

Leading Under Difficult Conditions: Local NGO Leaders' Perspectives on Leadership at the Local Level in Laos

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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes findings from research conducted on a diverse group of current and emerging Laotian local leaders who pursue their work through nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in and around the capital of Vientiane, Laos. Their organizations focus on local and community issues, and receive funding and other support from international sources, including parent organizations. The research explores their ideas about the meaning of leadership, what motivates them to do what they do, their role models, the challenges of leading, and their view of and advice for other local leaders. It was conducted outside of official channels with the help of Laotian colleagues. Our research made it clear that these current and likely future local leaders have the ability, experience and motivation to make a positive difference. It also is clear that there are few opportunities for the kinds of dialogue and training that would increase their impact. Instead, while continuing to work in their communities, they must be skillful in maintaining a space in which they seize the opportunities and avoid the dangers that come from any relationship with central authority. To our knowledge this is the first study of this kind done in Laos.

I. Introduction

In the West, leadership is a common, and perhaps excessive, focus of academic research, popular books and articles, and workshops. This is much less the case in other parts of the world. Laos is one of those places. Beginning with the advent of the socialist regime in 1975, virtually all official leaders were appointed by the party without public consideration of their qualifications or scholarly dialogue about issues relating to leadership. Laos changed to a more open system in 1986. Before the change it was challenging to even get into the country, and once there, difficult to go outside the capital of Vientiane. Today it is possible to move around with little concern about being confronted by authorities. This change and others that opened up the economy created a greater flow of tourists and investment capital, along with associated benefits and challenges.

Despite these changes, authority remains highly centralized and continues to assert a high degree of control over Lao society. There are, for example, no independent media and no independent political parties. All of its institutions, public and private, operate in this climate. Moreover this combination of carefully selected and controlled openness and strong internal control makes it both possible and challenging to

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independently explore issues important to the future of Laos. The work of leaders at the local level is one such issue.

This paper summarizes findings from research conducted on a diverse group of current and emerging local leaders who pursue their work through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in and around the capital of Vientiane. Their organizations focus on local and community issues, and most receive funding and support from international agencies. The research explores their ideas about the meaning of leadership, what motivates them to do what they do, their role models, the challenges of leading, and their view of and advice for other local leaders. It was conducted outside of official channels with the help of Laotian colleagues. The research combines information gathered from individuals working at the community level during two separate field trips. To our knowledge this is the first study of this kind done in Laos.

II. Setting

In December 1975 the Communist Pathet Lao seized control of the government, ending a six-century-old monarchy. They followed their thirty-year struggle against colonial rule by establishing a strict socialist regime and closely aligned the new Lao People's Democratic Republic (LDRP) with Vietnam. A Constitution was promulgated on August 14, 1991 and amended in 2003. Elections were held in April of 2002, 2006 and 2011.

Estimates put the population at 6,477,211 in 2011 (Mundi.index). About half are ethnic Laos and the rest ethnic minorities, such as the Hmong and the Yao. The gross domestic product per capita was estimated at 1900USD in 2005 (CIA). Laos is classified as a "least developed country" by the UNDP. Life expectancy at birth for the population overall, the median age of which was estimated to be 21, was estimated at 62.4 years in 2011 (Mundi.index). In 2005 around 73% over 15 years of age could read and write, with the rate among males about 20% higher than females. Sixty-seven percent of the population is Buddhist (Mundi Index).

In 1986, in response to a sagging economy, the regime adopted the "New Economic Mechanism." Although still described as one of only five remaining Marxist-Leninist states, after 1986 many orthodox policies were dropped. Industries were privatized, foreign investment was invited, land rights were restored to peasants, and development aid welcomed. Today Buddhism is accepted, even encouraged, making Laos one of five Theravada Buddhist countries along with its three neighbors Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand. Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997.

Despite these policy adjustments, authority remains highly centralized with power concentrated in the Laos People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). Martin Stuart-Fox describes the exercise of that power in this way:

Most Lao pursue their daily lives as they have always done: the power of the party is felt mainly by those who would challenge it. No criticism, or even political debate, is permitted outside the confines of the highly secretive party, which recruits its membership from the elite and the educated. Without the support of the party, promotion in government and the bureaucracy, or success in business, is impossible. As everyone knows in Laos, a powerful political patron is the key to advancement (Stuart-Fox Crossroads: 2).

He goes on to observe that all important positions -- village chiefs, district leaders, provincial governors, senior members of the public service and upper echelons of the judiciary -- are appointed, directly or indirectly, by the party. This in turn means that there is no possibility of checks and balances within the government (Stuart-Fox: 4). The LPRP exercises control through networks of patronage relationships (see "Single Party State", pg. 3 for a useful description). The relationships can be viewed as structured along two dimensions: a "vertical line", which is the party, and a "horizontal line", made up of the four mass organizations, each containing party cells ("Creating Space for Fieldwork").³

In recent years Laos has become a focus of foreign investment, targeting the country's natural resources. This has added to overall national wealth, but that wealth is created and distributed inside the frame created by the party and its networked patronage relationships.

The USSR's collapse in the late 1980s meant its loss as a principle provider of goods and services. To compensate Laos turned increasingly to multilateral NGOs for assistance ("Creating Space"). Since then Laos has become one of the region's chief recipients of foreign aid and assistance per capita" (Irrigation: 194). The international assistance also reflects the broader context of Laos' strategic relationships. The West, as well as Vietnam, worry that China will turn Laos into a client state, fears that recent Chinese investments have accelerated. This in turn makes it possible for Laos officials to accept aid in exchange for promises for reform that don't have to be acted on (Political Culture of Corruption: 72-73).

The government and the party face diverse challenges as they adapt their economy and their polity to changing conditions. These challenges include uneven economic growth and rural poverty, resource development and its internal and external impacts, environmental destruction, the production or transiting of illegal drugs, the low quality of health care and education, the rights of the large population of minorities, and corruption. In Stuart-Fox's view, "Educated and concerned Lao are well aware that the country is falling behind both Thailand [and] Vietnam where between human and economic development are concerned" (Stuart-Fox, Single Party: 170).

All of this forms the setting for anyone working in Laos. Corruption provides a window into the ways in which elements of that setting are interwoven. Transparency International defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." This refers to abuses of power relating to bribery, kickbacks and embezzlement, as well as the strength of public sector anti-corruption efforts. Its Corruption Perceptions Index reports on pooled perceptions of corruption for public officials, civil servants or politicians. Laos ranked 154 of 182 on Transparency International's 2011 Index, and 160 of 174 on the 2012 Index. This indicates that in the view of informed observers corruption by public officials is deeply entrenched, and not abating (Transparency International, 2011, 2012). This has, for example, direct consequences for health and education, the tremendous underfunding of which is increased because donor money sent to help in these areas is "plundered" at a high rate (Stuart-Fox Single Party State:

³ These are the Lao Front for National Construction, Lao Women's Union, Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union, and the Federation of Lao Trade Unions.

169). Although there are extensive laws and regulations on the books, a range of corrupt practices operate through the patronage networks, networks that in modern Laos revolve around the LPRP. The most prevalent of these practices include:⁴ accepting payments to disregard illegal trade; collusion with officials to reduce tariffs and duties; bribes to disregard environmental regulations; collusion to reduce taxes and rents; bribes demanded to issue documents; extortion of businesses for payments to the Party, or to influential individual Party members; kickbacks for awarding contracts; unrepaid loans from state lending banks or through state-owned enterprises (SOEs); use of government funds earmarked for projects, or even salaries, for individual gain; payments for political favors; a wide range of petty corruption by low-level civil servants, police, and so on (Stuart-Fox – Political Culture: 60).

Civil society is not well developed in Laos. A 2011 report by the Asian Development Bank concluded that, “The role of civil society in the development of the Lao PDR, while being supported at the broad policy level, is still being defined and collaboration and implementation mechanisms are only at a very early stage of development” (Asian Development Bank, 2011: 1). Until recently NGOs had no official status. A November 2009 Decree on Associations changed this by providing for their establishment and registration. Two or more Lao citizens may set up an association to promote economic and professional interests, creative endeavors, and social welfare. This process also has the effect of placing them under the official oversight of the Public Administration and Civil Service Authority and raises concerns about submitting their work to its political dynamics.⁵

Foreign NGOs are not subject to this requirement, but they must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between the creation of the Lao PDR and adoption of the New Economic Mechanism in 1986 only three international NGOs were allowed to operate inside the country. The numbers expanded with the change and in 2011 there were about 160 (Asian Development Bank, 2011: 1). An idea of the scope of their work is provided in the Internet Directory of Non-Government Organizations in the Lao PDR, a source partially funded by a World Bank grant (Internet). It summarizes self-descriptions of the work of 55 INGOs. Of these the most common focus is on health and children followed by education, social justice and human rights, and poverty. Stuart-Fox points out that while foreign NGOs are important in Laos “most are careful not to be too critical of the government” (Crossroads: n9).

III. Conditions for research

Doing social science research in contemporary Laos is challenging, as one would expect from the foregoing descriptions. The country is more receptive to economic initiatives, but political and social spheres are carefully monitored and controlled, and permission is required to do almost anything. Studies that seek to ask sensitive questions or might reach conclusions critical of the regime will not be approved. Social science work of any kind by foreigners is quite rare for these reasons.

⁴ Not surprisingly, Stuart-Fox notes that “much of the information was provided by Lao informants who must remain anonymous” (n4).

⁵ This concern was raised several times in our interviews.

Steeve Daviau reflected on his experience over several years trying to conduct fieldwork in southern Laos with Tarieng communities (Creating Space). He notes that prior to 1975 it was virtually impossible for a researcher from a non-communist regime to do any kind of fieldwork. This has softened since the end of the 1990s, and in 2007 the National Academy of Social Sciences was opened to work with researchers. He points out however that its first director was a “well-known LPRP hardliner” nominated by the Central Committee and directly connected to the Prime Minister’s office (Creating Space: 199). Seeking approval for his work was a complex process that relied on personal connections and a willingness to modify its focus, and success at this by others has been rare. When received, approval brought with it requirements for using, and compensating, “officially appointed research assistants” (Creating Space: 201).

Daviau’s work is with ethnic minorities and is particularly sensitive to a regime whose goal is to prevent, or at least conceal, conflicts related to land claims and cultural, as opposed to national, identities. At the same time it seems likely that in the current setting there are few areas of inquiry where independent research would not raise concerns, at least to the level that that the work would, even if approved, be closely monitored. Reflecting on the obstacles he faced Daviau proposed strategies for creating “a discursive space that allows local people without formal political positions to speak up [...] Within that space one must navigate between public performances selected for local or international audiences and the most difficult challenge of finding out about locals’ honest beliefs” (Creating Space: 201-202).

IV. The Importance of Leadership at the Local Level

Leadership of all kinds is important for societies and organizations, but in this shifting institutional setting local leadership is especially significant. “Local” as used here refers to issues facing communities within district or sub-district jurisdictions. Leadership in this context is the vehicle by which communities organize and express their interests and concerns. Because of their role in focusing issues and in implementation, the work of local leaders is an important determinant of whether what a community wants, or wants to avoid, are acted on. This role takes on special significance in this still-centrally controlled but evolving system because leaders away from the system’s centers of power and authority may have more degrees of freedom for action. For all of these reasons the well-being and capacity building of communities is linked to the effectiveness of local leaders. In addition, the outlook, skills and experiences of these leaders, many of whom are young, will be important in shaping the country’s future.

As the preceding suggests, research, education and training related to leadership are new and still uncommon.⁶ This is true more broadly for human resource development as well. The absence of education and training about leadership does not reflect a lack of interest in it, which we found to be very high. Those we met were eager

⁶ c.f., “Identifying and Developing Local Leaders in the Asia Region”, which describes a training program started in Vientiane in 2007 by SNV (NETHERLANDS) in partnership with UNDP. “Leadership Styles of Construction Members in Laos Construction Industry” is a Masters thesis that surveys the views toward leadership of individuals holding management and project leader positions on public works projects.

to talk to us about their work and, because of the lack of education or training on these topics, equally eager to know what we learned.

V. Background of the Project

Our interest in local leaders has evolved over a number of years. We began by identifying five successful local leaders from northeast Thailand, Isan -- and then bringing them to the Manoa campus of the University of Hawai'i in November 2008 to share their experiences.⁷ As part of this project we produced a pamphlet titled "Stories That Inspire: Five Local Leaders from Isan". The pamphlet, which highlighted the five leaders' accomplishments and shared their ideas about leadership, was produced in Thai and English and distributed in local communities in the northeast (Isan). This initial project had a number of goals. These included learning from the perspectives of successful leaders, bringing what we learned into the classroom, developing training modules that made use of these leaders as resources, and cultivating positive role models that might inspire current or future local leaders. We also wanted to use this as a first step toward identifying other local leaders who are committed to serving their local communities, learning from their experiences, and creating a network that linked them together.

In September 2009 we organized a workshop in Dan Sai, northeast Thailand, and in February 2010 another in Mukdahan on the Mekong River across from Laos. These workshops brought together a larger number of individuals from organizations operating at the local level and joined them with the first five Thai leaders. Both gatherings included a few Laotians, reflecting our interest in expanding our work and the local leader network into the Mekong region,

We traveled to Vientiane, Laos in February 2011 and again in February 2012. Our objective was to build on our experience in Isan to learn the views of leadership held at the local level in and around the nation's capital. The Laotians we met represented a range of nongovernmental organizations. Their organizations addressed youth empowerment, reduction of human trafficking, food security, sustainable development, gender equity and the empowerment of women, community capacity building, HIV education and treatment, and the status of ethnic minorities. We gained access to them through the indispensable assistance of several Laotians, relying especially on someone who is well-connected to the network of community organizations and trusted by those working in them. This enabled us to bypass the official approvals that otherwise would have been required, and which would have come with restrictions, if at all. A by-product of avoiding official channels was that we were *de facto* creating a setting in which people's opinions might be more open. Our primary goal was not to probe sensitive issues relating to the political context of their work. It was to explore their understandings of leadership and leaders. Not surprisingly however the political context appeared in our encounters with these current and emerging leaders.

⁷ This work was undertaken with financial support from a National Research Council grant received by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i.

VI. Methodology

What we have sought to learn from local leaders through group discussions, questionnaires and individual interviews has remained constant since our initial work with the five Thai leaders in 2008. That has enabled us to use, with minor adjustments, the same questions over a period of five years. Variations in questions have been a function of adapting to particular conditions, such as moving from survey to interview. Conditions did not permit us to draw a representative sample, or even to approximate one. Working through our contacts we were able to survey and interview Laotians, all of whom occupy director or program positions in NGOs that are attempting to address issues at the community level. While claims about the generalizability to other Laotians working in similar organizations are not possible, it seems reasonable to expect that what we learned applies to others in similar circumstances.

In February 2011 we utilized a two-step process to learn perspectives on leaders and leadership from 21 Laotians working at the community level in internationally funded nongovernmental organizations. They occupied positions as the heads of programs, or are likely to move into leadership roles since they currently are in middle-level organizational and community coordinating positions. In addition, through their positions they have knowledge of other local leaders. We first divided these participants into three sub-groups of seven members and used a modified brainstorming process. Each group appointed a facilitator and a recorder, and for approximately twenty minutes discussed an issue relating to leaders and leadership (these issues and the items in the questionnaire completed later are found in **appendix A**). Each issue statement was written in Lao in large script on poster board for easy viewing by all group members. At the end of the allotted time the recorder summarized the consensus points emerging from their discussion. After a short break this process was repeated by the group rotating to where another issue awaited them. At the end of the day each participant was asked to anonymously complete a 12-item questionnaire into which these three issues were incorporated.

We employed this “brainstorming” process as a way of engaging their individual thinking on issues relating to leadership, as well as to see what consensus points emerged. In essence we were asking them to have a group conversation following which they would share their individual opinions. We anticipated that participation in the group process would evoke their own preexisting thoughts, as well as be generative of new ideas. These in turn would be captured in their responses to the questionnaire. The downside of this approach is that it might overwhelm whatever prior opinions they held about leadership, shifting their individual responses toward a group norm or the views of the most articulate member.

We returned to Vientiane in February 2012 to individually interview eight Laotians who occupy key positions in international nongovernmental organizations that provide diverse social services to local communities and one village chief who is not a party member. None were among the 21 who completed the questionnaire the previous year. The interview questions are those asked in February 2011, but fitted to an interview format that accommodates probes dictated by the direction of the responses (see **appendix B**). Our work in Laos is based on questions that have been field tested over several years in different settings in Thailand. We took two different

approaches to using these same questions in Laos. In February 2011 the brainstorming questions and questionnaire items were translated directly from English into Lao by individuals fluent in both languages. These individuals also were available during the brainstorming to answer questions about meaning. The Laos responses then were converted back to English for our analysis. Responses that did not translate easily were discussed. We were able to conduct the February 2012 interviews in English because of the English ability of those we interviewed. Their language skills in turn derived from working in an international organization and from travel outside of Laos for education and work. The more flexible interview process allowed us to clarify terms when they were not clear.

“Leader” and “leadership” are key terms in the survey and the interviews. While, depending on the context, there appears to be some variation in what these mean in Lao society and culture, we think that in this context, and especially given the way the survey and interviews were introduced, respondents were talking about the same thing.⁸ On this basis we believe that, despite the challenges presented by translation, cultural differences and political sensitivities, the previously field-tested questions are capturing respondent views on key issues related to local leadership’s purposes, opportunities and challenges while also providing insight into the broader setting with which they must interact, and within which they are trying to operate successfully.

VII. Results/Findings

This section summarizes results from the February 2011 questionnaire process and the individual interviews conducted in February 2012. The section that follows draws some conclusions about what we learned.

A. Vientiane Group Process and Questionnaire – February 2011

The twenty-one Lao from international NGOs in and around Vientiane had the following demographic characteristics (see **Appendix C** for details). Somewhat less than three-fourths were female; more than one-half had earned a Bachelor’s Degree and almost one-fourth held a Master’s; slightly more than half were married; the vast majority were either coordinators or project assistants; and only two had been with their organizations for more than four years. Taken together this group is heavily female, well educated, with a large number not married and not long in their current positions. Slightly more than half are in project assistance positions. Most of the rest are in higher-level positions as coordinators, and two are directors.⁹

Prior to administering individual questionnaires each of the three focus groups discussed the following issues in the time available: what does it mean to be a leader, what is important for a leader to be effective, and where did you learn how to be a leader? As noted above, the focus groups were formed as a “warm up” to legitimate

⁸ The Lao word for “leader” is “ຜູ້ນຳ”. The dictionary definition “leadership” is ຄວາມເປັນຜູ້ນຳ. A more common used term for “leadership” is “ພາວະຜູ້ນຳ”.

⁹ Although we asked respondents, most did not provide it, we assume for cultural reasons. The average age appeared to us to be about 35, with youngest in the late 20s and the oldest in the 50s.

thinking about the generally unaddressed subject of leadership, and to energize thinking on that topic.

Responses to the twelve items in the questionnaire are summarized in the tables that follow. The first table shows responses to the question about successes to date. Most interpreted “success” in terms of showing pride in their ability to accomplish tasks or to be supported or rewarded for their work. Four of the 21 thought of it in terms of work she or he had been able to do for the country. In Thailand these comments most likely would be phrased in terms of work that is being done on behalf of the king. In Laos it might reflect the influence of national ideology and calls for a collective identity.

Table 1. Most important success in positions held?

Type of Success	Number	%
Got an important task and could do it.	10	48
Work on something that benefits the country.	4	19
Good work brought support to increase abilities through training, conferences.	3	14
Was selected to be director or head of organization.	2	10
Trust from boss and colleague.	1	4.5
Graduated from University.	1	4.5
	21	100

Table 2 summarizes 89 responses to the open-ended question of what defines or distinguishes a leader. The three most popular of these are clusters that focus on sense of duty and commitment to social justice and ethical behavior, abilities, and possessing a broad vision. It is significant that duty, justice and ethics are mentioned more frequently than personal ability and good problem solving. This suggests that for most good management is not enough good ethics are more important than knowledge or ability. The two next clusters highlight leaders having a strong sense of responsibility to their work and being successful in what they do. These five sets make up 70 percent of what these respondents believed defines a leader.

Table 2. What Does It Mean To Be A Leader?

Qualities (can name more than one)	Number	%
Committed to duty, justice and ethics.	17	18
Has personal ability, talents; good at problem solving.	14	16
Broad vision.	12	14
Takes responsibility for their tasks.	10	11
Successful in what they do.	10	11
Understand community environment.	7	8
Put the right person on the right job.	5	6
Can convince people in the community to participate in social work.	5	6

Sacrifice for public/community.	4	5
Self confident to lead organization and make decisions.	2	2
Consciousness in the workplace.	2	2
Be polite to older person and give chance or take care of the younger person.	1	1
	89	100

Table 3 addresses perceptions of what is needed for a leader to be effective. Although there are fewer total responses than for what “leader” means, they are spread out more evenly across more response groups. The highest five clusters incorporate about 70 percent of all statements made, with almost half of the twenty-one respondents indicating that each is important for success. They incorporate learning from experience and mistakes, accepting criticism, making sacrifices, being a problem-solver, being a role model, getting the community to participate and being effective with the public. The breadth and substantive diversity of qualities they want to see in a leader is striking. Moreover, many of these are attached to the relationship to the community.

Table 3. What Does A leader Need To Be Effective?

Needed (can name more than one)	Number	%
Learn from work and mistakes and apply this experience to improving.	12	16
Accept criticism and feedback.	11	14
Sacrifice, be diligent, be enthusiastic for community.	10	13
Be a rational problem-solver.	10	13
Join public activities and ask people to participate.	9	12
Be a respected person and a role model for others.	9	12
Have good human relationships and be smart and interesting when speaking to the public	9	12
Have the wisdom to make good decisions.	6	7
Be able to advise another person.	1	1
	77	100

Table 4 asked respondents to share the leadership qualities they believe they possess. It elicits the most responses of any question. Here too the most frequent statements fall into seven groups, but these comprise only 73 percent of total, reflecting more diversity in the qualities the respondents see themselves as having. There is a high degree of overlap between three of their own most common leadership characteristics and responses to the previous question about what leaders need to be effective. This overlap is in accepting criticism, making sacrifices and being enthusiastic, and, less directly, learning new things.¹⁰ Table 4 also describes qualities they see

¹⁰ The response category in Table 3 focuses on learning from experience and mistakes while in Table 4 it is around general enthusiasm for learning.

themselves having that were not included in what leaders need: supporting teamwork, leading and being trusted by the staff, and being able to put people in the right positions. All of these focus on processes within the organization, which may reflect the fact that most of the respondents hold supervisory and coordinating roles rather than being the heads of their organizations. It also suggests that they have very high expectations of themselves.

Table 4. Which Leadership Characteristics Do You Have?

Leadership Characteristic (can name more than one)	Number	%
Initiating ideas, enthusiasm to work and able to make-decisions.	14	12
Being fair; accepting criticism and feedback.	14	12
Supporting teamwork and participation.	13	11
Making serious sacrifices to work responsibly for the community; volunteering time.	12	10
Enthusiasm to learn new things, new knowledge.	12	10
Leading staff's work and being trusted by staff.	11	9
Able to put people in right positions for them and then monitor their work.	11	9
Having consciousness, enthusiasm and commitment to work for the community.	7	6
Understanding the organization's vision, goals, and objectives.	7	6
Acting with integrity, gratitude, and sense of obligation.	7	6
Speaking politely, having good humor, good human relations.	6	5
Being humble; learning to improve from others.	5	4
	119	100

The responses in **Table 5**, which summarizes the characteristics the respondents see in other local leaders, are much fewer in number than what is found in the first four tables.

Table 5. Common Leadership Characteristics of Other Leaders?

Characteristics (can name more than one)	Number	%
New ideas; good strategic planning, management and decision-making.	10	19
Responsibility to their task; diligence.	9	17
Always honoring and respecting others and showing respect to important persons.	8	15
Place people in the right jobs; work in a team, guiding people in their work.	6	11
Have good relationships; show good manners.	4	7
Has more knowledge and ability than others.	4	7
Sacrifice and tolerance for the public.	3	6
Work closely with the community; take care of people.	3	6
Be fair and treat people with equality.	3	6

Accept the decisions of others and be open to them, flexible.	2	4
Self-confident.	1	2
	53	100

There is also a wider spread, with about half falling into three categories and the rest into eight others. Respondents see other leaders as good with new ideas, management and decision-making: responsible and diligent: and respectful of others. What they see little of, or don't see at all, in other leaders also may be noteworthy. This includes having more knowledge and ability than others, willingness to sacrifice, working closely with the community, being fair and treating people equally, and being flexible and accepting the decisions of others. Having a broad vision, being a role model and learning from mistakes also are not mentioned as qualities they see in other leaders. This suggests that they may experience these leaders as promising new things whether or not they have the ability to deliver them.

Table 6 summarizes where these respondents have gotten their ideas and images about being a leader. One-fourth of the responses list the leader of their organization, understandable given that person's visibility in a small organization.

Table 6. Where Have You Learned About Being a Leader?

Source of Learning (Can name more than one)	Number	%
From the leader of our organization.	20	25
Study, seminar, training, internet.	17	21
Everyday life, experience.	14	17
Father, Mother, Family, extended family.	12	15
Success story of political leader or respected person.	10	12
Colleagues in work place	5	6
Others' mistakes or from the own.	2	3
Teacher.	1	1
	81	100

Slightly fewer point to what they've learned from studying, seminars and training, and the Internet. This may reflect the higher education levels (just over 80 percent have bachelor's and master's degree experience). The next most frequent response categories point to what has been learned from daily life, parents and family and then the success stories of political leaders or other respected public persons. Only two mention learning from their own or others' mistakes, and just one lists a teacher. The organization is the most important source of learning, but with seminars, training and the Internet close behind, it seems likely we are seeing a shift in sources of knowledge about leadership, probably in the direction of the Internet.

Fourteen people were named as role models, six of whom are Laotian. **Table 7** lists those mentioned most frequently.

Table 7. Who Is Your Role Model?

Role model ¹¹ (can name more than one)	Number	%
Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane*	6	21
Hồ Chí Minh*	4	14
King Fa Ngum*	3	10
Master Kong <i>OR K'ung-tzu*</i>	2	7

Six, or about one in four respondents, cite Kaysone Phomvihane, the leader of the LPRP from 1955 and later Prime Minister and President. Another four name Ho Chi Minh, the nationalist who led the Viet Minh fight against foreign occupation and was Vietnam's President and Prime Minister. The next most popular role model, cited by three, is King Fa Ngum, a 14th century founder of a Laos kingdom. The only other person to receive more than one mention is K'ung-tzu, known as Confucius in the West. Diverse other non-Laotians are mentioned, including Nicolai Lenin, Karl Marx and Barack Obama (see **Appendix D** for complete information about role models). Their role models are those who have fought for the survival of Laos, including those, such as Ho Chi Minh, who have done this from the outside. Westerners are not very visible.

The question about what motivates them to be a local leader brought 73 responses, summarized in **Table 8**. Two clusters are equally popular and capture 60 percent of the responses. It is noteworthy that both are related to community work, and not to their organizations. One focuses on a desire to strengthen the community and improve the capacity of its members. The other is about the chance to play an important role in and be accepted by the community. The next most frequent set of responses is the most self-referential and is associated with career success and the desire to be admired by society. It is perhaps surprising that only five of the 73 responses are about the more abstract concepts of poverty reduction, equality and justice.

Table 8. What Motivates You To Be A Leader?

Motivation (can name more than one)	Number	%
Strengthen community; improve ability and knowledge of people in community.	22	30
Have an important role and be accepted by community.	22	30
Be successful in career and with family; have a big name and admiration from society.	15	21
Strengthen local staff to be leaders.	6	8
Eliminate local poverty and build equality and justice.	5	7
Seeing the results and impact of successful work.	3	4
	73	100

¹¹ Kaysone Phomvihane was the leader of the Laos People's Revolutionary Party and the country's first prime minister. Ho Chi Minh led the Vietnamese fight against colonization and was prime minister of Vietnam. King Fa Ngum established the Lan Xang Empire and created the first unified state of the Laos people. Master Kong, known in the West as Confucius, was a Chinese politician, teacher, editor and social philosopher.

Table 9 looks at the opposite of motivation, asking what prevents these respondents from wanting to be in leadership roles. There are only slightly fewer responses than to what are positive motivators, and these organize into three clusters capturing 81 percent of all statements. This suggests a high level of shared experience. The most numerous cluster is perceived lack of experience and knowledge, containing more than one-third of all the reasons given. This is followed by a sense of lack of opportunity or support, while the third is an absence of self-confidence. The thread linking these responses is that almost all of them are personal. There is only an indirect reference to the external political environment, either national or local. That indirect reference is to others being against an idea, the prospect of failing, and the possibility of being harmed because of a disagreement.

Table 9. Why Not Be A Leader?

Reasons (can name more than one)	Number	%
Lack of experience and knowledge.	22	35
Want to be lead but not given chance because of lack of support or opportunity to show abilities.	16	25
Do not have self-confidence; not able to create new ideas, new things.	13	20
Could not adapt to the new environment; too impatient; could not stand the pressure.	6	10
Worry that someone may be against an idea; may fail; may be harmed by someone who disagrees.	6	10
	63	100

The next question asks about the challenges local leaders are facing today. **Table 10** has by far the fewest responses, except for the question asking for the names of role models. The three most frequently cited challenges are in relation to the communities with which leaders work, not to the challenges of leading organizations. Of these, what is required to solve community problems – knowledge, understanding, abilities – is the most commonly cited, getting about one-third of all responses. This is followed by the requirement to understand the community, which gets about 20 percent. Hard work, doing what you say, being respected by the community, effective problem-solving and being transparent are noted, but are less commonly cited challenges. The reasons for the small number of responses are not evident. It could be because they don't know what the challenges are, don't think they are so formidable, or don't want to draw attention to them. Did they give fewer responses because they don't know what challenges are, don't want to discuss them, or don't see the challenges as that great? In that context it is interesting that there is no mention of low pay, or of political concerns.

Table 10. What Challenges Do Leaders Face?

Challenges (can name more than one)	Number	%
They need to have knowledge, understanding, ability in the community to solve community problems.	8	32
Understanding the community's culture, traditions and structure.	5	20
Adapting to the community and doing what you say.	3	12
Solving problems with experience, self-confidence and teamwork.	3	12
Getting respect and being accepted by the community.	2	8
Need to work hard, make sacrifices, be just and fair.	2	8
Acting with transparency.	2	8
	25	100

Table 11 summarizes the mistakes these respondents have observed other local leaders making. Fifty-four responses fell into six categories, with one by far the largest. The biggest mistake, comprising about one-third of all the mistakes listed, is using the common good as if it is the leaders' "property" and making private interests the first priority. This is followed by wanting power for personal benefit, being unwilling to make personal sacrifices or be responsible for work, and low tolerance for the public. These three, which are primarily about being self-serving rather than being incompetent, constitute 65 percent of all of the responses. It is noteworthy that the word "corruption" is not used even though the words used appear to describe it.

Table 11. What Mistakes Do You See Other Leaders Make?

Mistakes (can name more than one)	Number	%
Take common good to be their own property; private interests are the first priority.	17	31
Have passion for power, but for themselves; using power in the wrong way.	9	17
No responsibility to their work, no personal sacrifice, no tolerance for public.	9	17
Do not care about comments from the community and do not know the needs of the community.	7	13
Lack of knowledge, ability and cannot make decisions.	7	13
Not sincere and not fair.	5	9
	54	100

The last question, summarized in **Table 12**, solicits advice respondents would give to other local leaders. The vast majority of responses, six of the eight clusters, deal with what leaders must do in relation to their communities. The most frequently cited advice is to listen and be open to community participation. This may reflect concerns that people in power over time forget the relationships that gave them their position in the first place. These concerns are followed by the importance of patience and sacrifice,

being guided by a vision and managing community resources, being fair in problem solving, strengthening the community and its most needy members, and working to have a peaceful community. The advice not directed at what leaders need to do in relation to the community focuses on the courage to make decisions, believing in ideology, and sharing and learning from good and bad experiences.

Table 12. What Advice Would You Give To Other Local Leaders?

Advice (can name more than one)	Number	%
Care about comments from the community; use teamwork and participation with the community.	11	23
Have patience, work hard and sacrifice for the public.	8	17
Have the courage to make decisions; believe in ideology and be self-confident.	7	15
Have vision and the ability to lead toward it; be able to manage community resources.	7	15
Have the ability to solve the community's problems with fairness, justice and equality.	5	11
Work to strengthen the community and support the lowest group in it.	4	9
Learn from earlier mistakes; share good and bad experiences with others.	3	6
Work to establish security, solidarity and peacefulness in the community.	2	4
	47	100

There are some patterns worth noting in the tables overall. First, some types of questions appear easier to answer than others. Table 13 shows that questions directed at views about themselves as leaders received more replies, even though in each case they were invited to give more than one response. Questions asking about the behavior of other leaders and the challenges that leaders face received fewer responses. This could be because they feel they do not know enough, or because they are not comfortable making such comments for cultural or other reasons

Table 13. Frequency of Responses to Multiple Response Questions

Which Leadership Characteristics Do You Have?	119
What Does It Mean To Be A Leader?	89
Where Have You Learned About Being a Leader?	81
What Does A leader Need To Be Effective?	77
What Motivates You To Be A Leader?	73
Why Not Be A Leader?	63
What Mistakes Do You See Other Leaders Make?	54
Common Leadership Characteristics of Other Leaders?	53
What Advice Would You Give To Other Local Leaders?	47
What Challenges Do Leaders Face?	25

The responses include many mentions of the importance of community, understanding and sacrificing for the community, and relations with the public. They do not refer to issues of the state or the nation as a whole. This may be in part because Laos today has many tribal communities. Community leaders need to know each community well because each tribe has a distinctive culture, language, and way of life. It also may be because these local leaders want to do social development work without having conflicts with the state. The best way to do this is to separate the state from the community, as if they are not related to one another. They recognize that if their activities create conflict with the national government their NGOs will not be allowed to function. They therefore try to do things in accordance with the state's requirements, thereby creating a "space" in which their work can continue. The state in turn gives them space to operate because the work of these local leaders is helpful in addressing social issues that, if unaddressed, might lead to political tensions. What the state gives however is limited. Even if it is not obvious that national officials are watching, it is well-known that they have numerous mechanisms for learning if a local leader's actions violate written and unwritten codes. When that happens there may be consequences for the person or for his or her organization. This space is maintained within the broader context that national leadership is not prepared to accept that Laos has poverty, inequality, injustice and corruption.¹² Since NGO leaders are always taking a risk to talk openly about these issues they instead talk about "managing community resources", "solving community's problems", and "strengthening the community", rather than it is poverty, injustice and corruption.

B. Vientiane – Individual Interviews

Interviews, because they permit longer responses and allow follow up questions, yield information difficult to obtain from survey questions. This section summarizes the results of eight interviews (see **appendix B** for the interview protocol). Seven are with individuals in key positions in nongovernmental organizations that provide diverse social services to local communities, and one is a non-party village chief.¹³

The issues addressed revolve around understandings of the meaning of leadership, the foundations for it, and the influence of context. These issues are: the meaning of "leader"; the motivation to be a leader; the sources of learning about leadership; the challenges leaders are facing; the mistakes leaders making. The interviews are summarized by identifying as themes the primary consensus points in interviewee responses to each of the five issues. Illustrative statements made in the interviews are included.¹⁴

¹² This was illustrated when the government built a solid fence around the city slums in the ASEAN meeting held in Laos PDR. ASEAN Ministers and journalists from all over the world could not see the conditions of the slums or poor people.

¹³ The names and organizations of those interviewed are not included in order to avoid any risk of retaliation.

¹⁴ The statements included are either exact quotes or close paraphrases from interview records.

1. The Meaning of “leader”

Five themes emerged when interviewees were asked what makes a person a leader and how a formal or informal leader is different from a person who may be accepted or respected. The themes revolve around personal qualities, motivating others, community relations, intelligence and ability to analyze, and the use of power.

Personal qualities. A leader must be honest, consistently responsible to staff and community, be able to communicate effectively, and have integrity. It is “the heart” that provides the will to lead, not money or intelligence. It is important not to be “financially needy” because that need leads to loss of independence.

Motivating others. A leader needs to be a positive role model, which means possessing humility and being prepared to make personal sacrifices. A leader also is someone willing and able to coach and mentor others. A stronger view is that a leader has an obligation to get outside of the dominant socialization processes and in so doing offer another path by which followers can become leaders (this rejects “the current view [in which] a leader is someone who creates followers”).

Community Relations. Working with local communities is difficult and a leader helps staff learn how to be successful at it. The leader needs to be aware of what is impacting the community in a world that is more and more complex and interconnected, and he or she must help to establish trust and build working relationships. A person does not have to be the “official” leader to be influential in a community and this can be a good counterbalance to those in official positions (an interviewee said, “I am not a community leader. I bring in support from the outside. Leaders in Laos villages are selected and ‘official’”).

Intelligence. Leaders need to be smart enough to recognize the important issues, provide information that is relevant to those issues, and then help the average person analyze what needs to be done (a leader needs to, “Be open to not knowing what you are doing. Don’t act like you know everything because then you can’t learn”).

Using power. Power needs to be used on behalf of people rather than over them. Power is derived from staff support and for this to happen the staff must be able to trust the leader. The leader in turn needs to trust the staff to do their own work and not be over-controlling (it is better to have “big ear, small mouth” because then challenges can be viewed as opportunities).

2. The Motivation to Be a Leader

This issue explores what motivates these individuals to do the work they do, which of those motivators are most important, and why. Five themes are identified from their responses: an alternative perspective, a less stable world, the power of personal experiences, the need to produce results, and sense of responsibility.

Alternative perspective. A leader should use his or her knowledge and information to “fill the gap” that exists for people in the community who have an inadequate education. Closely related to this is the incentive that comes from helping people to get outside of the dominant structure that has taught them to be “like a flock of birds following one another in the sky.”

An unstable world. Laos' "new economic mechanism" has brought big changes and resulted in a great deal of turmoil ("Laos could not keep its culture the way it was, or keep the same level of stability"). Leaders must provide the needed stability, as well as a way to protect the future of Lao society and Lao culture.

Personal experience. Personally experiencing hopelessness, loss and unfairness is a powerful motivator if there then is an opportunity to help others avoid or cope with the conditions in which they occur (one interviewee recalled that, "In the evening [she] would see them coming in from the fields carrying a workload and a child while the men were empty handed").

Producing results. The chance to accomplish specific material goals can be a powerful incentive to be a local leader. This can bring good things to the leader, to other individuals, and to the community. At times the motivation is to out compete rival communities in, for example, getting funds to improve community infrastructure, such as roads or water systems.

Sense of personal responsibility. Everyone has a basic obligation to help because they all are products of Laos society (an interviewee asked, "If I do not to help local people, who will?").

3. The Sources of Learning About Leadership

This asks about the important people and situations that shaped the kind of leader the respondent has wanted to be, and what he or she needed to know to be that kind of leader. The themes that capture this are: accumulated experience, mentors, difficult situations and individuals, exposure to the world outside of Laos, and education.

Accumulated experience. Being placed in a position with a leadership component, no matter how small, lays a foundation for learning how to lead. Having some "natural" talent helps. Moving through diverse and higher level positions, over time builds more and more relevant experience (an interviewee shared the experience that in the [Thailand refugee] camp he was "picked out by Thai to be in charge of 60 families – food stamps, distribution, etc. It was voluntary. I was tired, but proud. Some people thought it was stupid").

Mentors. Different individuals play crucial roles in learning how to lead, and these individuals are found in a variety of places. They include parents, other NGO leaders, women who have been mentors for other women, and friends. No current national leaders are mentioned however.

Difficult situations and individuals. Facing difficult situations, such as trying to meet the challenges of poor people or fire an employee, shapes the approach to leading. Negative experiences with bad leaders, the opposite of mentoring, also can provide lessons about the right way to lead.

Exposure to the world outside of Laos. Seeing how things are done in other places, in nearby countries such as Thailand or Vietnam, or in more distant societies, brings new ideas about leadership and broader images of successful leaders (for example, "I lived in Thailand for 10 years and learned how the system worked and about management").

Education. Concrete knowledge and specific skills make a difference. They can be acquired through undergraduate and graduate education, trainings that are provided by organizations, and by making use of less formal opportunities.

4. Challenges

The focus on challenges asks what is most challenging about leading at the local level and what turns away individuals who might be effective in that role. This issue produced the largest number of responses. The themes include: using the system to get access, lack of resources, people can be difficult, the unequal status of women, dealing with the government, the presence of corruption, and getting access to local communities.

Using the system to get access. It is difficult to get anything done outside of the dominant system. Local communities are hard to get access to because the villages too are formalized systems (This was like, “They are operating inside a big box”). It is necessary to find ways to use these formal policies and rules on behalf of the work that needs to be done. Working from inside the system brings more opportunities to have an impact, but requires continuous judgments about what to accept and not accept.

Lack of resources. There is too little money. Because people working in the agencies have too few of the skills needed – such as budgeting and accounting - they have to look for ways to learn them. Everything takes a long time to do and therefore time also is a scarce resource.

People can be difficult. People in local communities can be difficult. They get frustrated when there seems to be no progress. They criticize, and they have fights with one another that need to be mediated. Addressing an issue can be more challenging because of the need, for cultural reasons, to be so indirect. (One interviewee tries to deal with local people’s resistance to new things “by using the [even disagreeable] existing laws and policies to support what I want to do”).

Unequal status of women. Women are not respected as decision makers and gaining respect means they must prove themselves through hard work and consistency. Being accepted as a leader requires women to be strategic in their relations and in how they present themselves in specific situations (“Being a woman leader in Laos. It has been stressful.” It took a year for her work to be respected. She got it by “meeting expectations, such as on deadlines; communicating effectively with different levels and individuals; being consistently honest; being strategic in [her] actions”).

Dealing with the government. The government is controlling and paternalistic, often treating people like children. It is hard to work cooperatively and be supported, no matter how long the relationship with government officials (“The government always treats you as lower in a hierarchy. Like parent - child. It is never working together”). It also is possible to become out of favor by working with a group the government is suspicious or wary of, such as one supported by Americans.

Corruption. Corruption is serious and a fact of life. A local leader’s work has to be done while trying to ignore it. Government positions give officials who come from poor backgrounds the power and opportunity for private rewards. It is hard to do anything about because the government is the party and the party is the government.

Campaigns against corruption lack monitoring and enforcement (“Corruption is very hard to address when the government is the party and the party is the government. Even if the government says it is addressing corruption, there is a lack of monitoring and enforcement”).

5. Mistakes

This explores the biggest mistakes made by local leaders, and what makes those mistakes so important. “Mistakes” refers to actions that cause someone not to be successful, or does harm to their organization and community. The questions resulted in the following themes: poor assumptions, not being responsible, dishonesty, impatience, and not admitting mistakes.

Poor assumptions. Unwarranted and unexamined assumptions lead to the wrong actions (“High speed and competition lead to poor assumptions and assessments”). These unexamined beliefs include what is causing a particular problem to occur and what needs to be done about it, as well as traditional ideas about people’s capabilities. Assumptions about people reflect a lack of respect for them, and, since people are seen as not competent, result in decisions being pushed away from them to the top of the system.

Not being responsible. Lack of responsibility is seen in spending money and using resources on the wrong things; seeing an issue as someone else’s problem and therefore not taking responsibility for it; and talking about doing something while never taking concrete action (“Leaders show no respect for people. Talking, but no action”).

Dishonesty. Important forms of dishonesty include obtaining power claiming it will be used for people and then using it over them, and government officials guiding money meant for community projects into their own pockets (“Use power and use it well; not just over people the way in government some try to use power”).

Impatience. Impatience takes the form of trying to hurry something that needs more time, and failing to communicate with partners while expecting that things will go smoothly.

Not admitting mistakes. It is harmful for a leader not to accept responsibility for mistakes he or she has made. It is also wrong for a leader not to learn from mistakes even if they have been admitted (“But everyone makes mistakes. The thing is to learn from them. A person who does not make mistakes is not doing anything”).

These interviews are revealing of the complex world local leaders work in and the opportunities and constraints they must negotiate. It is crucial that they understand the issues their community’s face at a time when changes are impinging on those communities. This understanding is what gives them access. Once access is obtained they must try to help to solve community problems using the experience and knowledge they bring. At the same time the resources available -- money, people, and materials -- to get to the best outcomes are very limited. Ultimately it is the joining of their desire to help, their local and outside knowledge and some limited resources with the power, or potential power, of local people that is likely to bring results.

The individuals we interviewed also must find ways to work with national and

local authorities to benefit their communities. This can be a delicate process. They look for degrees of openness to their initiatives, and hope that official policies will not be too top-down and controlling, and that their aspiration to lead with integrity and without corruption will be honored, or at least permitted.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The current and likely to be future local leaders we surveyed and interviewed know what outside observers understand about their country and motherland: it is less developed economically than its neighbors, and many of its people are in poverty. Our interviews made it clear that they have the ability, experience and motivation to make a positive difference. It also was clear from both the survey and interviews that there are few opportunities for the kinds of training that would increase their impact. Instead of receiving training and support they must learn to be skillful in seizing the opportunities and avoiding the dangers that come from any relationship with the central government.

Changes in Laos today are rapid. The opening of the economy to more economic activity and investment signaled the government's decision to catch up with Thailand and to not be the least developed Southeast Asian country. Today those ambitions for development include selling off natural resources and accepting foreign "help" that includes *quid pro quo* arrangements. The centralized authority of the government makes this easier to do. These local leaders often see themselves in the position of trying to save land, communities and culture for the future. While central authority and its capacity to establish policy and mobilize resources could also be helpful in their efforts on behalf of land community and culture, their goals commonly place them in conflict with it.

These then are the challenging circumstances to which the title of this article refers. Leaders at the local level in contemporary Laos are attempting to address difficult problems relating to the control of resources, community capacity and cohesion, economic well-being, equality and fairness. They do this with few resources, little training in what it takes to be an effective leader, while working in and around rigid and self-serving political arrangements. Despite these challenges their dedication to the work is remarkable and their expectations of themselves are high.

The meanings they give to "leader" are not surprising in either the questionnaire responses or the interviews. Similar descriptions appear in many other places, likely explained at least in part because a number have been abroad for school and work, and because everyone has access to information through the Internet. What seems more distinctive is the deep commitment to understanding and meeting the needs of their communities and the difficulties they experience in doing that.

This reflects the procedural hurdles they must surmount that come from both national and local structures. One interviewee described obtaining permission to work with a local community as working in "a box inside a box." It also is in part a function of the ambiguous role these current and emerging leaders occupy when they feel the need to do things unofficially and outside of their formal organizational positions.

Our primary goal was not to probe sensitive issues relating to the political context of their work. It was to explore their understandings of leadership and leaders. It is not surprising of course that the tightly controlled political system surfaces as an

issue, indirectly in the questionnaire responses and directly in the interviews. Our respondents, especially in the interviews, were clear that they make every effort to do their work while minimizing contact with rigid bureaucracies and powerful government officials. In effect they try to maintain a space -- a kind of bubble -- that enables them to either be ignored or to have fewer encounters with the official system, thus avoiding the need to continuously seek approval and be the target of close oversight.

Corruption is part of the fabric within which they must work. Because in its various forms it is so pervasive it seems to be unspoken not to make it an issue. Elevating it as an issue would only serve to undermine their community relations, and potentially make them a target for increased scrutiny. This in effect would reduce the size of the bubble within which they work. Reflecting this, “corruption” does not appear in the questionnaire responses, even though the behavior described qualifies as a definition of it.

Looking to the future, there is not enough information to understand the personal and more inward looking reasons for not wanting to be a leader seen in **table 8**. It could represent acceptance of, or adjustment to, the broader institutional setting, or concern about the negative consequences of being openly negative about it. There clearly are constraints on open discussions of desirable and undesirable approaches to leadership. Opinions about the reason to lead ranged from having a duty to be helpful to the urgent need to be a counter balance to powerful mechanisms of socialization. While duty is acceptable as a motivation, criticizing messages issued by the dominant institutions is not likely to be. This is hinted at in concerns expressed in the survey responses about the possibility of personal harm. The scarcity of opportunities to openly discuss what is effective public leadership, and the skills needed to develop it, raises questions about the fate of today’s most dedicated and successful local leaders, and about the development of those who will follow them.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire and group discussion questions – Vientiane, February 2011
(*indicates questions addressed by all three groups in “brainstorming” discussions).

1. What do you think has been your most important success in the positions you have held?
Why do you think it is important?
- *2. What does it mean to be a “leader”?
- *3. In your opinion, what are the most important characteristics needed for a leader to be effective, in order of their importance?
4. Which of those characteristics do you feel you have?
5. Which of those characteristics have you seen in other local leaders, in order of how common they are?
- *6. Where have you learned how to be a leader?
7. Who are your role models in leadership? Why?
8. What are the motivational factors that make you want to be a leader, in order of importance?
9. What are the factors that prevent you from wanting to be a leader, in order of importance?
10. What do you think is most challenging about being a local leader?
11. What do you see as biggest mistakes that local leaders make?
12. What suggestions would you like to give to other local leaders?

Appendix B. Individual interview questions -- Feb/March 2012 (* indicates those questions summarized in section VII.b).

Successes

Please describe your most important successes, and why they are important. (What accomplishments are most important to you? What about each one makes it important to you?)

*“Leader”

What do you think it means to be a “leader”? (Probe: What distinguishes a formal or informal leader from other another person? Many people may be accepted and/or respected, but does that make them leaders? What is it that makes a person a leader?)

*Motivation

What motivates you to do the work you do, in order of which motivators have been most important. (Probe: What pushes you to do the things you do in your community? Which of these are most important motivators. What are they?)

*Challenges

a. What do you think is most challenging about being a local leader? (Probe: Please share what you find most challenging about being in a leadership role at the local level.)

b. What do you think turns people away from wanting to be a local leader? (Probe: Thinking about others who might be effective leaders, what are the main reasons that more don't take on leadership roles?)

* Learning and Role Models

a. Describe where and how you learned to be a leader. (Probe: What are the most important places s/he learned (1) the kind of leader s/he wanted and (2) what s/he needed to know to be able to lead.)

b. Who are your important role models in leadership, and why was each important? (Probe: A little about why each has been important.)

Question 6: Most Important

a. In your opinion, what is most important for a local leader to be effective? (Probe: These can be personal qualities, skills or behaviors, or something else. If appropriate, get a least five qualities, skills, behaviors, etc. More are okay. Try to have them ranked.)

b. How common is what you just described in other local leaders that you've seen? (Probe: Please share what has been or is seen in other local leaders. There is no need to name specific individuals.)

* Mistakes

What do you think are the biggest mistakes made by local leaders, and what makes those mistakes so important? (Probe: "Mistakes" refers to actions that cause someone not to be successful, or even does harm to their organizations and communities. Examples without naming individuals, if possible.)

Question 8: Suggestions

What suggestions can you give to help to develop local leaders who can make positive differences on behalf of their organizations and their communities? (Probe: This could include a wide range of things, but what is most important? May help to picture a meeting or conference of present or future local leaders who have asked for

advice on the most important things for them to do to be successful. Please provide as many suggestions, guides and examples as possible.)

Appendix C. Demographic Information for February 2011 -- Questionnaire Responses.

Table A. Gender

Gender	No.	%
Male	6	28.6
Female	15	71.4
Total	21	100

Table B. Education Level Completed

Level of Education	No.	%
Secondary / Vocational / Diploma	2	9.5
Diploma	2	9.5
Bachelor's degree	12	57.1
Master's Degree	5	23.8
Total	21	100

Table C. Marital Status

Status	No.	%
Single	9	42.9
Married	11	52.4
Widow /divorce / separation	1	4.8
Total	21	100

Table D. Current Position

Position	No.	%
Director	2	10
Coordinator	8	38
Assistant Project	11	52
Total	21	100

Table E. Length of Time in Current Organization

Operating time/ year(s)	No.	%
1	5	24
2	9	44
3	5	24
6	1	4
8	1	4
Total	21	100

Appendix D. Detailed Information on Role Models**Table 7.** Who Is Your Role Model?

Role model (can name more than one)	Number	%
Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane	6	21
Hồ Chí Minh	4	14
King Fa Ngum	3	10
Master Kong <i>OR K'ung-tzu</i>	2	7
Prince Supanuvong	1	4
Prince Anuvong	1	4
Vice Prime Minister Somsavad Lenksavat	1	4
Mr. Nhuhug Phumsawan	1	4
King of Thailand	1	4
Jesus	1	4
Mahatma Gandhi	1	4
Lenin	1	4
Karl Marx	1	4
President Obama	1	4
Father, Mother	1	4
Teacher	1	4
	27	100