

SUMMARY OF THESIS

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is a small landlocked country in the South East Asia Region with approximately 6.5 million of total population. It has low population density of only 27 persons per square kilometer. About 80 percent of its country population is engaged in agricultural practices and almost half of them living in mountainous and rural areas.

After the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986, its national economic structure has gradually transferred from a subsistence agriculture and raw material base to a processing and market oriented economy. Many privates from both local and foreign business sector are fully supported to invest and run their business in Laos. This could be one of the main influential factors for its national economic growth and some light and medium factory numbers boom in these days.

However, the majority of those factories or even public projects seem to be located only in the major big cities and require highly competitive and skilled workers while the majority of Lao workers are semi and unskilled. They live in rural and mountainous areas where their livelihoods heavily rely on natural agriculture production in once a year. Hence, they might feel being unemployed and need additional jobs after their crop collections. The young people leave their original home in rural areas for seeking a job or new life settlement in big cities. Many of them even cross the international border in order to find a better job and life in neighboring countries. Thailand is the most common destination place for

Lao workers aim to work and live because there are more optional job opportunities and similar culture.

Several sources from the government of Laos, UN organizations and the academic scholars argue that there are more than 200,000 Lao workers are being recently employed in Thailand. About two-thirds are working as illegal migrant workers who are working in the most dangerous working environment, dirty and difficult jobs, but low pay. Moreover, many of them are prompted to become human trafficking victims.

While Laos is having young migrant workers issue, there have been several countries in the world that are trying to develop their rural community by utilizing the existing resources within the community. In order to decrease migrant workers from rural areas in particular those who are considered as vulnerable; it is necessary to create an optional employment opportunity within the original community. The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and One Village One Product (OVOP) models which have been being practiced in many countries can be considered as one of the most interesting approaches to apply as an alternative community development in rural areas of Laos in parallel with other measurements.

This research aims to investigate on if the ABCD and OVOP models could be applied in order to create an alternative employment in rural areas of Laos by reviewing some ABCD and OVOP case studies in Japan, India, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand and the Phillipines, and conducting a field survey on 160 households in the ODOP pilot project based in Saravanh and Savanakheth provinces, Laos.

The OVOP practice in Laos was initially implemented by MoIC of Laos in 2008 as a “*The One District One Product (ODOP) Pilot Project in Savannakhet and Saravanh Province*”. This pilot program aimed to launch initial measures in order to improve the living condition of local residents within the two sample villages in two above provinces by supporting local business and promoting potential local products for commerce. The first project performance review which was conducted in November 2011 concluded that this program had been somehow successful, but it seemed that the evaluation might be broader design. The evaluation concentrated on the programs’ tool and constitutional impact rather the impact of the program (beneficiaries) and the involvement of local people.

Therefore, in March 2016, the researcher with strong and motivate support of local officers (provinces, districts and villages), a survey in the two targeted villages that were covered by that program, was conducted. The survey aims to study if there are significant differences between ODOP and Non-ODOP households in terms of income generation, access to basic utilities, possession of properties, capacity to pay for health treatment, living satisfaction, housing condition, migration tendency and children’s education within two pilot villages in the provinces of Saravanh (Hoayhountay Villay) and Savannakhet (Laohuakham Village), Lao PDR. In order to meet the purpose of survey, the 160 respondents (80 from ODOP households and the other 80 households from general households) were randomized.

The survey findings have shown that there were potential differences in 7 out of given 8 items between ODOP and Non-ODOP households. The children in school and properties possession were the two key impacts from ODOP activity which more than 80% respondent from ODOP household answered their all children in school, nearly 84% said they owned 6-7 out of necessary properties while 60 % and 50% of interviewees from general households responded their all children in school and property owned respectively.

Another two significantly influential impacts revealed by the findings were the member of family working outside (migrant) and life satisfaction. The tendency of the general households who said they or having at least a family member leave home for working outside were nearly 4 times higher than the ODOP households did.

Apart from those two significant impact areas, the incomes and health treatment were additional areas that were notable because the respondents from ODOP households who said their annual income was between 21-40 million kip (Lao Currency) was twice as much as the general households and the number from general households who experienced in or having difficulty in payment for health treatment was 4 times higher than ODOP households

To be concluded, the above mentioned findings indicate that the ODOP practice in the two targeted villages has significantly impacted on the local residents' living conditions. The ODOP practitioners in both two villages seemed to have better living conditions and having more incomes sources throughout the

year. Probably, these factors might be associated with having fewer numbers of migrant workers among ODOP households, compare to general households.

This field finding is also appearing consistent with the finding from the literature review. The ABCD and OVOP movements in Taiwan, India, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and other countries did have some economic impact by providing job opportunities and income generation for rural communities in those countries. In addition, local residents from those countries were also becoming actively involved in their community development. Therefore, ABCD approach and OVOP model can possibly be applied as an alternative employment for the rural community of Laos.