labour

According to the Provincial Lao and Social Welfare Office, the numbers of foreign workers in Oudomxay are broken down as follows:11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>No. Women</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>Business, sales, hotels, road construction,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>brick making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Local furniture making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sawmill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Resort manager at Pak Beng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Zinc mine at Na Mo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no health qualifications for foreign workers and most of the arrangements are made by private companies. The biggest employer of Chinese is the Yang Lue Say

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11 At the present time there is no way of knowing the degree to which these and other figures are accurate, and whether or not there is an illegal alien problem.
Construction Company owned by a Chinese Ho from Phongsaly and has been operating in Oudomxay for seven to eight years. There are also three Chinese hotels in the city, the Fou Sang, the Kiu Long Chien, and the Salika Chieng Xay. The Yang Lou guest house is said to have Chinese service women available.

Most of the Vietnamese are ethnically Tai Dam from Meuang Theng who work for the Han Na Ming Trading Company and the Sommai Furniture Company. The Thai workers are timber specialists who spend most of their time scouting for valuable trees to process at the Meuang Hung saw mill.

In 1998 Lao Employment Services was established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare with the main function of protecting the Lao labour market. Thus they are tasked with insuring that only those foreign workers are allowed who possess skills not available in Lao PDR. In principle, foreign workers who pass through this office are required to produce health certificates and vocational certification, but these requirements have not been carried out in practice. Foreign workers are inspected every six months and there is now a system of fines in place, US$5 per day for overstaying the permitted time, and US$300 for having no documents.

3. Establishments Frequentied by Mobile Populations

The types of establishments catering to mobile populations in Oudomxay fall generally into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Roadside small beer gardens</td>
<td>Construction workers, truck drivers, townsfolk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Restaurants/large beer gardens</td>
<td>Businessmen, government officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nightclubs</td>
<td>Businessmen, government officials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example of the first type of establishment was visited was that of Nang P in Ban Ko Noy, an ethnic Lue village or 130 households located 14 kilometers West of Oudomxay on Route 13. There are a number of small shelters offering beer and spirits. Customers who wish to eat may bring the ingredients, say a fish or a chicken, and the girls there will cook as well. Girls are available upon request from among the 60 unmarried girls in the village. (Widows and divorcees were the specialty of Nang K's shop further on.) The girls are fetched and sit with the customers for as long as they remain. They may accompany the customer at their own discretion. The girls are paid 10-15,000 kip per night by Nang P for sitting with the customers. Most of the business is at night.

The customers are mainly from a nearby construction camp. Occasionally truck drivers on their way to China may stop, but they are said to not have much money. A second construction site nearby has mainly Chinese workers who do not patronize these establishments because they are unable to communicate. Other customers include residents of Oudomxay who travel to the village specifically to meet girls.

The owner of the shop is Nang P who is 20 years old and not married. She completed primary school (Grade five) in the village but her mother would not let her continue on to secondary school. She was very open and honest about her business. She is
ethnically Lue and has traveled to Meuang Sing in Louang Nam Tha and to Meuang Bo Hane in China. She has been to a lecture on AIDS but was reluctant to discuss the issue as the main point was a demonstration of condom use with a banana.

Restaurants / large beer gardens and nightclubs visited revealed similar profiles of girls and clientel, the main difference being that nightclubs also have dancing. Characteristics of the girls in both types of establishment are the same in that they:

- come from nearby provinces, mostly Phongsaly and from Louang Namtha;
- are from ethnic minorities, especially Lue, Khmou and Phou Noi;
- are aged between 15-22, with an average age of 17-18;
- have little awareness of AIDS; condoms are used entirely at the discretion of the man. One Hmong girl interviewed even said that condoms revolted her. Free condom distribution has been prohibited by the province;
- receive a commission of between 500-1,000 kip for each bottle of beer consumed at her table (in restaurant/beergardens), so most consume enormous quantities of beer per day;
- are always free to chose whether or not to go with a customer; and
- have completed at least the 5th grade, and most had gone to lower secondary.

The education level is noteworthy because, for example, the literacy rate for the province of Phongsaly is only 20 per cent, and the net enrollment rate of children between ages 6-10 is the lowest in the country at 34 per cent, compared to the national average of 76 per cent. Furthermore, for certain ethnic groups the literacy rate is even lower. Thus, for instance, one of the girls interviewed was 15 years old from the Sila ethnic group for whom the literacy rate is less than one per cent (between 0.4 per cent and 0.7 per cent). But she had completed primary school and thus was one of the very few from her ethnic group to have done so. The girls interviewed reported that the same general characteristics apply to all of the girls in their occupation. The high degree of correspondence between minority girls’ education and the service girl occupation cannot be coincidental. But while this fact is discouraging from the point of view of education, it may be taken as a positive sign for the future of AIDS education if the majority of the service girls are literate with some educational foundation.

The customers in both types of establishment are commonly white collar or public and private sector professionals. One customer, Mr. S, was a secondary school teacher from Louang Namtha who was in Oudomxay temporarily for a special refresher course in Chemistry being held by Vietnamese experts at the Ethnic Minorities Boarding School. He has a regular girlfriend working at the nightclub. He frequently takes girls from the nightclub to the Salika Hotel (referred to locally as “The Four-Story Hotel”) after paying the 20,000 kip charge. At the hotel he rents a temporary

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12 According to the statistics, minority girls have the least amount of education and educational opportunity and yet the service girls working in the establishments surveyed here have the opposite profile. Some hypotheses might be (1) that the education they receive is not relevant, (2) that the time spent in school is time spent away from the traditional family setting and serves to alienate the girls from their own culture, (3) that progress in the field of education and other development initiatives has induced social upheavals in traditional societies with which these societies are presently unable to cope.

13 Knowledge of the Lao language must be assumed to be an important factor in the selection of girls as well since a large amount of time is spent by customers engaging in playful repartee with the girls. Most minority girls who are either monolingual or have limited knowledge of Lao would be unqualified for this aspect of the job.
room for another 20,000 kip. After spending about 30 minutes in the room they go out to eat.
Mr. S goes to the club about two or three times per week and usually consumes three bottles of beer and dances. Sometimes, during the day, his girlfriend will come to visit him at the school. He does not use a condom with his girlfriend, but does so with her friends from the nightclub with whom he occasionally sleeps if she is busy.

Profile of a Nightclub Owner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The owner of one nightclub, Mrs. C., is herself a Phou Noi (Seng Saly Ba) from Boun Tay in Phongsaly Province. She was formerly a teacher trained at Dong Dok college in Vientiane. She was also a trained medic, provincial head of the Lao Women's Union for Phongsaly, and head of Information and Culture for the province as well. In 1982 she came to Oudomxay with her husband and retired from government service. She invested her retirement compensation of 105,000 kip in a small shop which sold clothing and eventually bought a pick-up truck which she hired out for hauling. Eventually she bought a house and turned it into a nightclub in 1997.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The club has seven tables, and when these are full she grosses about one million kip per night. There are currently nine girls working at the club each of whom was recruited by the owner during her visits to Phongsaly. The average salary for the girls is 60-70,000 kip per month, but they are allowed to go with customers who must pay 20,000 kip to the establishment to take the girls out. Girls who go with customers usually receive a minimum of 70,000-100,000 kip up to a maximum of 1,000 baht.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nang V, a female customer, that is, not one of the regular girls working at the nightclub, was an 18-year-old Hmong girl. Her home was in a village recently resettled from the Xieng Khouang village of Ban Mok Chok to KM2 on the outskirts of Oudomxay. She had come to the nightclub with a customer who had brought her from the open-air gaslight food carts opposite the Thongsing Hotel, a location where service girls can also be found. The customer left with one of the regular girls leaving Nang V alone in the club. She reported going out with men regularly for a price of between 50,000 kip and 1,000 baht, depending upon the customer. She had only rarely experience condoms, and when she did she was revolted by the idea, but did not say why.

4. Construction Sites

Two construction sites were visited. One was located at the ethnic Khmou village of Ban Hom Xay. This was a state road construction company with a branch office in Oudomxay which was opened nine years ago. The crew at the site totaled 25 men, 10 of whom were originally from Vientiane, two were from Sam Neua and the rest from Oudomxay. The men from Vientiane had arrived nine years earlier and now have families in Oudomxay. They return to Vientiane only one time per year on the average, and only when a company vehicle is going for repairs or other business.
The base salaries of the employees falls between 70,000 - 150,000 kip per month. But the 10 per cent fee for the contract is divided among the employees as well. Thus, on the average, employees receive about 250,000 kip per month, and over 300,000 kip for heavy equipment drivers. The company works on main highways, mostly Route 13 North from Oudomxay to Bo Ten.

According to the foreman, there is little interaction between the crew and the villagers because of the language problem. There is a company policy not to cause problems in the villages. In any case, the interactions are usually strongest with new unmarried employees. In fact, the foreman admitted there were interactions between his crew and local girls.

Also according to the foreman, there are no regular health check-ups and three years ago, two employees contracted gonorrhea from the Fu San Hotel. It was a serious infection and had not been cured at the time they were transferred to Louang Namtha. In 1995, an employee was rumored to have died of AIDS, but in fact it was apparently determined that he also had a more common STD and committed suicide. He was said to have had a psychological problem. The crew does know about condoms.

The second construction site visited was a Chinese bridge construction project 17 km South of town on the road to Pak Beng. A bridge across the Nam Beng is being constructed for the access road to the district of Meuang Nga. None of the crew could speak Lao, and although there was a small shop selling beer and cigarettes run by girls for the local Lue village, the girls reported that courting behaviour was not possible due to the communication problem.14

5. The Ethnic Minority Boarding School

The boarding school is a palatial structure resembling a small college campus built as a gift from the Vietnamese Government at a cost of US$1.8 million. This year there are 310 students of whom only 50 are female. The school covers the four years of formal lower secondary education. Students are from the six northern provinces. There are 19 teachers, 10 of whom are female. 15 ethnic groups are represented, with Khmu the most numerous (50 per cent):

1. Lao 9. Mien (Yao)
2. Tai Dam 10. Kim Moun (Lantène)
3. Tai Deng 11. Phou Noi (Seng Saly Ba)
4. Lue 12. Akha (Ko)
5. Khmu 13. Lahu Shi (Kui)
7. Lamet 15. Ho (Chinese)
8. Hmong

In principle, the school recruits poor disadvantaged students from remote areas who otherwise would not have the opportunity to continue their education. And upon com-

14 While this may not be a total barrier to sexual encounters, it would definitely be a serious obstacle since village relations between the sexes are characterized by long and complex verbal exchanges which may lead to sex only late at night when all of the adults are sleeping.
pletion of the four-year course, would either return to their home village or continue on to a teacher training school. It would be logical to assume that a large number of students residing in Oudomxay and traveling to and from their homes frequently might potentially create an avenue for transmission to these villages.

There are, however, many problems. The water system does not work and the entire school must wash and bathe from a single outdoor faucet. The allocated food budget is insufficient, 400 kip per day per student plus rice. (400 kip is the price of one egg). The bulk of the food is therefore vegetable, resulting in protein deficiencies and many health problems. There is no budget for transportation so students cannot return home at the end of the school term unless they can pay their own way. Dormitories are crowded, with eight students housed in a three metre by five metre room with only one desk. Special AIDS and drugs programmes are incorporated into the curriculum.

Thus, although there would seem to be unusual potential for versatile creative programme initiatives at the school, this has not occurred. The impressive physical plant, which houses expensive laboratories and computers, is not supported by parallel social, cultural, and pedagogical initiatives which are sensitive to the needs of minority students. Even basic subsistence requirements such as food and water are deficient. Considerable financial and intellectual inputs would be necessary to meet the real needs of minority students. Without these inputs, economic and social problems of the students have the potential to increase HIV/AIDS transmission risk.

## C. Louang Namtha

The estimated population of the province in 1998 was 124,600 (63,700 female), of which 97.7 per cent are ethnic minorities. The average population density is 13.4 persons per km². The estimated total fertility rate for the province is 5.7 and the rate of natural population increase 2.8. The total land area is 923 000 hectares, of which 85 per cent is mountainous. There are five border crossing points of which only one, at Bo Ten, is official. Louang Namtha is the province with the most exit-entry points to Thailand (by river), Myanmar, and China.

### 1. Transportation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Distance (km)</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha¹,²</td>
<td>Bo Ten</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Yunnan/X. Hung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha¹</td>
<td>Oudomxay</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>ODXY, LBNG, VTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha¹,²</td>
<td>M. Sing</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>M. Sing, Yunnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Sing</td>
<td>Pang Thong</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M. Mang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Sing¹</td>
<td>Xieng Kok</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Myanmar, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Sing</td>
<td>Pak La</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>China-Myanmar-Lao PDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha¹</td>
<td>Bo Keo</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>Chiang Rai, Thailand²³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louang Namtha</td>
<td>Na Lè</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Na La District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹most frequently traveled routes ² dry season only ³ under construction
Figure 3 - Road System of Louang Namtha (Source: MCPTC)
There are 11 privately owned trucks registered in the province, and 70 passenger vehicles. According to the official statistics, overland passengers for the province average 6,683 per month.

During the period of September 1998 - September 1999, 2,840 vehicles entered Lao PDR through Bo Ten and 3,225 entered China from Lao PDR at the same point as shown on Table 7 above and Table 8 below:

**Table 8 - Vehicles Entering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicles Entering Lao PDR from China</th>
<th>Official</th>
<th>Tourist</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Passenger</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,289</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>296</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>563</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2,840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Immigration Police at Bo Ten.

**Table 9 - Vehicles Departing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicles Entering China from Lao PDR</th>
<th>Official</th>
<th>Tourist</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Passenger</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,701</td>
<td>369</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>496</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1,904</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3,225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Immigration Police at Bo Ten.

Air routes connect Louang Namtha to Vientiane, to Louang Prabang, and to Bokeo. The majority of arrivals are tourists traveling to Meuang Sing.

The Nam Tha River is used by boat traffic primarily in the wet season. Boats trafficking goods and people on the Mekong from the Lao-Myanmar-China border to Xieng Kok and Houay Sai are from all countries: China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar. Altogether there are 260 small passenger boats registered for the province, 258 of which are restricted to the Nam Tha River.

2. Establishments Frequentied by Mobile Populations

The main nightclub in Louang Namtha is identical in its modus operandi to those in Oudomxay. It caters to approximately 30 customers per night who are mostly public and private sector professionals. There are six service girls. One of the girls was from Oudomxay and the other from Meuang La in China. Girls receive a base salary of 30,000 kip per month and 500 kip for every bottle of beer sold at their table. The girls
here reported that every two-three months they moved to a new location but provided no additional details. The price for services depends on whether or not the girl is attracted to the customer. For customers they like, the price is 500 baht, otherwise it is 1,000 baht.

There is some evidence of Chinese girls entering for short stays. Officials at Bo Ten report about seven-eight girls crossing the border per month for stays of up to seven days each.

In Meuang Sing, establishments with service girls were ordered closed by the authorities in August 1999 citing the Lao Tourist Year as the reason. As might be expected, in at least this instance, the closure served only to move the business underground. Mrs. C, whose shop was ordered closed, simply moved her business into her home where she provides the same service only in a slightly less visible manner. The price for service girls here is a flat rate of 1,000 baht. With respect to AIDS, Mrs. C had only heard the name.

Guest houses in Meuang Sing cater mostly to tourists. According to many reports, European tourists prefer not to seek out local service girls; rather they tend to pair off among themselves. Pharmacies in Meuang Sing do sell condoms.

Travelers to Meuang Sing generally fall into the following categories:

- European travelers who like to visit minority villages, take pictures and perhaps smoke opium who stay two to three days;
- Vietnamese businessmen looking for may ketsana (trees of the family Thymeleaceae infected by an incense producing fungus);
- Chinese traders mostly traveling by boat to Xieng Kok to sell blankets;
- Lao businessmen transporting corn from Vientiane and Louang Prabang to China and returning with Chinese goods.

The checkpoint at Na Toey, where Route 13 divides, is a truck stop community where 30 to 40 Lao trucks and 5 to 10 Chinese trucks pass each day. The local authorities here have strictly enforced a ban on service girls that went into effect in 1995. However, local people, while they have heard of AIDS, had not even a basic understanding of it.

Generally speaking, it would appear that for the time being high risk establishments are much fewer in number than in other provinces surveyed. This is probably due Louang Namtha's geographical position as a final destination rather than a crossroads. This situation will change, however, when the Lao segment of the Kunming-Chiang Rai road is complete.

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15 At least this is the common opinion that was voiced frequently in the northern provinces. It may not be one hundred percent true in practice.
D. Louang Prabang

The population for the province in 1998 was 396,100 (199,900 female), of which 71.4 per cent are ethnic minorities. Average population density is 23.5 per km². The total fertility rate for the province was estimated at 6.1 and the natural increase rate at 2.6. Infant mortality is 132 per 1,000.

1. Transportation

Characteristics of the Louang Prabang transportation system are dominated by the tourist industry and in this sense the province is unique and unlike all of the others covered in the assessment. Having been once a royal capital, Louang Prabang is also more urban with an average population density roughly 36 per cent – 45 per cent higher than the other northern provinces. It has been found throughout the study, however, that in general European tourists in the northern region rarely interact with service girls.

Louang Prabang city lies approximately midway between Vientiane and the end of Route 13 in Meuang Sing adding a southward orientation to the route in contrast to the mostly East-West-North orientation of Oudomxay and Louang Namtha. The Department of Transport records that 80 per cent of the bus passengers traveling from Louang Prabang to Vang Vieng are foreign tourists. Table 9 summarizes the volume of transportation in Louang Prabang for fiscal 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Transport Volume (Tons)</th>
<th>Traffic Volume (tons/km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Transport of Goods</td>
<td>18,865</td>
<td>4,554,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Transport</td>
<td>14,347</td>
<td>3,308,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Transport</td>
<td>4,518</td>
<td>1,245,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Passengers</td>
<td>1,448,928</td>
<td>55,454,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>1,257,132</td>
<td>48,335,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>191,796</td>
<td>7,118,833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Louang Prabang Transportation Office

Route 13 North and South from Louang Prabang are currently considered “developed” as is Route One to Houa Phanh. Roads in need of development are those leading to the districts of Pak Xeng, Chomphet-Hongs and Pak Eum, Viet Nam. These are in fact currently under construction. Map 4 shows the roads of Louang Prabang.
Figure 4 - The Road System of Louang Prabang (Source: MTPTC)

![Road System Map]

Table 11  Primary River Routes for Passenger Boats in Louang Prabang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Terminus</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Mgnt</th>
<th>Trips per month</th>
<th>Time per trip (hrs)</th>
<th>Price per km/kip</th>
<th>Months per year</th>
<th>Type of boat (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>Pak Beng</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>The Boat Assoc</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>Houay Sai</td>
<td>307</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>Pak Lai</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>Chomphet</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(10 min)</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBNG</td>
<td>Pak Xeng</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.5 - 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Louang Prabang Transportation Office
2. Establishments Frequentied by Mobile Populations

Small beer gardens in Louang Prabang surround the city on the outskirts. One of four visited during the survey was located approximately one kilometer from the nearest village which was a mixed village of Lao (70 per cent), Khmou (20 per cent), and Hmong (10 per cent). Each of the four establishments employed four service girls. The distance to the nearest pharmacy was 3 km. Condoms were on sale there but most pharmacies in Lao PDR close early, usually by five or six pm. Shops visited averaged about 15 customers on the premises at any given time, primarily public and private sector professionals.

Four male customers interviewed in one shop were aged 22, 28, 32 and 39 respectively, three of whom were married. All had completed upper secondary education. They were all ethnic Lao and came from various locations in Louang Prabang Province and from Xaygnaboury. All said that they regularly slept with the girls and used condoms.

The four service girls were aged 18, 20, 21, and 23. Two of them had completed primary school, one had completed two years of lower secondary, and the other, three years of lower secondary school. Three of the girls were unmarried and one was a divorcée. Three were ethnic Khmou and one was ethnic Lao. Two of them traveled regularly to their homes in Xaygnaboury and Oudomxay, while the other two did not travel. As with their counterparts in Oudomxay and Louang Namtha, the girls receive 500 kip for each bottle of beer consumed. None of the girls, it was claimed, had heard of AIDS. Prices for the girls range from 100,000 - 600,000 kip. Another service girl who worked at a construction site provided the same rates.

The owners of the four shops are all women aged 19, 27, 32 and 35. Three of them are married. Ethnically, two are Khmou and two are Lao. They reiterated that most of their customers are public and private sector professionals.

The main night club in Louang Prabang was unlike those described for Oudomxay and Louang Namtha. Here there are no service girls, and the main clientele are school age teenagers, average age 15, along with foreign tourists.

Approximately 100 kilometers North of Louang Prabang is the main intersection and truckstop. From here the highway goes East to Houa Phanh (Route One) and North-west to Oudomxay (Route 13). Located at the intersection are many shops and restaurants, some of which have service girls working in them. The main clientele are traders and truck drivers.

Two men interviewed, one Lao and the other Vietnamese, were traders who spend most of their time on the road between Xiengkhouang, Louang Prabang, China, and Thailand. Both men had completed secondary school. They were well aware of AIDS for various media sources and from friends, and that using condoms is the best prevention.
D. Vientiane Province

The estimated population of the province in 1998 was 311,100 (153,800 female), of which 59.8 per cent are ethnic minorities. Average population density is 19.5 persons per km². The total fertility rate for the province was estimated at 5.9 while the rate of natural increase was 2.4. Infant mortality was 102 per 1,000.

1. Establishments frequented by mobile populations

The establishments on Route 13 closer to Vientiane Municipality are more sophisticated than those in the northern provinces. They are larger on average and have more on-site facilities. In one case there is a large dining and dancing establishment with service girls as well as a number of bungalows where customers may take the girls.

The profile for service girls in Vientiane Province differs somewhat for that of the northern region. Girls in Vientiane were found to range in age from 15 to 22, to have minimal education ranging from primary grades one to three, and to be ethnically Lao. In some case the girls come alone to apply for a job and sometimes they are brought by their parents. They are usually not from the surrounding area, and will move on to a new location when the customers begin to lose interest or if there is a quarrel. Normal rates for services range between 50,000 kip and 1,000 baht. But many of the girls related that if they like a particular customer they may go out with him just to have a good time with no charge involved. As elsewhere around the country, girls are free to choose which customers they will sleep with.

The girls interviewed had heard about AIDS but not all had accurate knowledge. Most were familiar with condoms but few had received training on their use. While many of the girls appeared to use condoms at least some of the time, this seemed to be primarily up to the client. Most of the girls said they did not use condoms with their “boyfriends”. “Boyfriends”, of course, tend to be regular clients and may have a wide range of other sexual partners.

2. The Big Boat on the Reservoir

There is a large floating hotel on the Nam Ngeum reservoir where rooms may be rented for 300 baht per night. Service girls, who have arrived from other locations, are available from nearby shops where they work ostensibly as sellers. Condoms are available at stores but are not on display and must be asked for specifically. Furthermore, pharmacies at the reservoir close at four pm.

16 At the present time, based on present data, such movements appear to be most common in Vientiane and points south and much less frequent in the North. With the improvement of the road system and the amount of traffic in the North, however, the potential exists for this practice to expand throughout the country.
3. Dène Savanh

A new casino and resort complex has been built on the shore of the Nam Ngeum reservoir. Although operations have begun, the construction has yet to be completed. There are hotel rooms and dining facilities and a Cabaret show in the evenings. There is an in-house doctor and a clinic and pharmacy with condoms on the premises. Male guests must provide their own female companionship since there are no service girls available on the inside of the complex.
The management has developed an ongoing relationship with Lao/Australia Red Cross, which is able to provide training in both Lao and English. Training has already been provided on HIV/AIDS as well as first aid. There are an estimated 300 construction workers on the site, primarily Lao and Chinese. These are all hired by subcontractors and the hotel management was not able to provide much information, although it appeared that the workers generally traveled to Vientiane for leisure.

4. Houay Mo and Ban Tha Heua

This is the truck stop at the turnoff for the road to Xaysomboun Special Zone. Both sites have service girls available who come to stay here periodically. The clientele are mostly truck and boat drivers. It was noted that there is a high incidence of STD infections in these villages, lingering cases which have been improperly treated with weak antibiotics. Condoms are not in favour either because wives consider them to be evidence of the husband's infidelity.
PART III  Recommendations

A. For NCCA:

- The research capacity of the NCCA should be increased to meet future needs through establishment of a research unit.

  Because of the great diversity of peoples and cultures who will be caught up in the events surrounding future economic growth resulting from the enhanced road network in northern Lao PDR there will be an increased need for social research to target problem areas and to plan interventions. Research should be a long-term on-going feature of the NCCA.

- Basic participatory research should first be expanded to cover all of the northern provinces.

  The present study covered only those provinces adjacent to Route 13 North. With the completion of the road network other affected provinces will need to undergo this type of preliminary assessment, in particular, Bokeo, Xaynaboury, Phongsaly, and Houa Phanh.

- In-depth research should be initiated on all aspects of sexual behaviour.

  These should include traditional culturally-bound types of behaviour as well as behaviour in service girl relationships in order to identify where possible, conditioning factors.

  Of particular concern are (1) additional details on service girls, their sexual habits and concerns, frequencies of sexual contacts, etc., and (2) behavior of clients, what are their preferences, use of condoms, what type and why, costs, etc.

- Follow-up research should be initiated in areas where large numbers of construction workers have been present.

  For example, one very appropriate area for this type of investigation would be the Theun-Hinboun hydropower project on Route Eight which was recently completed and where considerable social aftermath would be expected. This study could provide valuable insights into the types of problems that may be anticipated in the future and be useful for targeting and planning.

- NCCA should coordinate with MTPTC to carry out Behavioural Sentinel Surveillance as part of on-going health programme mandated by the government for truck drivers.

  In some cases the health check-up requirement is already in place and it would only be necessary to include Behavioural Sentinel Surveillance and possibly HIV testing along with other tests being administered. In other cases, such as with the Passenger
Transportation Association of Oudomxay, the will to carry out surveillance of drivers exists and could be followed up.

B. For UNDP:

- UNDP should coordinate closely with NCCA in Vientiane and in the field in the planning of appropriate interventions.

This effort should focus on creating the right conditions for HIV/AIDS issues to become fully integrated with government planning and management; improve the planning process at central and local levels, and expanding human resources development and training.

- Northern Lao PDR should be designated the locus of a regional concentration of efforts since it has all of the regional interests and would provide a clarity of focus for the programme as a whole.

This focus might begin with analysis of the research findings resulting from recommendations for the NCCA above to evaluate the constraints for effective management of the impending crisis especially in the light of crucial ethnic minority and gender issues. And then how this would impact on the HIV/AIDS planning cycle, e.g. planning, data collection, implementation of programmes, monitoring and evaluation, and budgeting and resource mobilization.

- Donor aid organizations and investors who are involved in infrastructure development should be approached with the goal of including HIV/AIDS components in all projects.

Support is needed here for a broad range of activities, but particularly training, local planning and management, many of which are already called for in extant social impact analyses carried out by the agencies themselves.
References


Appendix 1  Basic Survey Instrument

Semi-Structured (key informant) Interview Instruments:
Information Summary

1. Establishment

a) Interviewer observations [first impressions on nature of establishment, special characteristics of the site, etc.]
b) Type [Construction Site, Truck Stop, Boat Landing, Beer Garden, Night Club, Other: factory, bus station, ethnic minority boarding school]
c) History of business and locale
d) temporary or permanent
e) nearest village/town (km)
f) ethnicity of nearest village/town
g) community services, eg temple
h) number of staff
i) estimated income
j) setting [eg downtown, outskirts, district, village]
k) surrounding environment [villages, vulnerable groups]
l) distance from health facility or pharmacy, availability of condoms
m) number of clients per day/week/month, etc.
n) Services/Activities provided

2. Clientele:

a) mobile or permanent (local)
b) type [eg. nationality, tourist or business, occupation, socio-economic class]
c) if truck driver, type of vehicle, type of load
d) age group
e) sex
f) marital status
g) place of origin
h) current residence
i) how often return home
j) currently reside with whom
k) ethnicity
l) nationality (if relevant)
m) frequency of movements (from where to where and how often)
n) reason for patronage, regularity
o) routes traversed regularly
p) sexual behaviour (frequency, safe sex, preferences)
q) health problems
r) understanding of AIDS
s) how do you see the future?

3. Staff:

a) mobile or permanent (local)
b) position in establishment
c) age
d) sex  
e) marital status, especially widow or divorcee  
f) place of origin [province, district, urban, rural, etc.]  
g) how often return home  
h) currently reside where and with whom  
i) length of time in current position  
j) ethnicity  
k) nationality (if relevant)  
l) frequency of movements [from where to where and how often]  
m) move alone or with group  
n) means of transportation  
o) income and sources  
p) services provided  
q) sexual behaviour (frequency, safe sex, preferences)  
r) Health Problems encountered  
s) Understanding of AIDS

4. Owner of establishment (if different than subject in Section 1)

  a) Mobile or Permanent (local)  
  b) Age  
  c) Sex  
  d) Marital status  
  e) Origin/nationality  
  f) Ethnicity  
  g) Length of time in business  
  h) General characterization of clientele  
  i) General characterization of staff  
  j) Preferred type of staff  
  k) Income
Appendix 2  Land Transport Questions

1. What are the main directions of transport volume along the above routes? (e.g. is it east towards China or west towards Vietnam?).

2. What are the monthly or annual numbers of freight trucks (private, government, military), cars, and passengers (local, tourists) travelling on the roads indicated above?

3. Between which points are transportation densities highest?

4. Where are the major origins/destinations of the trucks and passengers?

5. Are Chinese trucks allowed into Laos and vice versa? What about Vietnam and Laos? Thailand and Laos? Or are all goods transferred?

6. Where are the main truck stops/rest stops along the highways?

7. What does the driver training for truck drivers encompass?

8. What are the salary/payment arrangements for truck drivers and crews?

9. What types of lodgings are available along the routes for truck drivers? Which ones are most commonly used?

10. What are the main types of goods transported?

11. Which roads are most/least developed?

12. Which routes are currently under construction?

13. What are the completed and scheduled road improvements in the last 5 years? Are there any plans for such improvements in the near future? Who financed these improvements? (e.g. ADB, AusAIID, JICA, UNDP, etc.)

14. What is the position of the organization financing road improvements (ADB, JICA, etc.) towards HIV sensitive policy integration in road improvement projects?

15. Are there any water-way concerns and issues surrounding HIV and transport at the present time?

16. What is the ownership of the cargo vehicles? Are they privately owned, government owned, or both? Which companies and government agencies do they belong to?
Development is the process of enlarging peoples' choices to live long and healthy lives, to have access to knowledge, and to have access to income and assets; to enjoy a decent standard of living.