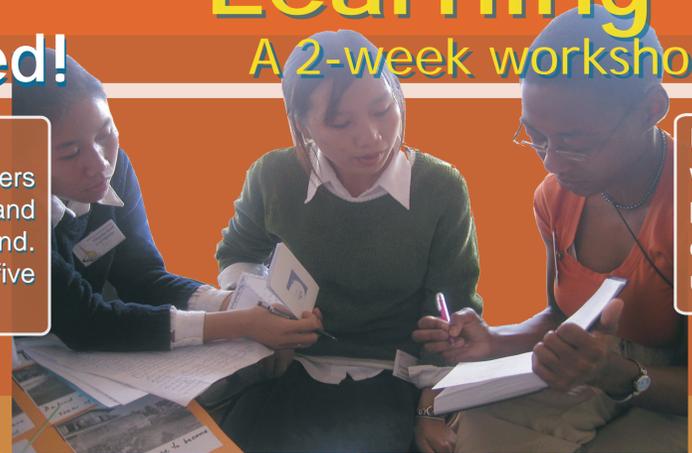


"Learning with Communities"

A 2-week workshop: Our Experience in Vientiane, Lao

1. Getting Started!

Forming teams
We meet our students and faculty partners from the National University of Laos and Oxford-Brooks University from England. We will be working in teams around five different sites around Vientiane.



Understanding the context
We meet Planning Officials at the national and local level to get an overview of housing and city conditions. We also talk with university faculty to understand the situation from their point of view.



Our Goal: Gain an understanding of the issues in our respective villages and then develop a short-term project for each community that was a catalyst for tackling broader long-term issues.

2. Working with communities

Understanding the community: listening and looking with 'different eyes'

I see - We use varied PRA (participatory rapid appraisal) techniques, community mapping, walk-troughs, photographs, sketches. As the "professionals in the field, we observe and identify what the problems (-) and opportunities (+) are along with key concerns. We also come up with a series of questions for future field work that would help us understand out communities better.



Meeting the communities
We are introduced to our five communities through informal meetings. We walk through the communities for initial reactions.



NONG BOUA TONG TAI II

NONG DUANG THONG

HARDUONECHAN ISLAND

BAN DONG PA LAHN THA

GNAPHA VILLAGE

You see - The community tells how they see their community. Oral histories are explored and we meet with children to understand their world through their eyes. And we get the answers to our previous questions!



Revisiting Planning Officials to ask specific questions



We see - We brainstorm with the communities TOGETHER to identify main issues and priorities for action: what to address NOW, what address SOON and what is left for LATER. We also identify key partners and realize we need more information!



3. Moving Forward!

Addressing the main issues and structuring strategies
We determine the main actions: an initial catalyst project to get things going, in the context of long-term strategic goals.



Reflecting
We have some time to stop and review, to go back over the events; to build confidence in assessments.



Sharing Ideas
We present our ideas to the community, to city officials, university faculty, and NGOs. We also set up booths so the people can asks us for more detailed information. We have a variety of products ranging from puppets shows, tourist brochures and posters to resettlement guidelines drafts and awareness reports.



Now celebrate the future ... with traditional Lao dancing and songs!