

Help yourself: What I learned from my Development Studies placement

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Development is contagious. This is the lesson I learn during my visit to Mok Mai, a district in northern-central Laos. I also learn about the wet season. If you're going to drive up a mountain, you're going to get stuck, literally, in the mud.

I visit the remote villages of Ban Tham Ioy, home to 49 families living in 41 houses. With the help of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, toilets have been built and water systems installed. The villagers are now building a school.

A 'cow bank' provides income—a cow is lent to a family who, when the cow gives birth, give the calf to another family. The bank has grown from five to seven cows.

The head of the village smiles. “Before ADRA, we didn't have toilets, hospital, water system. Now because of the project, we have.”

After lunch (soup with a turkey's foot), the primary purpose of the visit begins. The 2012-13 yearly report meeting brings ADRA staff, government officials and village leaders together. They discuss the activities of the past year, the 11 villages and what can be improved, and most importantly, how to improve according to the need, skill and interest of each village. They emphasise the importance of teaching people how to use the water system and toilets, rather than simply having them installed.

The 47 people in the four-hour meeting are an inspiration. They come from different places, employment situations and backgrounds, but they come with a shared purpose—to help people help themselves. **TEACH**

Chelsea travelled to Laos as part of her placement for her International Poverty and Development Studies course.



A woman from the villages of Ban Tham Ioy in Laos

[Photograph: Chelsea Mitchell]