Building from the ground up The District Government partners with Poverty Reduction Fund for community planning

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The Nakai District Government is actively preparing for the future after the Resettlement Implementation Period (RIP) through its new partnership with the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF). From the 29th to the 31st of May 2017, 14 District staff, including the Deputy Governor of Nakai Mr Thonekeo Chanthavong participated in a workshop in Vientiane with key representatives of the PRF. The aim of the workshop was to review the Nakai District’s field manual on planning in preparation for updating the Village Development Plans (VDPs) in each of the resettlement villages. The workshop was run by Mr Sengpeth Vannavong, the head of the PRF’s Community Development Division. The PRF is a multi-sector program under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry which aims to build the capacity of communities and institutions in using a community driven approach for planning and development.

During the workshop the District and the PRF discussed how to adapt the Participatory Planning Manual from the Ministry of Planning and Investment into a practical guide for Nakai’s specific context. The manual is based on the principles of Community Driven Development, and the idea that, given the right support, the villagers themselves are best-placed to make plans for their community. Mr Sengpeth explained that using this approach can be a significant change in thinking for anyone who is used to a more traditional,
?top-down? approach. He noted in contrast that the Nakai District staff showed their familiarity with the concepts, and their readiness to integrate them into the planning process. After the RIP, due to close at the end of 2017, the District Government will take the lead in project implementation on the plateau. Their projects will use both Government budgets and NTPC? s Nam Theun 2 Development Fund (NT2DF). Some of the NT2DF will be targeted to village priority projects from the Village Development Plans. Because the VDPs will be one of the cornerstones for development projects after the RIP, the District Government sought the support of the PRF to update them. The key challenge, according to Mr Sengpeth, will be to help both the resettlers and the District adjust to plans that are not defined by the requirements of compensation or the direction of the resettlement project. With long-term funding, support and an active District Government, the villagers can set their own agenda.