



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Press release – “New Life Handicraft Shop”: a UNODC-AFESIP Initiative

Acting for Women in Distressing Circumstances in Laos (AFESIP) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have jointly opened a shop on 25th of June 2010 called *New Life Handicraft*, located at the 450th Market in Vientiane Capital on Kounbouleum Road.

AFESIP and UNODC support and assist the Government of the Lao PDR in protecting and rehabilitating the impoverished and vulnerable populations in Laos. These groups include victims of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, people living with HIV/AIDS, former and current drug addicts and their dependants as well as former opium producers. Both organizations reaffirm the need to foster and strengthen inter-agency partnerships in order to support the Government’s efforts in facilitating the protection and rehabilitation of these groups.

AFESIP and UNODC recognize the need to build skills and working capacities of these vulnerable communities in order to ensure successful reintegration with society. The two organizations currently offer vocational training activities aimed at providing the beneficiaries with income generation and livelihoods opportunities.

The *New Life Handicraft* shop is a project jointly run by the AFESIP’s social enterprise *Fair Beauty* and UNODC’s Alternative Development Projects in the Northern provinces as well as the Drug Demand Reduction Pilot Project at the Somsanga Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre in Vientiane. Proceeds from the sales are directly reinvested into income generating activities for these vulnerable groups. With a strong growing consumer market in the Lao PDR, part of the offered trainings target the development of market-oriented, hand-made and natural products – such as handicrafts, beauty products, literacy games and so on.

AFESIP’s *Fair Beauty* was created in 2007. It is a training and income generating activity that supports victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The initiative helps the rehabilitation process for these victims , primarily through financial independence.

Fair Beauty Organic Cosmetics is a new range of organic beauty products created in partnership with the Lao Organic Product Promotion Association (LOPPA) and AFESIP Social Enterprise to empower nature, Lao women and consumers from all over the world. Organic Bergamot Shampoo, a wide range of Organic soaps and Organic Massage oils are another line of *Fair Beauty* Cosmetics available at the *New Life Handicraft* shop.

AFESIP *Fair Beauty*'s objective is to support the empowerment of children and women victims of human trafficking and exploitation. *Fair Beauty* works with one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of Lao society.

By providing job opportunities in Fair Trade conditions, AFESIP *Fair Beauty* supports their economic, social and psychological empowerment to foster sustainable independence. AFESIP Social enterprise *Fair Beauty* now has 3 operational branches:

- Production and sale of *Fair Beauty* organic cosmetics products, in cooperation with the Lao Organic Product Promotion Association (LOPPA)
- Production of Handicrafts: handmade Champa flowers in Lotus Fibers, gift cards and frames in Mulberry Paper.
- A beauty training salon in Vientiane Capital

UNODC's engagement in Income Generation & Marketing (IGM) activities takes place through its Alternative Development programs in the Lao PDR. IGM is highly effective in improving villagers' living conditions and increasing household incomes, particularly in settings where subsistence agriculture is gradually being replaced by an evolving cash economy. IGM activities coupled with agricultural development - directly benefits former poppy farmers who previously relied on opium as their sole cash crop.

One of the central tenants of IGM is to increase the income generated in former opium-growing communities by building on traditional knowledge, i.e. by turning goods previously made for own-use into marketable, profitable and sustainable income-generating products.

IGM is now also being implemented through the Recreational Therapy and Vocational Training at the Somsanga Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre. Vocational training is offered in screen printing, food processing, handicraft production, construction, and IT.

Recent partnerships with the private sector have resulted in new opportunities for treated patients who participate to the training programmes. With internships established in the sectors of textile, screen printing, and motorcycle repair among others, former drug users are given opportunities to rebuild their lives.

Somsanga patients have successfully produced a wide range of screen printed T-Shirts and wooden learning games for children, which are also available at the *New Life Handicraft Shop*. The proceeds from these products are used to ensure the sustainability of the Project. Part of the proceeds also goes directly to the producers.

UNODC's Alternative Development projects in the Northern provinces of Phongsaly, Houaphanh and Oudomxay also offers vocational training and small scale processing of agricultural, handicraft and weaving products to opium users seeking treatment. By providing beneficiaries with income generation and livelihood opportunities, the drug abuse problem that is rooted in

poverty and the lack of opportunity is tackled more effectively. Support and strengthening the capacity of people and communities that have been victimized by drugs is a key element in the global fight against drug abuse.

By creating skills, knowledge, and job opportunities for former drug users and producers, UNODC supports the economic and social empowerment of those who have been victimized by illicit drugs.

The *New Life Handicraft* joint initiative helps rebuild lives of those having been once affected by drugs, trafficking and exploitation.

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