



Executive Summary

Project: Women Entrepreneurs Achieving Viable IP Technologies (WEAVIT)
Target Country: Lao PDR
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To date, international law and public opinion have been ambiguous about rights to creative knowledge and work that is traditional and shared by a community and culture in the developing world. Conventional intellectual property (IP) instruments have limited applicability and there is currently no international legal framework obliging commercial entities to seek consent from or pay compensation to traditional knowledge-holders. This is not only damaging to the cultural sustainability of these communities, but a risk to the economies of countries like Lao PDR and others in the Asia Pacific region, with large craft sectors that are crucial to rural supplementary income generation, particularly for women. This project provides an avenue for artisan communities to protect their own Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) by replicating, institutionalising, and disseminating the Traditional Textile Design Database (TTDD) model.

Project goal: Strengthen the economic competitiveness of women entrepreneurs by institutionalizing the protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) in Laos, ASEAN, and beyond, through innovative Intellectual Property (IP) instruments.

Project outcomes: 1. Replicable TTDD model for licensing to other communities in Laos and ASEAN; 2. Normalization of sui-generis IP protections in Laos; 3. Expansion of TTDD model for harmonizing TCE and TK protections across ASEAN.

Outputs and Activities:

- 1.1 Two new TTDD with registered IP copyright protection for two ethnic minority communities
 - 1.1.1 Engage partners and convene Steering Committee for project with triannual meetings
 - 1.1.2 Legal review of model for developing TTDD with new communities
 - 1.1.3 Prepare materials for training and workshops
 - 1.1.4 Lao Handicraft Association and TAEC present 3 regional awareness workshops in Lao
 - 1.1.5 Identify and work with 2 communities for TTDD replication, consultation, and data collection
 - 1.1.6 Build and test TTDDs
 - 1.1.7 TTDDs community approval and copyright registration

- 2.1 TTDD facilitated commercial design collaboration between community textile artisans and external designers
 - 2.1.1 Invite design collaborations through UNFAO Mountain Partnership, WIPO, and/or open call
 - 2.1.2 Facilitate product collaboration between community and designer
 - 2.1.3 Present a Lao artisan showcase and match-up with international and local product designers
- 2.2 Recommendations for implementation of a national system of databases for TCEs and associated TK sui generis IP protection in Lao PDR
 - 2.2.1 Research and create a report identifying steps needed to strengthen the formal protection of TCEs in Laos
- 3.1 Trained TTDD creators, digital documentarians, and database managers.
 - 3.1.1 Train and coach community TTDD facilitators
 - 3.1.2 Train and mentor database managers
 - 3.1.3 Capacity-building of Lao stakeholders in using and promoting the TTDD model
- 3.2 Model is disseminated through various forums.
 - 3.2.1 Produce materials for dissemination (white paper, video, presentations, online resources)
 - 3.2.2 Share model in relevant online spaces, and ASEAN and global IP meetings

The project will commence with convening a steering committee who will meet tri-annually to guide project activities and ensure harmonisation across stakeholders. A comprehensive legal review of the model and any updates needed will follow, using lawyers specialised in conventional IP, *sui-generis* approaches, and Lao and ASEAN legal frameworks. The steering committee will comprise of TAEC, Lao Department of Intellectual Property (DIP), Lao Handicraft Association (LHA), and Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative (CIPRI).

A comprehensive training in the community facilitation and use of this model will equip 10 – 12 local facilitators to support communities in creating TTDDs with their own cultural expressions. Regional awareness-raising meetings will engage communities, CSOs, provincial government staff in the issue of traditional cultural rights and invite them to express interest in creating a TTDD. From this, two communities will be selected and matched with the trained facilitators.

An 18-month process includes 12 months for community consultation, obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and interviews and documentation of TCEs in the two communities led by the facilitators with close coaching and support of TAEC. Community members with basic technical and language skills will shadow the documentation, with the aim of their becoming the community database managers. After data collection, the facilitators, TAEC, and community database managers will compile the data, build the database with a programmer, and hold final community consultations for approval before registering the database with the Department of IP.

The project will support dissemination of this model through relevant ASEAN and IP conferences, handicraft forums, and online media. Through the training of the facilitators and capacity-building of the DIP and others, the

long-term ability to expand and establish this work will be ensured. The project will also support and showcase a design collaboration to demonstrate the model as a basis for fair commercialisation of traditional designs.

TAEC will serve as the lead organization and provide fiscal and project oversight and direction throughout the project. The four primary actors involved in the delivery have worked together previously to develop the Oma Traditional Textile Design Database, the pilot which demonstrated the capabilities of this model and was recognised by WIPO. DIP, LHA, and CIPRI are all committed to publicising and institutionalising this approach to protecting traditional designs of ethnic groups in Laos and beyond. With this, Laos would take significant strides towards enabling its local communities to protect their cultural heritage, enter into fair commercial and collaborative design agreements, and position the country as a leader in cultural intellectual property best practice with opportunity for upscaling on a global scale.