

Feature

# Wetlands – a natural source of food that may not last forever

Truong Thanh Thuy

“Here is our breakfast, our lunch and our dinner,” a middle-aged villager tells us, pointing to a large pond.

She lives in Nongtha village in Chanthabouly district, where one of three wetland areas in Vientiane can be found.

Every day, villagers go to the pond to collect various kinds of vegetables that flourish here and the men go to catch fish.

“There are a lot of fish here. We don’t need to buy any at the market,” Mr Bounthom Vorasane, a 64-year-old fisherman, told us.

“Catching fish in the pond has enabled me to feed my son and daughter over the years. Although we’re not rich, we’re also not poor,” he said.

Fishing in the pond has been his only way of earning a living since 1988. In the past, he could catch over 10kg per day. On a good day, the old man could bring in over 20kg.

Just 2-3kg was enough for his family of four so the remainder was sold at the market.

Thirty households grew up next to the pond in Nongtha village. The wetland area became a source of food that seemed inexhaustible.

“There were so many fish that we had to use a basket to catch them,” an old lady recalled.

Then everything changed. Life turned tougher.

The mass of fish is now significantly reduced. With luck, a fisherman can only catch 6-7kg a day now, and the fish are smaller than in the past.



Mr Bounmy Bhodhisane shows a fish he has caught in the pond.

Such biodiversity loss has occurred not only in Nongtha but in many other areas of Laos.

Mr Savanh Chanthakoummane, Deputy Director of the Forest Resource Conservation Division at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, gave an example of biodiversity loss in a wetland area in Champassak province.

“Some populations have moved elsewhere and have not come back. The food source, of course, reduces. We have no clear regulations to ensure that people, even residents of wetland areas, are fishing in the right ways,” he said.

In Nongtha, villagers blamed the reduced fish population on outsiders who come to the village to catch fish by many methods, even electrofishing, in which electric shocks are administered.

“Nongtha village shares the pond with four other villages. This makes it difficult to manage and control, especially with regard to



A view of Nongtha pond.

economic and environmental concerns,” said Village Head Souphan Keobounma.

“In spite of this, as head of the village I have asked people to clean around the pond. I think we should protect it because the pond can benefit not only this village but others nearby as well.”

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Country Representative, Ms Latsamy Silavong, said: “Some areas in Laos are low areas, which all are wetlands. We need local people to recognise how important wetlands are. All the functions of wetlands should be understood by everyone.”

The wetlands ecosystem fulfils various functions which are essential for human survival such as recharging of groundwater reservoirs, water purification and waste treatment, flood control and storm protection, as well as

being a source of water and fish, and providing recreational and spiritual opportunities.

These functions have been valued by some economists at US\$14 trillion annually worldwide.

According to IUCN, we have probably already lost 50 percent globally and we are still losing wetlands, especially in developing countries.

It is difficult to protect wetlands when there is no specific legislation in place in Laos.

Mr Savanh Chanthakoummane said the government was trying to make local people understand the importance of forestry and wetlands. His activities now focus on the establishment of laws and regulations to protect them.

Villagers in Nongtha tried to express their hopes and expectations.

“We want this area to



Villagers in Nongtha village collect vegetables from the pond.

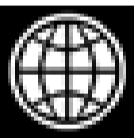
be developed. We hope the government protects it. This is all we have to live on.”

The village head said “Wetlands can provide jobs for people. We really want to conserve them.”

“We want to keep them for

future generations.”

*Truong Thanh Thuy, a reporter with the Vietnam Forum of Environmental Journalists, is working at the Vientiane Times for 10 months under an exchange programme.*



## Vacancy Announcement For Locally Recruited Staff

The World Bank

The World Bank is one of the world’s largest sources of funding for the developing world. Its primary focus is on helping the poorest people and the poorest countries. It uses its financial resources, its staff, and extensive experience to help developing countries to reduce poverty, increase economic growth, enhance environmental and social sustainability, and improve their quality of life. The World Bank is expanding its Vientiane Office as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting the development vision of Lao PDR. The World Bank invites applications from qualified individuals for the following Locally Recruited Staff positions to join the Lao PDR Country Team in Vientiane.

### SHORT TERM CONSULTANT PUBLIC SECTOR AND GOVERNANCE

The short-term consultant will work under the direct supervision of the Public Sector Program Coordinator of the World Bank. As the consultant will develop the knowledge of operations, her/his tasks will evolve, to ensure career development and progression.

#### Job Description and Accountabilities:

1. Assisting the task team preparing the Treasury Modernization Project;
2. Working with the task team on providing technical guidance to Ministry of Finance on implementation of the Public Finance Management Strengthening Program;
3. Participating in the Poverty Reduction Support Operations missions and preparing status updates on policy actions and triggers;
4. Working with Bank sectoral colleagues under guidance of the task team leader on the Nam Theun2 Revenue Management Arrangements, with specific focus on determining eligible programs;
5. Working with the task team on dissemination of the PFM diagnostic studies such as public expenditure and integrated fiduciary review, PEFA assessment etc
6. Working with the task team in managing the public finance management multi-donor trust fund; and
7. Any other work assigned by the supervisor on the public finance management program of the World Bank

#### Qualifications and Experience:

- A master degree in economics, public administration or other relevant fields.
- Fluent in English and Lao.
- Interpersonal and client engagement skills.

#### Duration of Contract

The work will be for 250 working days commencing on March 2010 and ending December 31, 2010, with possibility of ETC conversion.

Applications can be submitted electronically through the website or in paper copy to the address below by February 12, 2010.

Human Resource Officer  
Attn: Ms. Boualamphan Phouthavisouk  
The World Bank, Vientiane Office  
Patou Xay – Nehru Road  
Vientiane, Lao PDR

email: [bphouthavisouk@worldbank.org](mailto:bphouthavisouk@worldbank.org)  
(Only shortlisted candidates will be notified)



## Romantic Candlelight Dinner



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### Set Menu

Prison Paradise

(Pan-fried Prison served on Vegetable with Dressing)

Pumpkin Soup Or Classic French Onion Soup

Lady Pink in Duo Sweet

(Pan-fried Filet of Salmon served with Garden Vegetables, Lemon and Ter Ter Sauce)

Or

Cow Boy in Jungle

(Pan-fried Beef Steak served with Garden Vegetables and choice of sauce)

Strawberry Ice Cream with Fruit Salad

Coffee or Tea

Complimentary a Glass of House Wine

(Prior reservation is required)

For more information please call 021-214-455-7

Ramayana Gallery Hotel

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