

saoban

VILLAGE HANDCRAFTS FROM
THE HEART OF LAOS

**Ms Noud, weaver of
None Somboun
Village, Bolikhan
District**



Most of the weavers in Bolikhan District are migrants from Houa Phan, one of the poorest and least developed provinces in northern Laos. In the case of Noud, the fourth child of a poor family of seven children, she left her remote village in Soubbau District of Houa Phan at age fifteen to escape poverty. She came to live with her uncle in Vientiane and supported herself by weaving. In Vientiane she met her present husband, Bounkhong, who was at that time a student studying agriculture in a college in the city. Noud and Bounkhong fell in love and got married in 2002. After their wedding, Bounkhong took his young wife back to live with his family in Phonesaat Village in Bolikhan district. Three years ago, the district authorities asked families who needed

more land for production to develop a new village at None Somboun. Bounkhong decided to take up the offer and moved his young family to None Somboun where they built a small house and started to farm the land near the village.



Although the government has given them land, opening up new land for cultivation is not an easy task, especially when they had no machinery to clear and level the land. Determined to build a better life for themselves, the young couple decided to persevere and work hard, hoping that life will become better progressively. So Bounkhong now besides farming his own land also works about 10 days a month as casual hire in a nearby rubber plantation where he earns 30.000 kip/dav.



This is where Noud's weaving skills have come in very handy. Income from Noud's weaving brings in about 700,000 Kip a month. "Opening up new land for farming is difficult. Even after three years, we do not produce enough rice to last the whole year. We still need to buy about half of our food needs. If not for Noud's ability to earn extra money from her weaving, our family will not be able to make ends meet", Bounkhong admitted frankly.



Noud is a good weaver and can produce good quality products. Having lived in the capital city of Vientiane before moving to Bolikhan district, Noud is more in touch with market trends and marketing outlets in Vientiane. She does not sell her woven products at the local market but often makes the half-day journey each way to sell her weaving in Vientiane herself so as to get a better price.

Her knowledge of weaving and market information is well appreciated by the women who live in the newly developed village of None Somboun. So, when PADETC initiated a weaving promotion project to help poor women in the village, Noud was elected to be the deputy head of the weaving group of 14 members. With two young children - a 5-year old daughter and a 2-year old son - to take care of and other domestic and farming chores to attend to, Noud is a very busy woman.

Despite her limited time, Noud is very committed to helping the other women in her group. She teaches the less experienced weavers how to set new designs and weave the more complicated motifs. She also helps take the other members' products to sell whenever she goes to Vientiane. All this means that she has less time for her own weaving. Pointing to a lovely piece of silk shawl she was completing, she said that she could finish it in one day if she worked on it full-time, but because of her many other chores, she now can finish only 15 to 18 pieces a month. Nevertheless, Noud is happy to lead the weaver's group and obviously pleased with the fact that she is trusted and respected by others. "Being in a group gives us a sense of solidarity. We have the opportunity to learn new things from the training and after the training we continue to meet regularly and support each other", she said smiling.



Although life is still a struggle for young Noud, she is full of ambition and hopes for the future. Her dream is that she can develop a small weaving training and production center at None Somboun where she can train women to weave and create a sale center for the weavers groups from the nearby villages. "I will continue to weave and design patterns and train others. I have seen other women in Vientiane set up small weaving workshops. I would like to be able to do that one day", the budding entrepreneur in Noud said shyly.

