

Social Capital of Rural Laos

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1 . Introduction

The research project commissioned by the Center for Social Capital Studies, Institute for the Development of Social Intelligence of Senshu University in 2012 aims to explore the realities and potentials for social reform, by investigating the social, economic, and cultural aspects of rural area in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao P.D.R.). In the Lao PDR, the Research Office of the National University of Laos formulated a survey team to carry out the data collection in two villages in Vientiane Province. A local field study, in this paper, was conducted in Nakang Village and Done Village, Feuang District, Vientiane Province, Lao PDR. The framework of the research is based on the concept of social capital, which refers to the norms of trust and reciprocity, and social networks that could enhance the welfare of the community/society. This local investigation was to explore the realities and potentials of social capital, in relation to: social trust, maintaining and improving livelihood, risk and social safety net, and social rituals.

Iinuma (2013:122) in the article on government-initiated social capital in urban and rural area of Laos expresses that for Laos it is impossible to avoid the fundamental question of whether or not freedom and voluntariness as characteristics of social capital are truly essential for the functions of social capital because the majority of social capital in Laos is closely linked to governmental organization such as the state, the government and the party, which often counteract with civil society. In the societal development, particularly in the rural area, where education, economy, and basic infrastructure have not yet been well developed, government's influence or intervention is necessary to develop the society in a harmonious and well-functioning manner. Influenced by the war for a long time, resulting in people's migration, the society changes its direction from homogeneity to multi-group integration. The result of such development brings in both formal mechanisms from the government and the social behaviour that has been long practiced by each group of people.

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This paper presents the result of the empirical survey exploring the reality of the social capital with the sample size of 127 in the rural area. The villages were Nakang and Done, which are 130 kilometers from Vientiane Capital City. Nakang villagers are multi-ethnic while Done villagers are a homogeneous ethnic group. The research team visited the households and filled in the questionnaire through interviews with the villagers. The questionnaire was developed by the Centre for Social Capital Studies, Institute for the Development of Social Intelligence of Senshu University.

2 . Social Capital Analytical Concept

The social capital analytical concept for this paper is based on the report of Iinuma (2013:112-114), which reviewed the definition of social capital from a variety of sources. One of the definitions by Coleman (1988, 1990a), which has been regarded as favourable by many researchers, states that social capital is a social structural resource that is a capital asset for the individual. The forms of intentional organizations aimed at receiving returns on investment in social capital include business organizations and voluntary association, and that elements which affect the creation and destructions aimed at receiving returns on investment in social capital include the closed system, stability, and ideology (Ibid.:318-319). Iinuma (2013:12) states that if returns on investments in social capital can be obtained by private sector organizations such as business organizations and voluntary associations, the government sector can also aim to obtain such returns by means of policies and other methods. The closed system, stability and ideologies are primary concerns of the government as well. There have been moves to utilize social capital for development policies in developing countries. Efficiency of society can be improved through coordinated actions. Social and political networks are organized horizontally, and communities respect solidarity, civil participation, cooperation, and good faith.

Bonding social capital and bridging social capital are classification of social capital. Bonding social capital is formed within social groups consisting of people who are closely connected to each other and that are established based on kinship and neighbourhood ties, or by relatives, neighbours, and friends. This type of social capital is generated within homogeneous social groups. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, refers to an external link of a group with other groups (Gittell and Vidal, 1998). It involves diverse social groups, wherein horizontal and voluntary relations are created without kinship or neighbourhood ties. Putnam refers to workplace ties as a good example of bridging social capital.

3 . Background Information of the Survey Villages

3 . 1 . Nakang

According to the story telling across generations, Nakang Village was established in 1761 (confirmed by village chief in the interview on February 15, 2012; with an evidence of the first Bodhi Tree planted in a Pagoda when they settled, which still exists). Initially, there were 7 families: namely Mr. Xay, Mr. Xayasane, Mr. Luang-in, Mr. Luangsy, Mr. Luangkham, Mr. Baohome, and Mr. Khoun-in, migrated from Xamneua District, Houaphan Province. These

people brought their families with them to find suitable place for settlement.

At first, the village was named Latkhuai (located along Tong River, one kilometer away from the current village location). They believed that the location was not suitable; therefore, they moved to the current location for the hope that they could build irrigation through the centre of the village to absorb village organic wastes as fertilizer and made their rice field productive and sufficient for their living. For this reason, the village was named Nakang as literally “na” means “rice field” and “kang” means “centre”.

As of August 2011, Nakang Village consists of 2,338 people, 1,092 females. There are 358 houses, with 395 families. The village is divided into 19 administrative units. There are 3 ethnic groups (in Lao means *Xonphao*) residing in the village: 1,628 Taidaeng (733 females), 56 Khamou (22 females), and 664 Hmong (337 females) (August 2011). In February 2012, there are 1,585 Taidaeng (726 females), 38 Khamou (24 females), 832 Hmong (482 females). Nakang Village is located 500 meters far from the Meuang Feuang district centre. The north is bordered with Tha Village, the South is bordered with Laokham Village, the East is bordered with Khiao Mountain, and the West is bordered with Ngeun River.

Nakang Village is the largest village in Feuang District. The main occupation of the villagers is farming and livestock raising. Retail in the market is the secondary occupation of the villagers. The majority of the villagers are Buddhists, which reserve the local, ethnical, and national tradition strictly.

Nakang Village has 1 complete 5-year primary school, with 15 teachers (6 females). There are 275 students (132 females). There is one temple. The villagers preserve the tradition and organize annual festival. The administration unit of the village consists of a seniority unit, Youth Organization, Women Union, Village Guard Unit, Police Force, and Social Security Unit.

3 . 2 . Done Village

According to the story telling by elderly people (80 years old in 1980, the time at which the history data of Done Village was collected), and from the clan which pass on several generations, it was believed that Done Village was established in 1600, evidenced by a stone seating at the temple of Sarmmeuan Village nearby, which was established at the same time. The people settling in this village were 17 families migrated from Phouan District (phouan ethnics, currently believed to reside in Xiengkhuang Province, northern part of Laos).

The villagers are Phouan ethnic minority. The village is divided into 5 administrative units. There are 464 people, 229 females, 79 houses with 97 families. Done Village is located in the suburb of the district, 3 km from district office. It is one of the Developed Village Group, called Ban Tha Group. The total area is 1,100 ha, bordered to the north and west with Tha Village, to the South with Kang Village, and the East with Hinherb District.

Done Village has strong leadership with outstanding government administration standard. As a result of its leadership, the village has been awarded with several administration statuses, namely:

- Strong party leadership award dated 30/9/2008.

- 3 cleanliness award dated 31/05/2007.
- Crime free award dated 22/06/2009.
- Drug free village award 15/09/2010.
- Cultural village award and Women Award dated 26/02/2009.
- Primary Education Graduation Award.
- Shifting-cultivation Eradication Village Award dated 15/09/2010.
- Developed Village Award 15/09/2010.

The main occupation of the villagers is rice growing, and the secondary career is vegetable plantation, livestock farming, and retailing. The village has sufficient land for farming and it is fully irrigated for dry season farming. All villagers are Buddhists and strictly follow the local, ethnic group, and national culture (which is Buddhism).

There is one complete primary school, 10 teachers (4 females), 226 students (98 females). There is one early primary school (shared with Tha Village), with 208 students (89 females). The primary school aged children enrolment rate is 100%.

There is a district hospital nearby. There are 3 village doctors in the village (2 females), there is a village medicine box (village first aid box supported by the Ministry of Health). All families have functioning toilets. Pregnant women and children were vaccinated 100%. There is one temple (ancient temple with high reputation). All villagers are Buddhists.

4 . Basic Information about the Respondents

The total number of the respondents is 127, of which 51 are females and 76 are males, with the ratio of 40.2% and 59.8% respectively. The age group between 20-29 covers 10.2% (3.9% females), 30- 39 consists of 32.3% (13.4% females), 40-49 covers 26% (11% females), 50-59 are 18.9% (8.7% females), 60-69 covers 7.9% (3.1% females), 70-79 are 3.9% (all males), and 80 or over covers only 0.8% (all males). Among the 127 respondents, 90.6% are married, 4.7% unmarried, 3.9% are widowed, and 0.8% is divorced.

The majority of the respondents work in agriculture, foresting, fishing (including family workers), and covering 72 people (56.7% of the total respondents). Some 9.4% (12 people) have self-owned business (including family workers), while 7.9% stay at home, 7.1% work as specialist personnel (doctor, teacher, accountant, nurse, etc.), and 5.5% does factory work. Management-level positions of section chiefs or higher represent 2.4%, business managers or executive officers, students, unemployed, and temporary represent 1.6% each, and temporary employee, contingent employee, part-time workers covers only 0.8%.

Education level is varied among the respondents. Higher ratio (29.1%) completed elementary school, while 27.6% completed middle school, 15% completed high school, and 11% completed college. Dropout from middle school covers 5.5% while high school dropout and “never attended school” cover 4.7% each.

The majority of the respondents have settled in the villages more than 10 years (48.8% have settled in the village 30 years or more, 19.7% have settled between 10 and 19 years, 18.9%

have settled between 20 and 29 years). Fewer numbers have settled in the village less than 10 years (5.5% between 4 and 5 years, 4.7% between 1 and 3 years, and 2.4% between 6 and 9 years). The family composition of the respondents shows that 65.5% (83 subjects) has only husband and wife. Some 19.7% is composed with 2 generations and 12.6% with 3 generations. Only 2.4% of the subjects live alone.

Goods and services listed in the household show that as many as 96.9% of the respondents have mobile phone and 95.3% have television set. The household having motorbike covers 88.2%, having bicycle covers 72.4%, and having radio covers 37.8%. The surveyed household having fixed-line phone covers 25.2%, automobile 16.5%, computer 10.2%, and only 2.4% have access to the internet.

Primary income earners of the respondents are mostly from spouses, covering 48% of the total subjects, followed by the informant (33.1%), son (7.1%), father (5.5%), daughter (3.9%), and finally mother 1.6%. Annual income earned by the entire family shows that the largest percentage of the respondents (24.4%) is between 8 million and 10 million kip, followed by between 4 million and 6 million kip.

5 . Social Capital

5 . 1 . Social Trust

The results of the analysis show that the level of social trust is relatively high in the surveyed areas. Social trust looks into whether the villagers think that people can be trusted, frequency of meeting with relations, frequency of meeting with friends, in-depth relations within the neighborhood, proportion of people the respondents have relations within their neighborhood, participation in volunteer activities, activities currently involved, frequency of participation in such activities, benefit from participating in the activities, and interest in politics.

The result of the analysis shows that the respondent rated “a lot of people can be trusted” as high as 39% in Done Village, while in Nakang Village, the ratio was 33.8%. The ratio on most people can be trusted, nevertheless, Nakang has a higher ratio than Done, 23.5% and 13.6% respectively. The ratios on some people can be trusted shows vast differences, 47.5 for Done and 25% for Nakang. While none of Done villagers feel that a few people can be trusted and no one can be trusted, Nakang presents 13.2% and 4.4% respectively. This shows the distinction between the homogeneity of Done Village and multi-ethnicity of Nakang that trusts scattered among the villagers.

Meeting relations was very active among the two villages. The highest percentage, in Nakang and Done, were found in meeting with the relations regularly (several times a week), 44.1% for the former and 39.0% for the latter. The frequency of relatively often (once a week to a few times a month) shows 25% for Nakang and 32.2% for Done. Both villages indicated that 25% of the respondents sometimes meet with their relation (once a month to a few times a year). The figure shows that the communities have a tight relationship with their relatives.

The frequency of meeting friends and acquaintances also shows that the community is closely interrelated. Done Village shows marginally higher percentage than Nakang in regularly

(several times a week) in meeting friends and acquaintances outside of school and work (42.4% to 38.2% respectively.) The frequency of relatively often (once a week to a few times a month) shows that Nakang shows much higher ratio than Done Village (42.6% and 20.3% consecutively). Done, on the other hands, shows that 32.2% sometimes meet with friends and acquaintances outside of school and work while Nakang shows only 13.2%.

Depth relations with neighborhood show that there are many people with whom the respondents have almost the same kind (52.9% for Nakang, and 50.8% for Done Village). The variable with having relations with some people in which the respondents can help each other, Done shows 37.3%, while Nakang exhibits 30.9%.

The respondents also exhibit high percentage on proportion of people they have relation within their neighborhood. The variable of knowing and interacting with most of the people in the neighborhood indicated that 40.7% were found in Done Village and 35.3% in Nakang Village. Knowing and interacting with most of the neighborhood shows that 54.4% were found in Nakang while 42.4% was found in Done Village.

Participation in volunteer activities, the highest percentage was found in sometimes participating in volunteer activities (54.2% for Done and 39% in Nakang). Often participating in volunteer activities, Nakang shows 32.4% and Done shows 27.1%. As high as 27.9% of the respondents in Nakang did not participate in volunteer activities, while some 18.6% of the respondents in Done Village did not participate. Nakang respondents were relatively active in sport association, village volunteer, village security groups, food processing and handicraft association, seniority association; while Done villagers were relatively active in seniority association, women union, and sport association.

The activities that the respondents were currently involved in also show interesting result. Nakang Village shows higher percentage in all variables, except agricultural improvement, vegetable cultivation, fruit cultivation, livestock management, etc., namely: sport, hobbies, recreation activities, disaster or crime prevention activities, irrigation, water resource management, environmental conservation, etc., handicraft production, and activities at work (labor union), with the ratio of 61.2%-42.4%, 53.1%-27.1%, 87.8%-62.7%, 44.9%-18.6%, 32.7%-10.2% respectively. In both villages, the respondents were not active in sport hobbies, and recreational activities as 83.7% in Nakang and 59.3% in Done village expressed that they never participated in it. Disaster or crime prevention activities also shows similar ratio, 72.9% for Done and 61.2% for Nakang stated that they never participate in disaster or crime prevention activities. Irrigation, water resource management, environmental conservation, most people expressed that they never join (51% for Nakang and 33.9% for Done). Fewer percentages were found in participating about once a month, 2-3 times a month, about once a week, and a few times a week. Agricultural improvement, vegetable cultivation, fruit cultivation, livestock management etc., some 32.2% in Done and 14.3% in Nakang expressed that they participated a few times a year. Approximately 22% of the respondents in Nakang expressed that they participated in agricultural improvement, vegetable cultivation, fruit cultivation, livestock management, etc. about once a week, and 13.6% of Done villagers expressed that they

participated about once a month. Some 67.4% of Nakang Village and 61% of Done villagers felt that the activities participated were productive; 71.4% of Nakang and 42.4% of Done Village felt that they have learnt how the local community or society works. As high as 81.6% of the Nakang villagers show that they have been able to contribute to the local community or society, while the ratio was 55.9% for Done. The majority of the villagers (75.5% for Nakang and 52.5% for Done) felt that they have grown more attached to the local community while most villagers (87.8% for Nakang, and 52.5% for Done) felt that they have made connections with people in the local community. As many as 46% of Nakang villagers showed that they have made friends who share the same value, while only 18.6% of them stated that they have made friends who shared the same value with them. Nevertheless, all people in Nakang Village and most people in Done Village (94.9%) said that they didn't really want to participate in the activities. It can be interpreted that the social mechanism introduced by the government make it compulsory for the villagers to join the activities, despite of they do not necessarily volunteer to participate.

The feeling whether the community group such as community associations, neighborhood association and fire cops are active or not shows that they villagers acknowledge the performance of the groups. As high as 55.9% of Done respondents and 47.1% of Nakang expressed that these community groups were very active; and the people feeling that there is some degree of activity is to some extent (36.8% for Nakang and 33.9% for Done). Regarding the interest in politics, most people are at the level between so-so and very much: 31 % in both villages were very much interested in politics, 39% of Done villagers and 13.2% of Nakang felt that they were interested in politics to some extent, and 45.6% of Nakang villagers and 22% of Done villagers were interested in politics at the level of 'so-so'. This can be concluded that the community is quite interested in politics.

5.2. Maintaining and Improving Livelihood

Most people in the two villages give the meaning of improving livelihood as to have enough food and to have enough cash earning while some people also refer to being able to buy consumer goods. The ratio of "to have enough food" was 85.3% for Nakang and 81.4% for Done. Having enough cash earning was 83.8% for Nakang and 76.3% for Done while being able to buy consumer goods was 49.2% for Done and 44.1% for Nakang.

Hardship faced in the past were mostly insufficient money to live one, while insufficient harvest, illness, injury to oneself or a family member, death of income earners, unemployment were only minor problems. The ratio of respondents feeling that insufficient harvest was hardships they faced in the past was 33.8% in Nakang and 39% in Done Village. For the villagers who regard unemployment as a hardship, the ratio was 22% in Done and 16.2% in Nakang.

The method of overcoming hardships investigated were whether the respondents get loan from the bank/ fund, borrow food from someone, borrow money from someone, receive food from someone, received money from someone, receive supplies from someone, solve the problem by themselves and receive supplies from relatives. The result of the analysis shows

that for most people, the ways of overcoming hardship is by oneself (67.6% for Nakang), and receive money from someone (39% in Done). Borrowing money from someone is around 19.1% for Nakang and 10.2% for Done Village. In expectation for hardship support, the first priority is relatives (73.5% for Nakang and 44.1% for Done). In Nakang Village, the reasonable expectation for hardship support is in son/daughters (25%), a friend (22.1%), central government 16.2%, and a village committee (10.3%). In Done Village, expectation for hardship supports are from a village committee and prefectural government, each of which is 20%, international aid agency 15.3%, central government and the bank 14%.

The improvement of livelihood of the people in the two villages is believed mainly to be carried out by themselves rather than other means of improvement. The ratio on “my livelihood can be improved by myself” was 86% in Nakang and 39% in Done Village. Others means of livelihood improvement varies in the two villages. In Nakang, waiting for help from the government was 25%, waiting for help of an influential person in the village 7.4%, and 8.8% of the villagers in Nakang believe that their livelihood cannot be improved. In Done Village, live improvement is expected to be from waiting from the government assistance (23.7%), mutual assistance group (16.9%), and waiting for help from NGO (16.9%). Regarding the area of livelihood needed to be improved the most in Done Village is increasing income (96.6%), sanitation (83.1%), child rearing (72.9%), getting food (64.4%), methods of preparing food (62.7%), getting water for household use (52.5%), getting fuel for household use (52.5%), transportation access (49.2%), communication (telephone) (40.7%), and job of children (13.6%). In Nakang Village, the order on the area of livelihood needed to be improved the most is slightly different. While increasing income is the top priority (95.6%), the second was getting food (82.4%), followed by sanitation (70.6%), child rearing and transportation access (60.3%), getting water for household use (35.3%), method for preparing food (32.4%), communication (telephone) (26.5%), getting fuel for household use (17.6%), and job of children is very little (2.9%).

Participation in a local community activity groups (kind of activity involved) looked into various aspects, namely participating in local community group that could improve the livelihood, agricultural improvement, water resource management, irrigation, livestock management, handicraft production vegetable cultivation, security, fruit cultivation, food processing, and social activities of the village. The people of Nakang Village shows the above priority in chronological order with 66.2%, 64.0%, 33.3%, 26.7%, 17.8%, 15.6%, 13.3%, and the rest under 10%. In Done Village, the first and second priority is the same as in Nakang, while the third is irrigation 16.9%, livestock management 11.9%, and vegetable cultivation 10.2%. All others are less than 10%. The results show the nature of the village where Nakang has vast area of rice field with insufficient irrigated water so that water rationing is the top priority to harmonize the farmers, while Done Village has good rice farm without irrigation. The villagers in both villages have little access to microfinance, only 37.3% in Done Village and 27.9% in Nakang Village.

5.3. Risk and Social Safety Net

Risk and social safety net looked into the threats of life, experienced a major natural disaster, war, or accident, help with the problems and worries of daily life, and kind of person or organization that the respondents could rely on when natural disaster or incident happened.

Threats to life is divided into unemployment (little income), illness or injury, food shortage, not having access to water, poor means of transportation or road conditions and traffic accidents, natural disasters (wild and flood damage, earthquake, etc), war and other. The mean score of a five point scale indicates that the scale with mans score three and above in Nakang were unemployment (4.07), poor means of transportation or road condition, traffic accidents (3.5), illness, injury (3.47), and food shortage (3.06). In Done Village, most of the scale, except war and others, shows mean score of higher than 3. The chronological order from high to low are unemployment, little income, illness, injury, food shortage, not having access to water, poor means of transportation or road conditions, traffic accidents, natural disasters (wild and flood damage, earthquake, etc.). This shows that both villagers regard most of the variables assessed as threats to life.

The people in both village experienced similar disaster, war or accident and they locate close to each other. Both villages experience wind and flood damage (63.2% for Nakang and 50.8% for Done; wildfire (20.6% for Nakang and 18.6% for Done), drought (35.3% for Nakang and 13.6% for Done), traffic accident (38.8% for Nakang, and 16.9% for Done), and war (11.8% for Nakang and 16.9% for Done).

Help with problems and worries of daily life were asked in the following variables: city hall, town or village hall; public institutions such as school or hospitals, police or firefighting organization, military, political party or politician, organization in nearby community, religious organization such as a temple or church, employer, coworkers, people in neighborhood, family, relatives, friends and acquaintances. All of these variables show that mean scores are above the median for Done village. The variables with mean scores of 3 and above are relatives (3.37), family (3.64), City Hall, town or village hall (3.51), friends, acquaintances (3.37), and people in neighborhood (3.24). In Nakang Village, none of the mean score reaches 3. Higher than average scores, nevertheless, are found in employers (2.71) while all others are less than the average.

The kind of person or organization that the respondents could rely on when natural disaster or incident happened shows that people trusted the close relation and government relatively high. The assessed variable include city hall, town or village hall, public institutions such as school or hospitals, police or firefighting organization, military, political party or politician, organization in nearby community (neighborhood association etc.), volunteer, NPO, or civic group etc., religious organization such as a temple or church, employer, coworkers, people in neighborhood, family, relatives, friends or acquaintances, and others. In Done Village the mean score above 3 include city hall, town or village hall and family (3.68), followed by relative (3.59), friends and acquaintances (3.68), public institutions such as school or hospitals (3.20), police or firefighting organization 3.12, and military 3.00. In Nakang, the variables with mean

score of 3 or higher include family 3.81, relatives 3.79, friends or acquaintances 3.29, and city hall, town or village hall of 3.19. All others have mean score of less than 3.

5.4. Social Rituals

Social ritual looked into the asset or resources that are managed jointly by member of the local society, the kind of assets; works, tasks and role that mainly man should take up; works, tasks and role that mainly women should take up; attending someone's wedding, attending funeral, participation in ceremonies, and consultation with holy man, fortune teller or someone associated with a temple or church.

Both Nakang and Done Village have assets or resources that are managed jointly by members of the local society, of which Nakang shows 88.2% and Done 100%. The kinds of assets or resources include water resource and reservoirs, water ways and rivers, forest and wilderness, roads, bridges, ceremonial facilities, and cemeteries. While in Done Village, no one has expressed that they have ceremonial facilities, villagers in Nakang expressed that they have all those facilities to jointly managed, but the ratio varies: 60.7% for water resource or reservoirs, 39.3% for waterways and rivers, 98.4% for forest and wilderness, 54.1% for roads, 70.5% for bridges, 45.9% for ceremonial facilities, and 31.1% for cemeteries. In Done Village, except ceremonial facilities, the ratio on road was 98.3% and cemeteries 96.6%, the rests are 100%. The figures show that the acknowledgement of responsibility of assets or resources jointly in Done Village is higher than in Nakang.

The works, tasks and role that mainly man should take up show that there is a distinction in Nakang and Done villagers. Although similar pattern has been found, men in Nakang taking up home work, handicraft, small business, and field/garden work are very low percentage. Higher percentage for Nakang is found in heavy work of family, main income earners, and head of family with 90.3%, 85.5%, and 83.9% respectively. Village activities, educating children, and livestock raising are 59.7%, 54.8%, and 48.4% consecutively. In Done Village, in contrast, village activities has the highest ratio (91.5%), followed by main income earner 86.4%, heavy work of family 67.8%, head of family 59.3%, home work and educating children 52.5%, handicraft 49.2%, livestock 45%, small business 47%, and field/garden work 10.2%. The results indicate that men in Done Village share the responsibility in more activities than those in Nakang.

The works, tasks and role that mainly women should take up is the opposite of what men should take up for Nakang Village, while in Done Village women take up most of the works, tasks, and roles. In Nakang Village, higher percentage of works, tasks and role that mainly women should take up are home work (91.1%), handicraft (87.1%), educate children (85.5%), village activities (59.7%), livestock (58.1%), and small business (56.5%). In Nakang, main income earner is 79.7%, followed by educating children 61.0%, home work 55.9%, heavy work of family 47.5%, head of family 44.1%, and small business 40.7%. In short, women in Done Village take heavier work, tasks, and role than those in Nakang.

In attending someone's wedding, both villages regard family, relatives, friends,

acquaintances, people in the neighborhood, and friends from work or co-workers as very important. Family and relatives were 100% in both villages, while friends or acquaintances is 100% for Nakang and 98.3% for Done, people in neighborhood 87% in Nakang and 98.3% for Done, friends from work or coworkers 82.4% for Nakang and 96.6% for Done, and employers 63.2% for Nakang and 59.3% for Done. People from a religious organization such as temple or church have the least ratios, 1.5% for Nakang and 25.4% for Done. A politician is 16.9% for Done and 32.4% for Nakang. Volunteer or people from NPOs or civic groups show 22% for Done and 29% for Nakang. The results indicate that the close relation, namely family, relatives, friends and acquaintances and people in the neighborhoods are very important for attending someone's wedding.

Attending funeral also shows a very similar pattern. All except people from religious organization such as temple or church, played a very important role in funeral, 86.8% in Nakang and 66.1% for Done. Family, relatives, friends and acquaintances are 100% for both villages. People in the neighborhood are 100% for Nakang and 98.3% for Done. Friends from work/coworkers are 97.1% for Nakang and 96.6% for Done; employer is 95.6% for Nakang and 67% for Done. Volunteer or people from NPOs or civic groups and politician are around 50% for Nakang and 25% for Done.

In responding to the question on "do you participate in ceremonies that are held in your community", both people in Done and Nakang Village have a similar trend. In Nakang, 36.8% always participated, while 20.6% as much as possible, 41.2% occasionally, and 1.5% not at all. In Done Village, 47.5% always participate, 27.1% as much as possible, 23.7% occasionally, and 1.7% not at all.

The consultation with a holy man, a fortune teller or someone associated with a pagoda or church, around 62% of the respondent in both villages sometimes have consultation. Some 25% of the respondents in Nakang and 13.6% in Done never consulted with any holy man, any fortune teller or someone associated with a temple or church. This shows that the people in both villages are somewhat religious.

6 . Conclusion

The social capital observed in the two communities in rural area of Laos has shown the uniqueness of harmonious living environment. Social network mechanism, ritual activities, social trust, norm, value, and livelihood are interwoven into a strong social texture. Both informal and formal organizations play very significant roles of strengthening, developing, and passing social capital from generation to generation.

Main features of social capital characteristics of Done Village and Nakang Village can be summarized as below:

- Supporting mechanism of social ties, mutual support is still strong. It can be drawn from the interview that social system functions as a pre-requisite for formal administration authority. Each of the village interviewed has informal system, consisting of seniority group, religious group, and spiritual network that support the

social mechanism functioning. The activities of these two groups strengthened social safety net and supervising harmonious living environment of the community.

- Carry on mutual help system. The mutual help system has been created and passed on from generation to generation. Particularly clear evidence is seen in house building, wedding ceremony, funeral, and other activities that need mental and physical support. The two communities have strong ties in these activities that become a tradition that has been practiced since the establishment of the villages. The indigenous group has exhibited stronger ties than the diversified group. In the diversified group, however, the majority's norm has become a standard that minority has to conform.
- Communal agriculture work (mutual support). Although the labour support mechanism has been fading out, strong evidence has been found in the two communities. Due to the vast land area for rice plantation and the shortage of family labour force, the community helps each other by rotating the plantation or harvesting from one family to another, particularly in relatives and close acquaintances. The indigenous group has been practicing labour rotation more than the diversified group, which labour hiring is increasingly practiced.
- Seniority support: conflict resolution, mental and physical support. The seniority group, comprising of elderly people, village authority, women union, youth union, security force of the village function as the basic social support mechanism. This group has close relationship and strong ties to steer the village activities such as conflict resolution and ceremonial events (wedding, funeral, festival, new born baby support, new house ceremonies, and other festivities in the village). The stronger performance of the seniority group exhibited, the safer and more harmonious living environment becomes.
- Informal social support on birth, death, marriage, illnesses. Strong support from the villagers, relatives, friends, and the whole community has been practiced. Gifts such as rice, liquor, livestock, vegetable, etc. have been offered to the people impacted by various misfortunes. Recently, cash have been voluntarily donated to the village authority, which functions as a formal figure that collects and passes the donation to the impacted family or groups.

In summary, the supporting mechanism of social ties, or mutual support, in rural Laos is still strong. Social system functions as a pre-requisite for the formal administrative authority. The people in rural areas carry on mutual help system for example house building, wedding ceremony, funeral, and other activities that need mental and physical support. Communal agriculture work through mutual support is still very strong. Seniority support for social mechanism in terms of conflict resolution, mental and physical support is a vital element for the social functioning. Informal social support on birth, death, marriage, and illness is still important part of their social practices and unity.

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