

*"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." —1 John 5:14*

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*Encourage one  
another and build each  
other up.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11

## Women, Weaving, and a Village Revolving Fund A Story of Transformation from Vangsong Village

Mrs. Keo lives in Vangsong village with her husband and their four children. She works hard each day, taking care of the young children and weaving skirts on a traditional homemade loom to earn some income for the family's needs. Her husband works in the upland fields planting and harvesting rice for daily food consumption. We were visiting the village and learning from villagers about the impact of the development activities that World Renew engaged in together with the community. One of those activities involved helping to set up a revolving loan fund for the women's group in the village. This situation was unique for World Renew because in the other communities where World Renew works, the loan fund is not set up specifically for the women's group and thus the majority of loan recipients are men. In Vangsong, the loan fund is managed and used only by women. Mrs. Keo was very enthusiastic as she explained how the women and their families are benefiting from the loan fund.

Most of the women in the village already have the skills to weave skirts using looms. These skills are passed on to them by their mothers and aunts, and Mrs. Keo is currently passing along her skills to her 12-year-old daughter. The challenge they often face, however, is in having sufficient funds to purchase the raw materials needed to weave a product that can be sold for a reasonable profit. In the past, they had limited cash flow because they could afford to purchase only cheap, low-quality material and thus produce low-cost skirts for the market. They often worked hard for just a minimal income. Through the loan fund they are now able to purchase higher-quality material and produce skirts that have a higher profit margin. For example, in the past they produced traditional Lao skirts, each one taking an average of two days to make, that sold for 60,000 kip (approx. \$7.50 USD) each. But now, by spending a little extra on higher-quality materials, they can produce skirts in the same amount of time that sell for 140,000 kip (approx. \$17.50 USD) each. So now the women have more income to use for a variety of family needs. Mrs. Keo explained that she hopes to



save up some money to make additional improvements to their house.

The women in the village manage the revolving fund themselves. They have elected three representatives to be responsible; a chair, a treasurer, and a bookkeeper. The amount that can be loaned ranges between 250,000 kip (approx. \$30 USD) and 500,000 kip (approx. \$60 USD). Mrs. Keo proudly showed us the record-keeping book for which she, as bookkeeper, is responsible. The list of all who received a loan and then repaid the amount (plus 5 percent interest) six months later was carefully recorded, along with those who received a second loan after 100 percent repayment. The women are looking forward to the future as the fund grows and continues to bring benefits for their families.

# World Renew Laos and Fennema Family Recent and Upcoming Events

- From December 4 through 9, all of the World Renew Lao staff met in Chiang Mai for a special time for team building and capacity building. There were many highlights, including field trips to learn from the successes of agriculture, health, education, and capacity building work undertaken around Chiang Mai by various organizations.



- During January and February, we implemented a mid-term review of the project in Xieng Khouang targeting 37 villages. The main highlight was our time spent in the villages listening to community members sharing about the project's impact on their lives. Now all the information is being reviewed, analyzed, and compiled into a report outlining progress made and recommendations for improving the project. One of the sections in this newsletter includes some photos with captions sharing reflections by Dr. Tom Post, team leader for World Renew work in Asia, who joined in on the review process.
- Every March the Xieng Khouang health team interviews over 180 mothers to gather information about changing food consumption patterns, breastfeeding and diarrhea-treatment practices, and so on, in order to track progress being made in these key areas.
- In April there is a week-long school break. We will be visiting family in Myanmar during that time.

## What's that for?

Take a close look at this photo. What could this item be used for?

Don't hesitate or be shy, but send your best guess to Mike at [fivemfamily@gmail.com](mailto:fivemfamily@gmail.com).

The mystery will be revealed in the next newsletter!



## Mystery Revealed

Your guesses were:

- A low-tech solar panel
- Close-up of rudimentary dental tools
- A fly swatter
- A bird trap
- Fruit-picking tools
- Trebuchet (catapult)
- A long paddle-oar used to get through water that's thick with water plants. The "hook" is used to clean the water plants off the paddle.
- A device used to improve reception for TV and Internet service
- A rat-swatter and hook to remove the carcass
- A scorpion swatter and the hook to pick out its dead body without having to touch it
- A rake and a stick for picking up animal dung

The correct answer is...

While visiting Myanmar, I have seen many variations of this item. It's a tool for putting out a fire on the roof of a building. In remote communities, the roof is often made of thatch, and when it catches fire, villagers need a quick way to put the fire out way up high on the roof. The hook is used to pull down the smoldering mass so that the fire does not spread.



# Tom Post Reflects on Changes Observed, comparing this visit with a visit from two years ago



A villager having a good time during the participatory “pocket” exercise of the evaluation. That picture symbolizes for me a very positive aspect of our cross-cultural gender awakening effort.



Marrion and a young girl at a village water point. The increased cleanliness and increased latrine use in the villages really impressed me. So many people taking baths in the afternoons and evenings -- encouraging to see!



A young girl carrying two buckets of water. It reminds me of the working life of children and of the stories my Grandma Post used to tell me: she said she was so short because those heavy water buckets in the Netherlands held down her growth! This was a good reminder of my own heritage and history.

Many beautiful family gardens in many different villages with so much potential to make a nutritional impact in these communities where stunting rates are very high!



The hospitality of our village hosts. They opened their homes to us and provided bed and breakfast! At night it got very cold, but the host family provided us with blankets too.



A picture of Marrion with a grandmother and a young grandchild. I was really impressed by the rapport Marrion has with the villagers!