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Larry D. Woodson
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U.S.A.

Re: KHAO LAO 1998

Dear Larry,

I just returned to Kyiv, Ukraine after visiting Lao after a 33-year absence from my I.V.S. days teaching at Dong Dok from 1963-65. It was stimulating as I landed at Vientiane airport during the "Bi Mai" (Lao New Year) and was showered with cool water to relieve the torrid heat of April. I didn't remember it being quite so hot and dusty as all of Vientiane is torn up as they are putting in storm drains and cutting down all the trees along the Mekong and main avenues which is a real shame.

I visited the National University of Laos (formerly L'Ecole Superieur d'Pedagogie) and searched for my apartment, and the agricultural buildings and farm. It was a far cry from the early 60's when we (Bill Rufener and I) were building the school farms with the help of one elephant and a John Deere tractor. I did find the John Deere Tractor half buried in the dirt outside the old maintenance shed that Pat Basler and Dell Johnson held forth building and running classes. The university is badly in need of maintenance and most of the old buildings that USAID funds helped build in the late 50's and early 60's are being eaten away by the termites and collapsing. Even though my apartment was still standing, the rafters and ceiling were caving in. I took photos and found my counterpart's house that we helped build. The new occupants knew nothing of the days of the 60's but were so hospitable that we drank tea and fresh coconut and talked about the new Lao PDR.

After returning twice to the university at K-9, I decided to visit the Embassy and see what was happening in the development community and with educational and agricultural investments. I met with the American Ambassador, Wendy Chamberlin who was also an I.V.Ser at Dong Dok in the 70's. We discussed the great needs at the National University and the feasibility of establishing an endowment fund to help support improvements in the system. We thought of having a multinational board of Lao and Americans who had taught at the university or studied there during the 1950's to 70's. If we could raise funds for providing value-added activities and computers to link up to the Internet and/or provided better information services to the Lao students, our endowment fund would be most welcome. It also would be sustainable if we could raise a base amount that would be invested.

My appeal to all I.V.S. alumni is to assess if there is sufficient interest to begin this effort in contributing to institutional strengthening through establishing a private foundation in Lao PDR. We could approach the Ford Foundation and the Asia Foundation as well as private contributions from those of us who served in Laos with I.V.S. and other organizations.