



CASE STUDY

SUSTAINABLE RATTAN

DECEMBER 2016

BECAUSE WE CARE ABOUT OUR FOREST



Mr. Linhthong La-Intong, head of the Sobphouan village rattan forest management group, and head of the village patrol team, shows us an edible fresh rattan shoot. Photos and text by Nadim Boughamti, WWF.

When Mr. Linhthong La-Intong moved to Sobphouan Village from his native Xiangkhouang Province some 13 years ago, things were very different.

“But one thing stayed the same,” La-Intong tells us. “It’s our forest.”

The village’s nearby forest is more diverse these days, he tells us. He mentions seeing more wild pigs and deer, and that the villagers see to it personally that poachers don’t get their way in their protected forest.

“When illegal hunters are caught by our patrol, we take them to the village chief. The first time they get a stern warning.

Second time offenders get fined 500,000 Kip and the third time it’s 1.5 million [Kip]. The fourth time, they go to jail.”

The villagers care about their forest. Last year as well as this year, they actually declined to request a harvest quota from authorities when they noticed inadequate rattan density.

Instead, many households in the village grow rattan shoot at home and in the nearby forest. La-Intong tells us that his family averages an income of about 3 million Kip per month from rattan shoot cultivation.

La-Intong explains how back when he was a young newlywed who had just

moved to Sobphouan, he used to collect wild rattan shoot from the forest to eat and sell at nearby markets.

“I didn’t know how to grow it,” he remarks.

His village joined WWF’s project in 2006 and received 5,000 seedlings, shared between 16 households. The objective was twofold: To give an opportunity to the villagers to explore sustainable rattan cultivation, and to test a potentially sustainable income generating activity.

Today, the rattan cultivation area in the village has expanded from 40 hectares to the project’s onset to a current 384 hectares.



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While many families benefit from their rattan shoot yields, revolving funds generated by the community cultivation zone are used to finance forest patrols, pay for basic infrastructure, forest path signs, for contributions to the local schools and other community expenditures.

“There are three harvest periods, and we have averaged about 9 million Kip per harvest before” says La-Intong, referring to the rattan cane product.

This is the more familiar application of rattan: rattan cane for furniture.

“The first crop we measured in weight, but that didn’t work out, as the canes dried out and lost a lot of their mass,” says the Village Chief’s Deputy Mr. Man Lavanasith.

Production is nowadays measured in number of rattan canes, which have to be removed from the harvested plants, and prepared for either shipment, or further processing into another products. ■



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Wild Rattan Forest, Eastern Laos.



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RATTAN



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Village Rattan production group, eastern Laos.



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FSC certified rattan cane, Vientiane prefature processing factory.