COMMUNITY PROFILE

Strengthening Conflict Resolution in the Village Project at Ban Na Jong in Xamnuea district, Houaphan province.

Every year, the Land Information Working Group (LIWG) visits a project area of an LIWG's core member organization. This year, the visit was welcomed by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The purpose of this visit is to learn the implementation of the project on Strengthening Conflict Resolution in the Village Project in Houaphan province to gain an understanding of the condition and results of the implementation, and to share the lessons within the network. This project started in 2017 and is currently in the end of Phase II. According to this occasion, LIWG along with representatives from the Department of Justice in Houaphan Province, representatives of the training team from Xam Nuea District and the project coordinator visited the target village at Na Jong Village, Xam Nuea District in Houa Phan Province.







Na Jong Village is a small village with an area of about 1,050 hectares located in Sam Nuea District, Houa Phan Province, which is about 21 kilometers away from the city and surrounded by rich mountains, the village's farmland and adjacent to Nam Ham River which is the main branch of Namsam River, and other sub-streams. Na Jong village was established more than 200 years ago. In the past, a number of people relocated from nearby villages such as Eb village, Xam Tai district and the area near the border to Vietnam.

Na Jong village has a total population of 257 people with 121 women, 36 houses, 45 families. They are totally Lao Loum and Buddhist. Most of them are farmers, and they live by doing household-sufficient agriculture production. The villagers mostly use agricultural land to grow grass as the main food for their own cows and buffaloes and only a small part is used to grow vegetables, rice, corn and cassavas.

Although Na Jong village is located in a high area, but in some years, it has encountered natural disasters such as a lot of water flowing from the forest and flooding the agricultural production area, especially the rice field. In addition, some seasons people face a large number of insects that causes damage to people's crops such as corn and rice.

Mr. Sithone, the chair committee of the village conflict mediation unit at Na Jong said, "These have affected the food supply of the people and caused them not to produce as expected, which is the cause of food shortage in some years."



Mr. Sithone
The chair committee of the village conflict mediation unit at Na Jong Village

The land use planning of Na Jong village has been completely implemented in 2023, which has a clear land boundary allocation consisting of 3 types of forest such as conservation forest, protection forest, and production and cultivation forest. In the village there are 3 types of land such as construction land, agricultural land and village/collective land for agriculture and for commonwealth purpose such as village office building, schools and temples. In the process of land use planning in Na Jong village, both men and women play an important role in participating in agreeing or opposing the land use plan of the village. Since the past until now, only about 30% of all households owned land titles, and there was not a serious land conflict reported, which has been a minor problem and ended with a compromission



Mr. Xaitoy
A Village Conflict Mediation Committee,
& a Village Land Committee at Na Jong Village

Mr. Xaitoy, a Village Conflict Mediation Committee, a Village Land Committee at Na Jong said, "The mediation unit provided assistance in education and helped the parties to adjust their understanding and compromise based on the Lao legal framework. Therefore, there is no subsequent lawsuit."

Na Jong village conflict mediation unit has 5 members including 1 chair committee, 1 co-chair committee and 3 committee members, which are all men. The mediation situation of Na Jong Village before the project came in was very difficult because within the conflict mediation unit, there was still a lack of skills and guidelines for correct mediation in principle. Also, the members of the mediation unit still lack understanding of the rights and roles of being a village conflict mediation committee. However, after receiving training from the project, the members of the conflict mediation unit understood more and brought the lessons from the training to the people in the village, which made the people more aware and practice based on the law.

The Strengthening Conflict Resolution in the Village Project started at Najong Village in 2020. The Najong Village Conflict Mediation Unit has received training on many topics from relevant parties such as district trainers and trainers from MCC since 2021, which are related to the rights and duties of the mediation unit, gender equality, land and forest use, inheritance, etc. Even though the mediation unit has been trained and involved in disseminating knowledge, legislation and principles to the people of Ban Najong, it cannot avoid small conflict that arise between the people themselves, especially about land, such as building fence crossing borderline. In the past 2 years, there were only 2 cases that occurred between people in the village. However, the mediation unit was able to educate the parties and helped them reach a compromise in the end.

Mr. Dasai, MCC staff and the project coordinator said, “Since 2020 until now, it can be seen that the Village Mediation Unit’s role in Ban Na Jong has become more intensive. For example, the training for the first mediation unit, it was seen that only a small part of them expressed their opinions, answered questions and tried to implement the mediation according to the principles. It is now seen that they are more involved in commenting, question-and-answer and practice, they have strength in education and skills to handle more cases based on the decree.”



Mr. Dasai Vongvixa
MCC staff and the project coordinator on
Strengthening Conflict Resolution in the Village

Overall, Na Jong village is seen as a village with unity and care for each other. People can make a living by themselves by producing agriculture and livestock farming. In addition, the village conflict mediation unit has the ability and experience to mediate domestic conflict and educate parties, as well as having the potential to disseminate knowledge on various topics and legislation for the people in the village to be aware. However, there are still some points that should be improved in the future, such as having women participate in the mediation unit for equality and being representative for women in mediation and educating cases related to women.

Mr. Xaitoy said at the end, “In the future, there should be women involved in the village conflict mediation committee which is to promote gender equality and will increase the conditions of convenience when there are conflicts between women.”

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