

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY VIENTIANE



18 November 2014

Australia-Lao clean water collaboration

A simple and versatile Australian technology, adapted for local use, is helping prevent disease and support local development by delivering clean, potable water for rural Lao communities.

The clean water initiative, led by Australian not-for-profit group Abundant Water, is also empowering communities to better manage their water and sanitation needs, strengthening the culture of research and development in the Lao PDR, and providing vital work for the Lao pottery industry.

Abundant Water's innovative clay pot water filters, being built by indigenous potters in Laos, are able to eliminate waterborne diseases like dysentery, gastro-enteritis, cholera and typhoid.

Many of these diseases are endemic in rural villages in parts of the Lao PDR and other developing countries.

The simple ceramic water filters, which have earned Abundant Water a nomination for a UN best practice award, are made from natural materials, such as coffee grains and clay, using traditional techniques.

Australia's Ambassador to the Lao PDR, John Williams, said Abundant Water's simple filter technology had helped deliver potable water to over a thousand households and a number of schools in rural Laos.

He said the innovation had the potential to reach many more communities as new partners recognised the value.

"In partnership with quality aid organisations like ChildFund, Helvetas, PADETC and CDEA, Abundant Water is helping break the cycle of disease, illness and poverty caused by water-borne diseases," Williams said.

"The ability to build the water filters from inexpensive, locally-sourced materials, means the technology has extensive reach into remote, rural communities, making it highly suitable for a country like the Lao PDR."

Chris Mastaglio, Lao PDR Country Director for Australian NGO ChildFund, said his organisation had been working with Abundant Water for more than a year to pilot water filters in schools in Nonghet, Xieng Khouang province.

"The filters are playing a vital role in ensuring children have access to clean drinking water in school," Mastaglio said.

“ChildFund and Abundant Water are making the most of the learning opportunities presented by this collaboration to try and develop a model that can be scaled up to support other poor communities in the Lao PDR.”

Australian engineer and Abundant Water CEO , Sunny Forsyth, said after six years in the Lao PDR, the program was more than ready to scale up to support other communities.

“Our approach transfers knowledge and expertise, and develops local capability and ownership, increasing the likelihood of ongoing use of the technology,” Forsyth said.

“Abundant Water is training Lao villager potters in our water filter technology and micro-financed business approaches.”

“We are developing a model for the propagation of low-cost programs enabling anyone in need, anywhere in the world, to access clay pottery water filter technology, so they too can benefit from safe drinking water,” he said.

Abundant Water receives much of its funding from Rotary Australia and private donations from Australians.

For more information, see www.abundantwater.org.

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