

**Muang Bachieng Educational Research Centre for Social and  
Environmental Sustainability**  
**A Non-Profit School of Ecological Learning for Minorities Groups in Southern Laos**

An independent GAPE project under the provincial and district education office of  
Champasak province, under present MOU with the Non-Formal Education Department,  
Ministry of Education, 2006-2009

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**Rationale / Conceptual Framework**

The need to effectively integrate socio-economic development and environmental regeneration is a necessary challenge in every country, including Lao PDR. Champassak is a province with an expanding agricultural sector, extensive forests and water resources. Though only a fraction of the province's population is profiting from the region's economic growth, all of the province's people face suffering from its' unintended consequences.

Lack of reading materials generally prevent rural Lao people from making educated choices with respect to the use of new technologies. Harmful products, such as pesticides, are often improperly used with negative effects on both human health and valuable agricultural land.

Education can assist to bridge this division between human needs and ecological sustainability. Recognizing human socio-economy as a subset within ecology imposes parameters on human activities, but it also opens a range of innovative explorations that require a human ingenuity to achieve.

The range of low-tech and ecological solutions that can emerge from human creativity is unlimited and can tremendously in environments where diverse minds are encouraged to think together. Local groups and gender diversity are greatly underutilized human resources that can assist in the development of sustainable societies.

The program's curriculum in Social and Environmental Sustainability comprises of both theoretical and practical components. Academic subjects include soil science, agro-ecology, forest biology, biodiversity and nutrition. Non-formal subjects include agriculture, building, water filtration, clothing paper, ink making, and micro-business management. Students will be expected to integrate theory and practice through independent projects, with teachers taking on primarily facilitative roles. This allows students to become independent seekers and creators of knowledge, transferring the act of 'educating' from the teacher to the student, making education itself sustainable.

### **Objectives**

- Preserve and grow the local knowledge of rural communities.
- Increase the self-sufficiency of rural communities in meeting their current and future information needs.
- Increase the self-sufficiency of rural communities in meeting their current and future material needs.
- Assist in the environmental and social sustainability of rural areas.

### **Activities**

- Integrate the production of handbooks, cataloguing and record-keeping of local knowledge into the curriculum.
- Integrate student-led experimentation from local frameworks into the curriculum and self-sufficiency of the school.
- Integrate knowledge sharing and communication training as a component of the curriculum.
- Build, operate and maintain the school according to the principles of ecology and sustainability that we teach.

### **Target Group**

Students will be accepted based on:

- Their financial inability to study at other schools.
- Adequately representing local diversity and gender.
- Representing geographical diversity.
- Their interest and motivation to progress in the specific education our centre has to offer.

Students will be selected from various villages in districts of Champassak, Sekong and Attapeu that GAPE has or will work in. Connections to villages in Salavanh through the projects of VFI will also be considered. Student housing will be accommodated, and most of their food requirements will eventually be produced on site. However, students will be responsible for items such as shampoo, soap, laundry detergent, and, if possible donations to the school in rice.

The school will enroll 30-35 people each year in two classes, reaching a total occupancy of 90-100 students.

### **Location**

The school will be built in Muang Bachieng, Champassak province. The specific location of the school will be chosen using the technical experience of GAPE

International staff who have been working in the area and have an understanding of the socio-economy and ecology of the region. The location will be;

- Given under the consent and willingness of a local community that understands and wants to actively participate in the project.
- In an area that has moderate soil quality.
- In a location accessible to vehicles (in the case of a student emergency).
- In a location that is not considered environmentally sensitive.

### **Project Duration**

The project start date will be January, 2007. The project will seek extensions on our contract with the government to continue operating the school after the centre has been established. We are requesting an initial three-year contract for the current phase of the project with the Champasak government.

### **Project Staff**

The project currently employs three staff, two Lao nationals and one foreigner. Ramsey Affifi is a teacher and the academic and project coordinator. Sophavanh Phommixay is the project accountant and handles finances. Insawn Duangkhamya is a teacher, translator and educational activity coordinator. In addition, we will hire two other teachers: an agricultural specialist and a forest/ecology specialist.

All staff members will be paid \$80/month plus \$20 held monthly by the project in the case of medical emergencies. After the school has been established, salaries will increase to \$100/month.

We will require that the Champasak province Education office assign a staff member to assist us in provincial project/government relations. In addition, we will require a Bachieng District Education Office counterpart for local government relations. We will pay for each of these per diem and provide travel costs.

The project will also utilize the assistance of a community-selected representative from the village nearest to the school, who will evaluate and assess the impacts of our project on them.

### **Implementation Plan / Project Management**

Project staff in Vientiane are currently developing a program curriculum and translating materials required for the curriculum into Lao language. The project officially begins, however, at the time when the government has approved it and we can begin building. This is designated by the term, 'Project Phase' on the top of the budget sheet.

- **Infrastructure Requirements**

**LAND.** An area of at least 10 hectares, separated or together, located near a stream that flows year-round, or that has an accessible water table for wells, would be suitable for the needs of the school. The land would not need to be located adjacent to a village, because connection to the electrical grid is not necessary as we will be producing and storing our own energy. Terms of use of the land will be negotiated with the municipal government and the community involved.

After the land has been acquired, it needs to be prepared so that it can provide food, building materials, cooking fuels, and plants for a variety of uses such as

medicine, soap production, ink, clothing, bedding etc. Some plants (such as fruit trees) will be planted as quickly as possible as they take several years to produce yields.

**BUILDINGS.** The centre will have six classroom once it reaches its' full size after three years. At this time, there will also be a male and a female dormitory, staff housing, a library, an open kitchen and eating area and 6 washrooms. All of the buildings will be erected gradually, and we will elicit the assistance of the students to help in the building.

**VEHICLE.** A small pick-up truck will be purchased to transport materials, people and, most importantly, to be on-site in the case of medical emergencies.

**EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS.** Agricultural tools, building tools, building materials, and solar panels and electrical infrastructure will all need to be erected. A ram-pump will be used to bring water to the campus for vegetables and small reservoirs. Books and resources for teaching, school supplies and library books will also be purchased.

- Evaluation of Project Success

Objectives	Specific Outcomes	Success Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve and grow the local knowledge of rural communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students produce papers, handbooks, and oral presentations about different aspects of their local knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of materials that are being produced that catalogue, develop or explain local knowledge.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the self-sufficiency of rural communities in meeting their current and future information needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students hypothesize, experiment and record results. Students research through secondary sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of documented experiments, essays written at the centre.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the self-sufficiency of rural communities in meeting their current and future material needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student research produces innovations that assist communities in achieving adequate diet, shelter and health.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students report back to the school of successes and failures of exported concepts.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist in the environmental and social sustainability of rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental degradation is lessened, social capital is increased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soil quality, biodiversity,</li> </ul>
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**• Economic Sustainability of the Centre**

Our current funding permits us to build, establish and operate the school for three years. In addition to our yearly donations of \$2322 coming in from Canada, the project will thereafter be supported by GAPE and (potentially) VFI assistance, sponsoring students at \$90/year. At the school’s full capacity, this would amount to between \$8000 and \$9000/year. These two sources would provide for the financial sustenance of the school. Surplus funding from student-directed ‘green’ micro-business projects could contribute a minimum additional \$900/year for research and development.

**• Budget**

\$29,500 USD has currently been donated from Canadian nationals. In addition, we are receiving yearly donations of \$2322; accessible if need be on a monthly basis. We plan to spend the money as follows:

		pre-startup	Project Phase			year n
			start-up	2nd year	3rd year	
land office	rent	325				
	computer & parts	675				
buildings	school		2000	2000	2000	
	student dormitories		1500	1500		
	kitchen		200			
	staff housing		1800			
	compost toilets		500	500	500	
	library				1000	
materials	library books		300	400	400	300
	teaching aids		300	100	100	100
	agricultural equipment		300	100	100	50
	building equipment		200	50	50	50
	kitchen materials		300	50	50	50
	learning materials		200	250	350	350
salaries	\$60/month then 80 @ n	1440	3600	3600	3600	4800
	\$20 insurance		1200	1200	1200	1200
	government counterpart		250	250	250	250
	labour					
food/agri	seeds, sapling		400	300	300	300
	animals		700	400	100	100
	budget for extra food		4000	3500	2500	1500

utilities	ram pump		300			
	water filters & pipes		300	300		
	electricity solar		1000	1000		
	battery and wiring		400			
training/trips		300	400	400	400	400
maintenance					500	500
research						500
vehicle	small pickup truck		2200			
	fuel		400	400	400	400
	maintenance		200	200	200	200
expenses		2740	22950	16500	14000	11050
contingency	4%	109.6	918	660	560	442
total expenses		2849.6	23868	17160	14560	11492
funding	Sponsor money		-3000	-6000	-9000	-9000
	Money from student microprojects			-600	-900	-900
	Money donations from Canada	-2322	-2322	-2322	-2322	-2322
	total	527.6	18546	8238	2338	-730
	project funds \$29,500					

Expenses over 5 year period from  
Expenses for phase 1 of project: 28919.6  
29649.6