



It's More than Sport

ChildFund Laos

This case study is based on activities within a broader Child and Youth Participation project, which is currently being implemented by ChildFund in partnership with the Lao Rugby Federation and Sport Matters in 12 villages in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province in the Lao PDR. Partner communities in this project are rural and remote, with a large proportion of ethnic communities; factors that have a clear correlation with poverty. The project began in January 2012 and will conclude in June 2014. The project aims to increase the capacity of communities to understand child protection issues, facilitate the development of life skills among young people, and increase the opportunities for children and youth to lead, and engage in, sport initiatives. This initiative is an Australian aid project, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

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Background

ChildFund Laos has been working in Nonghet, one of the poorest districts in Lao PDR, for the last four years. In our experience, ChildFund has found that village and district structures are not fully utilised to provide community members with opportunities to express their voice. This is largely due to the restrictive political context, language barriers, as well as patriarchal attitudes which prevent the participation of children, particularly girls. Through extensive consultations with youth and children, ChildFund found that these groups have no opportunities to voice their views at the community or district level. The lack of opportunities for children to participate in their communities, and also to engage in recreation and sport activities, has made them vulnerable to growing social problems such as drug and alcohol use and crime. However, ChildFund Laos' experience in Nonghet suggests that adults are willing to encourage the participation of children and young people, and that there is scope within existing community structures to strengthen the voices of children. In light of these findings, this project was developed to increase the capacity of community structures to protect children, and to provide children with the opportunity to participate meaningfully in their communities by leading their own sport activities.

Innovation

This initiative has given young people from ethnic, rural and remote communities the opportunity to participate in organised sport for the first time. The approach has been unique in its employment of a non-traditional sport (rugby union in this case) to get girls involved. This strategy was identified to deal with the gendered perceptions of other sports within the project, which include soccer, rattan ball, and volleyball, and has been successful in providing many girls with their first taste of participation in sport, both as participants and coaches.

Partnerships

The intervention actively engages government partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives to ensure there is broad support and understanding for activities. An overall project management structure is in place made up of key government officials and community members, which looks at implementation and progress of all ChildFund projects in the area. In addition, the LRF, a key partner, sits under the Ministry of Education and Sport and demonstrates the importance of government partnerships.

Sustainability

ChildFund has taken two important steps in terms of sustainability. Village level capacity is being developed to deliver quality sporting opportunities, with a focus on rugby, through train-the-trainer sessions delivered by the LRF. The LRF provides on-going

technical support for both youth leaders in communities and teachers, to build their knowledge of the sport and also to support the development of coaching skills. Working with the LRF, a national sporting federation under the Ministry of Education and Sport, demonstrates a strong partnership for sustainability. The LRF is the governing body for the sport across Laos, has a mandate to grow the sport nationally, provides a permanent presence for all capacity building support provided by ChildFund, and guarantees a level of quality during coaching.

Impact

The results of research conducted by ChildFund Laos reveals that project activities have positively affected the personal change of young female youth leaders. Sport for development activities have increased the confidence of female youth leaders, enhanced their capacity to express ideas and make their own choices, and increased their ability to support the participation of children in activities within their villages.

"I am more self-confident. For example at school I never answered questions as I was always too afraid, but I'm not afraid now."

Girls' participation in sport activities has also influenced duty bearers' attitudes towards children's participation.