



**Ms Nuthong, weaver of
Had Xiengthong
Village, Bolikhan
District**

Ms Nuthong is a dynamic organizer and a go-getter when it comes to making sure that women in her weaver’s group get as many production contracts as possible. “Yes, we will dye the silk in the color you ordered, but I also want the weaving order. Show me the design and I can assure you that Mai, my best weaver in the group, can replicate the design exactly” Nuthong persisted. She was arguing with a buyer who was there to contract Nuthong’s group to dye the silk for another group in nearby village who will receive the weaving contract. Finally, the buyer agreed to let Nuthong’s group weave one sample to show him, and if it meets the specifications, he will place an order with them for 20 scarves for a start. Such is the leadership quality of Nuthong, the head of 4 weaver groups of 60 weavers in Had Xiengthong Village in Bolikhan District

Had Xiengthong Village is an established village, and with nearly 250 households it is one of the largest villages in Bolikhan District. The village is settled mainly by people of the Moei ethnic group, a sub-group of Lao-tai people found mainly in Central Laos. The Moei ethnic group also has a long weaving tradition specializing in weaving the traditional Lao skirt and colorful skirt border.



In recent years, income from weaving for the women in Had Xiengthong Village has been falling. The reason is that the women had not changed their weaving designs or range of products much. As a result they have not kept up with the market's changing demand in styles and colors. "We work individually and mainly wove skirts and skirt-borders. The buyers at the local market do not give us a good price for our weaving as most of the women in the surrounding villages also produce the same products for sale", Nuthong explained. "In 2007, when PADETC offered to help us improve our weaving, we were happy to co-operate. Those who agree to participate in the project must agree to form weaving groups and promise to attend training and monthly meetings", Nuthong continued.



After joining the project, the women were trained in how to improve the designs, broaden the range of products, and use natural colors. Nuthong after attending training in making natural dyes experimented with various local materials and came up with a number of new colours. A dye made from a mixture of local river clay produced a warm earthy brown color which proved to be very popular with some her buyers.

Nuthong calls the color "Bolikhon brown" and she and group members have since used the new colour to weave silk scarves. At a recent craft fair, Nuthong exhibited the new scarves and they were all snatched up. Now they have received repeat order from customers overseas.

"We will have to work hard to create new designs and experiment with more new natural colors", Nuthong said. "One thing we must improve is the consistency and quality of our products. In the past we did not pay enough attention to this and so we have lost some contracts to the weaver groups in the next village", Nuthong continued. She and Mai, a fellow weaver in her village, are now determined to weave according to specifications and to make



sure that the group members pay attention to every fine detail to ensure good quality.

Nuthong's perseverance has paid off. The weaver groups now have broadened the range of their products and have attracted more buyers. PADETC also links the group with buyers who pay a "fair price" which is mutually agreed to before any contract is signed. Slowly Nuthong and her fellow weavers are seeing a gradual increase in their income which they are determined to continually improve.

Nuthong now makes about 900,000 kip a month from the sale of her weaving. Her farm worked mainly by her husband, Bounsone, produces enough rice to feed her family of three children. During the non-farming season, Bounsone also runs a little transportation business by driving his "tuk-tuk to carry passengers to and from town. With these various sources of income, Nuthong considers her family fortunate compared to others. "We have enough to eat and with the cash I earn from weaving, we can meet all our family's expenses, and keep all our children to school", she said smiling.

Nuthong dream is to see her children finish at least high school and get good jobs. Another wish is that her husband can buy a van for his transportation business.

