Community Event Narrative and identification of vulnerable households
(Focus group discussion guide)

The purpose of the focus group discussion is four-fold: First, an outline of the shocks that have affected the community during the last ten years should be made. The outline will secondly form the basis of the identification of potentially interesting households to be invited to the semi-structured interviews. Third, we would like to understand some of the values in the community concerning coping strategies and risk sharing mechanisms. Ideas on prevention will in addition be explored in order to describe some of the local explanatory models of wellbeing and misfortunes. Finally, the focus groups will provide insights into the type and level of perceived access to and use of government and non-governmental programs in the community.

The discussions in the focus groups are especially useful for capturing the normative aspects of community collaboration while the personal interviews will focus on the actual practices including risk-sharing mechanism as they unfolded during specific event.

The participants in the focus group. Two discussions are to be held – one inviting women and the other inviting men. In each group 8-10 person who are knowledgeable of the community history and has lived in the community for at least the last five years should be invited. They should be 25-50 years old and be willing to participate in the discussion. They should represent all clusters in the village if possible. If a program is implemented in the village, ask to have members as well as non-members invited. The village head should not participate.

If a cluster of households recently have been added to the community, make sure to have at least one representative from these families. When asking the village head for help in mobilizing participants for the focus group it is essential that he understands that no benefit or harm will accompany the participants. We need residents who know about the living conditions in the village in terms of agriculture and other sources of income, health and education, active support programs/organizations in the community.

The guide is divided into six sections:

PART 1: Community History
PART 2: Event Calendar and identification of affected households
PART 3: Community risk sharing mechanisms and other coping strategies
PART 4: Perceived access to and use of Programs and organizations.
PART 5: Notions of prevention and mitigation strategies
PART 6: Community concerns

Before starting the discussion it is important to emphasize to the participants that the information they provide will be anonymous and that the households that will be mentioned as examples will not receive support or be punished after this discussion. The objective of the visit is to understand the conditions in the village. The work is not linked

to a program that can assist the communities. However, some of the households might be invited to individual interviews during the next days.

Linkages from the focus group discussions to the interviews. The data collection tools are designed in a sequencing manner and it is important to link them as much as possible to assure as rigorous and solid data as possible. Remember to use the findings in the focus groups when administering the semi-structured interviews especially on these issues:

1. Probe on the benefits individuals have received from the different groups discussed in the focus groups (relatives, neighbors, government etc)
2. Probe on changes in livelihood individuals have experienced as discussed in the focus groups.
3. Probe on gender differentiation in access to resources.

Instruction to interviewers is marked in normal text in brackets [remember…..] in the guide.
Suggestion on probing is marked in italics in brackets *[probe…]* in the guide.

PART 1: Community history

[To start off the discussion it is important that all participants get a chance to say something early in the discussion and are assured that they will be understood - with or without interpreter. As initial question ask for example how long each person has lived in the village and where they lived before if applicable].

1. When was this community/village established? Have new clusters been added during the last 5-10 years? If yes, are any of you living in the added clusters? [If no, make a note of the cluster not being represented and ask the participants during Part 2 if they have heard of shocks or setbacks in these families].

2. How many ethnic groups live here? What are the different languages spoken?

3. How do most households earn a living? How about the remaining households, how do they earn a living?

4. Perceived wealth/poverty: Think about the best off households at one end [1] of this bar [show image] – what do they have? Now think about the poorest households at the other end of the bar [5] – what do they have? How about between the poorest and the best off – how many groups are there and what do they have? (Poorest = 1…..Best off = 5). Estimate how many households there are in each group. [Use large chart or the graphic illustration of the bars].

PART 2: Community Event Calendar

5. Has the village changed over the past five to ten years? What are the positive changes? What are the negative changes? [In non-Lao speaking villages make sure that the terminology of 'negative change' works and make a note of what wording was used] *[Probe when necessary: New or loss of sources of income, more or less families live here, new or broken infrastructure (such as road, clinic, school), support from the government or NGOs, resettlement, migration of men or women, health problems]* Are fewer households poor now than before?

[Refer to the list of shocks in Annex A when needed.] [For the next question use large chart to note negative change, number of households affected, names of households, poor/average/better off status] [List all mentioned events and when they occurred (year and month(s) if it is remembered. Encourage all participants to add to the list by repeating the events mentioned i.e. you mentioned a flooding in 2000 – do you remember other episodes of flooding?]

6. [For each type of event named, ask]: Please tell us about this event – how did it cause harm to households? How did it affect the community?

7. Which type of household was affected? *[Probe if necessary: Poorest, poor, better off, landowners, traders, female headed households]* Who [ask for names] were in particular hard hit by this event? [Note the names of the households for potential follow-up interview] What were some of the reasons for the hardship in these households? Were women in the households harder hit than men? Were children?

PART 3. Community risk sharing mechanisms and other coping strategies

8. When [Refer back to the shocks that had happened on the community and ask question 8-9 for at least three types of shocks] happens in your community what support does a households typically receive from:
    a. Relatives? *[Which?On the husband or wife's side? Living in or outside the village]*
    b. Neighbors? *[Same or different ethnic group]*
    c. Landlord or employer?
    d. Community group? *[Same or different ethnic group]*
    e. Credit and savings group?
    f. Village head authority?
    g. Club or association?
    h. Religious leaders?
    i. Local government?
    j. NGOs or other donors?
    k. The Party?
    l. Anyone else?

9. How important are these persons/organizations for households in need of help? *[Probe: beneficial, neutral, detrimental]* [Ask for each of the groups in question 12 above]

10. We would like to ask about differences between men and women. In general do men and women ask different people for help? If yes, who are women most comfortable asking? And men? Do men and women ask for different types of help? If yes, in what ways? Have these traditions changed during the last ten years? If yes, in what ways?

11. Do families in need ask the same group of people every time they are faced with a problem? If yes, are there different clusters/groups of households that normally help each other? How does it work? How do you get into that type of group? *[Probe: based on kinship, political ties, same economical situation, farming experiences, other]* Are there families in this community who do not belong to an informal group? To whom do they turn when in need?

12. What different sources of loans are available in this community? What are the interest rates? What are the other conditions related to the loan?

13. Who normally asks for the loan? Women or men? What are the reasons?

14. Do women own some of the household assets? [Land, livestock, house, tools, money you have]. If yes, which?

PART 4: Perceived access to and use of Programs and organizations.

15. Do any district officials live in the community? Do you know any district officials by name?

16. What role does the local government play during negatives changes? [Refer back to actual events] What role would you like them to take?

17. Are there any government financed programs offering support to households in this community? If yes, which? What services do they provide? Who is benefiting? Are the benefits fairly distributed? If no, what are the problems? *[Probe: food security related programs, programs addressing children's health, women/men's health, scholarships]*

18. Are there any non-governmental programs or projects active in the community? If yes, which? What services do they provide? Who is benefiting? Are the benefits fairly distributed? If no, what are the problems?

19. Are any health insurance schemes working in this community? If yes, who runs the scheme? What does it offer? Who have benefited from it? How do you enroll? What benefits have members received and how useful are the benefits to them? How many households participate in the scheme from this community? Please name the participants you know of [Note names for potential invitation to follow-up interview]

20. Are other programs or projects supporting some of the households in this community? If yes, which? [If names of programs are not known, take a brief description of the benefits and targeting].

PART 5: Notions of prevention and mitigation strategies

21. After these episodes, have some of the households or the whole community made some changes to lower the negative changes for the future? *[Probe: depending on which negative change the community experienced: diversify crops, new or increased savings, rotating credit schemes, going to different health facility, using mosquito nets, stopped smoking, use bicycle helmet, changed job, migration, new groups of friends, gift giving, increase giving to spirits, contributing to the collections done by the village head, contacting the local government, community based health insurance schemes, other]* Do you consider it likely that a similar

event could happen again? What are the barriers for making adjustments/changes? For how many households? What are the opportunities for making this type of changes?

22. We would like to understand how decisions are made in this community. Are these types of strategies [as mentioned above - crop diversification etc.] discussed in the community? If yes, who are people generally discussing with? *[Probe: village head, mass organization representatives, kin, neighbors, traders, persons living outside the community, others]* If no, what are the reasons? *[Probe: is it considered a private matter, only to be discussed with kin, neighbors, others?]* Do women and men tend to have different ideas on how to make decisions on changes in the household? How are differences between men and women settled? Are they discussed outside of the household?

23. We would like to ask you about the possibility for avoiding that these negative changes happen again [refer to experienced shocks]. Which of the episodes could have been avoided? If any, how? If none, what are the reasons?

24. Were negative changes man-made? Were they caused by nature/spirits? Or both?

PART 6: Community concerns

25. What are the negative changes that people most worry about in this community? What are the reasons?

26. Are poor households in general worried about other types of negative changes than better off households are? If yes, what are some of the reasons for these differences? [In mixed communities, are some ethnic groups more concerned about some events than other groups?]

27. Are women in general concerned about other types of negative changes than men are? If yes, what are some of the reasons for these differences?

The end.
Thank you very much for your time and input!