

# SFE newsletter - March 2021



The pandemic that has taken hold of our planet for the time being prevented the usual January follow-up visit to Laos. It revealed how fragile our humanity is and reminded us that no matter how many plans and projects we make, they can be slowed down or even stopped at any time.

In spite of this, the team in Laos remains very active. Some of our envoys were unable to return for leave last summer and others who returned during favorable periods have not yet been able to come back. Nevertheless, projects have been completed with minimal impact from the crisis and others are waiting for authorizations to start. Finances have been found for a large number of projects.



## Impact of Covid in Laos and involvement of the SFE:

The impact is in fact indirect. Health care workers prepared for the pandemic by implementing a sanitary protocol similar to that used in all countries: wearing masks, hand disinfection, barrier gestures...

In concrete terms, these measures have had a beneficial effect on hygiene in provincial and district hospitals and in healthcare centers.

The Covid mission entrusted by the WHO to an SFE envoy based in Attapeu continues in the 7 southern provinces, from Bolikhamsai to Attapeu. It started at the end of 2020 and should cover a period of 9 months in order to train the medical staff in all the southern hospitals.



## TerraCare in the South:

In our November newsletter, we wrote about the TerraCare project that had started. This is a partnership between the SFE and TerraClear, a non-profit company that produces ceramic water filters locally. <https://www.terraclear.org/2021/01/04/introducing-terraclear-new-video-about-reaching-everyone-with-clean-water/> Subsidized by the SFE in favor of the 10,000 poorest families, the distribution of these water filters is now well underway in the four southern provinces of the country. This project also includes an educational component consisting of training in: health, hygiene, the dangers of open defecation, sanitation training (in 6 sessions) and incentive to build dry pit latrines.





48% of the rural population of Laos does not use proper sanitation and 24% of the total population of the country practices open defecation. Population density has increased, but this traditional practice of going into the forest continues, and it has a significant impact on digestive diseases in the community that can lead to stunted growth in children, as well as other negative health impacts.

The concept of a dry pit latrine is simple and is a first step in changing behavior. A dry pit latrine is made from local materials and can be built with simple gardening tools. First, a hole is dug a half-meter wide and 1 meter deep. A plate is placed over the hole (made of woven bamboo for example), and finally a small building is built around the hole. After each use, ashes or soil are placed in the hole to cover the excrement and avoid the proliferation of insects and bad smells. Once the hole is two-thirds full, the family can dig a second one, move the plate and the building, and plant a tree that will benefit from the fertilizer of the first pit.

Through these actions, the TerraCare project is committed to improving the lives of the most vulnerable in Southern Laos. Clean water through subsidized filters, and now improved sanitation practices through dry pit latrines are indeed transforming people's daily lives!

## New projects:

Beginning 2021, several projects will start and target new areas of work.

### Vientiane:

- mental health: in collaboration with a Lao psychiatrist, this project, which began in February, aims to train medical staff in this field as well as to raise awareness among families concerned by a loved one suffering from mental illness in order to take charge of these people and help them to be more autonomous.

- deaf or hard of hearing people: the SFE is partnering with the "good hands" action to improve the inclusion of these people by teaching them Lao sign language, combined with vocational training in food services, in collaboration with a local coffee shop.

Sékong: This project, which is focused on the training of health personnel in the various hospitals and health centers, just started in February for a 3rd phase of 3 years.

Attapeu: "Inclusive community-based development" project for people with disabilities, in collaboration with the province's social affairs department, with the goal to together identify these people and put them in touch with the various support services available in Laos.

**To support this project, the SFE and its partner the CMMF are launching:**

## Event "A heart for Laos 2021"

**SFE and CMMF "Stay Connected" Support Action – Pentecost Monday, May 24, 2021**



The "A Heart for Laos 2021" event aims at supporting two projects in particular: assisting people with disabilities, and improving the capacities of the nursing school in Attapeu, as well as helping the French expatriates that are in charge of these projects.

Alone or in a small group, you are invited to "make your heart beat" and to move: walk, run, bike ride, run on a mat indoors... and to collect support from your friends and family which can be proportional to the performance achieved!

**MORE INFORMATION on:** <https://www.sfe-laos.org/news/> and <https://lecmmf.fr/uncoeurpourlelaos2021>

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A huge thank you to all the envoys, donors and volunteers who are involved in the work of the SFE in Laos or in Europe. The commitment of each and every one is necessary for this work to continue, especially in these special times when the future is even more uncertain than ever.

Philippe Klopfenstein, SFE Chairman



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