



TRADITIONAL ARTS
& ETHNOLOGY CENTRE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Museum Exhibition Celebrates the Voices and Visions of Ethnic Women in Laos

Luang Prabang, Laos
14 November 2014

Caregivers to Culture Keepers: Stories from Women in a Changing Laos, a new exhibition produced in collaboration with *PhotoForward*, will opened on 7 October at the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre in Luang Prabang. Featuring photographs, documentary videos, oral histories, and community research, the exhibition shares the lives of women today in the rapidly developing country of Laos.

Over the past two years, women and girls in Northern Laos have been provided with cameras and training in digital media so that they might document – for and by themselves -- their experiences. That project, called *Stitching Our Stories (SOS)*, resulted in photographs, and videos documenting how rapid change in Laos has influenced the Hmong, Kmhmu, Phounoy, Tai Dam, Tai Lao, and Tai Lue ethnic groups. This new multimedia exhibition explores themes of work, family, health, heritage and handicrafts as recorded by the SOS participants.

Eight participants received additional training to become Community Researchers. With new skills in media arts, they chose issues to explore within their communities. “Using photography and film, we were able to learn things about our family and our community that we didn’t know before,” says Chitthaphone Bounlidsavong, a university student and one of the Community Researchers.

Some Community Researchers focused on the importance of preserving their cultural heritage. Bao Xiong, pointed out that, “The next generation may not know this story, won’t wear [traditional] clothing, may not use natural materials or make by hand. They will use the materials from the market that produce from the factory.”

Keolavanh Poytady, a high school student, chose to explore Tai Lue weaving. She says, “All of Phanom villagers learn and know how to weave, because weaving is the village and ethnic group identity...I would like to pass on my knowledge to teach to the next generation.”

SOS launched in 2012 and has reached 28 women and girls in Northern Laos. SOS photographs have been exhibited in Laos and the US. SOS short films have screened at film festivals in Cambodia, England, Laos, and the United States. Three new short films about childcare, Tai Lue weaving, and sa papermaking will debut at the exhibition.

The *Stitching Our Stories: Community Research Project* and the *Caregivers to Culture Keepers* exhibition were produced in partnership with *PhotoForward* an international media arts programme. Allison Milewski founded *PhotoForward* in 2005 to empower women and girls to share their own stories through photography, community art, and documentary film. *PhotoForward* collaborates with local organizations around the world to develop sustainable and inspiring community programmes that include workshops, media resources, and ongoing project support. With cameras in their hands and the skills to create images that reflect their world, *PhotoForward* media makers

document their lives from their own perspectives and celebrate their history, while defining their futures.

Founded in 2006, the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre is dedicated to preserving the cultural diversity of Laos. TAEC operates a museum in Luang Prabang with permanent and temporary exhibitions showcasing cultures and traditions of Laos, and runs an active handicraft development programme in 12 provinces in Laos.

Links

www.taeclaos.org

www.photoforward.org

<https://www.youtube.com/user/StitchingOurStories>

Press Contact:

Donna Lednicky
Director of Marketing and Development
Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre
Ban Khamyong
Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

email: donna@taeclaos.org

phone: +856 71 253364

###

High Resolution Photos Available Upon Request

Selected photos from the exhibition taken by participants and community researchers in the Stitching Our Stories programme in Luang Prabang, Laos.



*Stitching Our Stories Community Researchers, Bao Xiong and Maiyong Xiong, practice their camera techniques.
Photo by Sia Yang*



Embroidery for Hmong New Year by textile artist Jai Ly
Photo by Pasong Ly



Lao woman harvesting rice.
Photo by Maiying Xiong



Young Lao woman at school. Today, Lao women and girls have more opportunities to attend school and pursue occupations outside of the home.
Photo by Bao Xiong



*A young Lao women practicing traditional weaving techniques. Young Lao women learn to weave from elders in their family and community.
Photo by Sompanee Xaymuangsing*



*Community Researcher Vonvilath Bounlidsavong shares her photography project with her mother, Bouachanh Bounlidsavong, at the 2013 Stitching Our Stories community exhibition at TAEC.
Photo by Pasong Ly*