

Cross-Border Transportation Infrastructure Development
and Hiv/Aids Vulnerability
at Nongkhai-Vientiane Friendship Bridge



สถาบันวิจัยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Shakti R. Paul
Amornthip Amaraphibal
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Foreword

This research paper is a part of a series of studies on cross-border migration produced by the Asian Research Centre for Migration (ARCM). It investigates the relationship between transportation and HIV/AIDS in the context of migration. It also provides a better understanding of the changing HIV/AIDS situation in the target areas: Nongkhai in Thailand and Vientiane in Laos, connected by the Mekong River Friendship bridge. This paper, conducted in 2000, examines the links between the construction of the infrastructure and transnational migration and health issues.

Upgrading transport infrastructure has a very strong positive impact on the two destination points it links, in terms of the elimination of obstacles that prevent free movement of people and goods and the reduction of transport costs. However, this does not come as just an economic cost alone. The flip side of the coin in upgrading transport links includes some adverse social costs too, especially the health aspect.

We would like to thank Ajarn Pichai Kanchanapreecha for acting as local interlocutor and arrangement of logistics, interviews, etc. Our special thanks to the staff of AIDS/STD Departments of Provincial Public Health office of Nongkhai and Mukdahan for local data collection and organization of the field survey in their respective areas. In particular, we are indebted to the following individuals for their generous help in the conduct of this study: Mr. Sanan Monnenag, Khun Virat, Khun Nippon. Mr. Suwan Boontae, Khun Yong, Mr. Michael Neblitt, Khun Pornthep, Dr. Wanchai, Mr. Intong Leusinsay, Mr. Sommai, Mr. Tony Lisle, Ms. Pauline Taylor, Mr. Henk Veerdig, Mr. Inpeng Rasprasith, Dr. Ounkham Souksavanh, Mr. Udom Waitoolkiat, Mr. Ekkachai Patumpornvorakul, Mr. Chalerm Rojanabenjawong and Khun Maeo.

Many thanks to Graham Bennet and Allan Beesey for editing the report. A special thank to Moumita Paul and Mr. Pakpong Sangsoi for the preparation of the maps, and Ms. Sajin Prachason for the preparation of the manuscript. Our sincere gratitude to the Ford Foundation for the funding of this project and many other ARCM activities.

Lastly, We hopes that this research findings and recommendations will be beneficial for the relevant organizations in developing ideas and useful programs to combat HIV/AIDS.

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Executive Summary

This research project aims to study the links between cross-border transportation infrastructure development, subsequent local and trans-national population migration and mobility and the resultant health problems, particularly the transmission of HIV/AIDS in the development area. Nongkhai – Vientiane where the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is located was chosen as the preferred study-site with Mukdahan - Savannakhet as the control-site. The total period covered by the study was divided into three phases: pre-construction (before 1992), construction (1992 - April 1994), and post-construction (April 1994-1997). The research was conducted in November 1997-July 1998. Secondary data with qualitative analysis was carried out with the relevant sources using interviews and cross-examinations.

The construction of the friendship bridge has facilitated and maintained the movement of people and opened the space for trade and commerce opportunities. There was a sharp rise in the numbers of vehicles, especially during the opening of the bridge. Thai official data on population movement shows an increase in figure but became sluggish in 1996 due to economic recession. However, Laotian data differently reflected a steady climb in the population flow which means that no real decline in the figure. A flow of people between Nongkhai and Vientiane can be classified into six groups. Tourists compose the highest proportion, followed respectively by traders, truckers, migrant labours sex workers and local Thai and Laotian people, who continue to go back and forth as before. Compare with Mukdahan-Savannakhet, following the opening of the bridge was seen a drop in both numbers of vehicles and people movement; however, in 1997 there was some increase due to rainbow trade effects with Vietnam. For trade, exports from Thai have increased continuously, while those from Lao were likely to decrease with highly fluctuation. Interestingly, unlike Nongkhai-Vientiane where growth rate of trade value slowed down in recent years to 3.2% in 1997, Mukdahan-Savannakhet showed a growth of 84% in the same year as the result of the rainbow relations.

There was an indirect relationship between the bridge development and HIV/AIDS situation in the area. For example, a rise in vehicles moving between Nongkhai and Vientiane had resulted in thousands of Thai and Lao truck drivers crossing in both directions and an increase in the number of cross-border traders. The construction led to many new buildings like hotels, department stores, shop houses, roads and highways in the area, which used the services of a large number of migrant workers from the neighboring provinces as well as Laos. Both groups showed increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS transmission mainly through unsafe sexual contacts. As attracted by new developments, a large number of Thai, Laotian and foreign tourists, especially those staying overnight outside their home country, would also appear to be vulnerability but may be to a lesser degree. For Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai, a lack of awareness about the risk factors associated with HIV/AIDS has resulted in poor preventative measures.

Related to STD incidence, Nongkhai figure presents a outstanding fall from 4.88 per 10,000 population in 1993 to 0.92 in 1997. In Mukdahan, there was a decline over years but later climbed up between 1996-1997.

Recommendations

Local Provincial Level:

1. Form a “local working group” on HIV/AIDS for migrant and mobile populations to develop and/or improve HIV/AIDS service.
2. Organize a local workshop as an initial stage for the formation of the proposed working.
3. Develop programmes for especially vulnerable mobile population to improve HIV/AIDS awareness and support services for them.
4. Monitor and review programme Laotian CSWs in Nongkhai to identify contacts and provision of services. Such a review should include close monitoring of the new arrivals, rapid assessment of their HIV awareness, intensive HIV/STD education for the new arrivals, condom supply and use, and diagnosis and management of STDs.
5. Collaborate between Nongkhai and Vientiane, for instance information sharing about communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS, sharing IEC materials, referral of patients between countries, and prevention and care to high mobile groups on both sides of the border. Small ‘pilot’ collaborations should be done before any joint planning.

National Level:

1. Develop a clear, precise and practical national policy on migrant population and HIV/AIDS populations. Integrate these policies with overall policies on migrant population in the country.
2. Raise awareness on migrant and mobile population issue among government officials, NGOs and the general public. Support activities at the district and provincial levels and guide or channel additional resources from local or outside donors to the priority areas.
3. Initiate mass media programme for Thai and Lao populations in the border areas to disseminate information.
4. Develop special programme for Mukdahan, especially before construction of the proposed bridge. Highly recommended to form a local working group in Mukdahan similar to Nongkhai. The group will then be in a position to make all necessary preparation for their province.

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Contents

Foreword

Executive Summary

Part I: Research Methodology

1. Introduction	1
2. Cross-border Transportation Links Between Thailand and Laos	3
3. HIV/AIDS Situation in Thailand and Laos	4
4. Objectives of the Project	5
5. Site Selection and Feasibility Study	5
6. Study Methods, Data Collection and Analysis	7

Part II: Study Findings

7. Overview of Thai-Lao Relationship	11
8. Construction of the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge	11
9. Transportation Industry	14
10. Population Mobility	18
11. Trade, Economy and Social Impact	23
12. HIV/AIDS Risk Situations	25
13. HIV/AIDS/STDs Situations	45
14. Conclusions	49
15. Recommendations	51

References	54
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Appendix	57
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PART I

1. Introduction

By virtue of Thailand's rapid economic growth over the past few decades, the government and private investors have built or improved a great deal of infrastructure in the country: roads and bridges, dams, irrigation systems, water treatment facilities, electric power grids, gas pipelines etc. Investments in transportation infrastructure (roads, railways, airports etc.) have been particularly heavy. While much of the transportation infrastructure facilitates movements within the country, the Thai government is also increasingly pushing for better transportation links with neighboring countries such as the "Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge" over the Mekong River at Nongkhai - Vientiane. One more bridge-road development at Mukdahan-Savannakhet between Thailand and Laos, the so-called "Rainbow Project", is in an advanced stage of planning and will be linked by an upgraded road #9 in Laos and Vietnam with the Da Nang sea-port in Vietnam (Figure 1 Map).

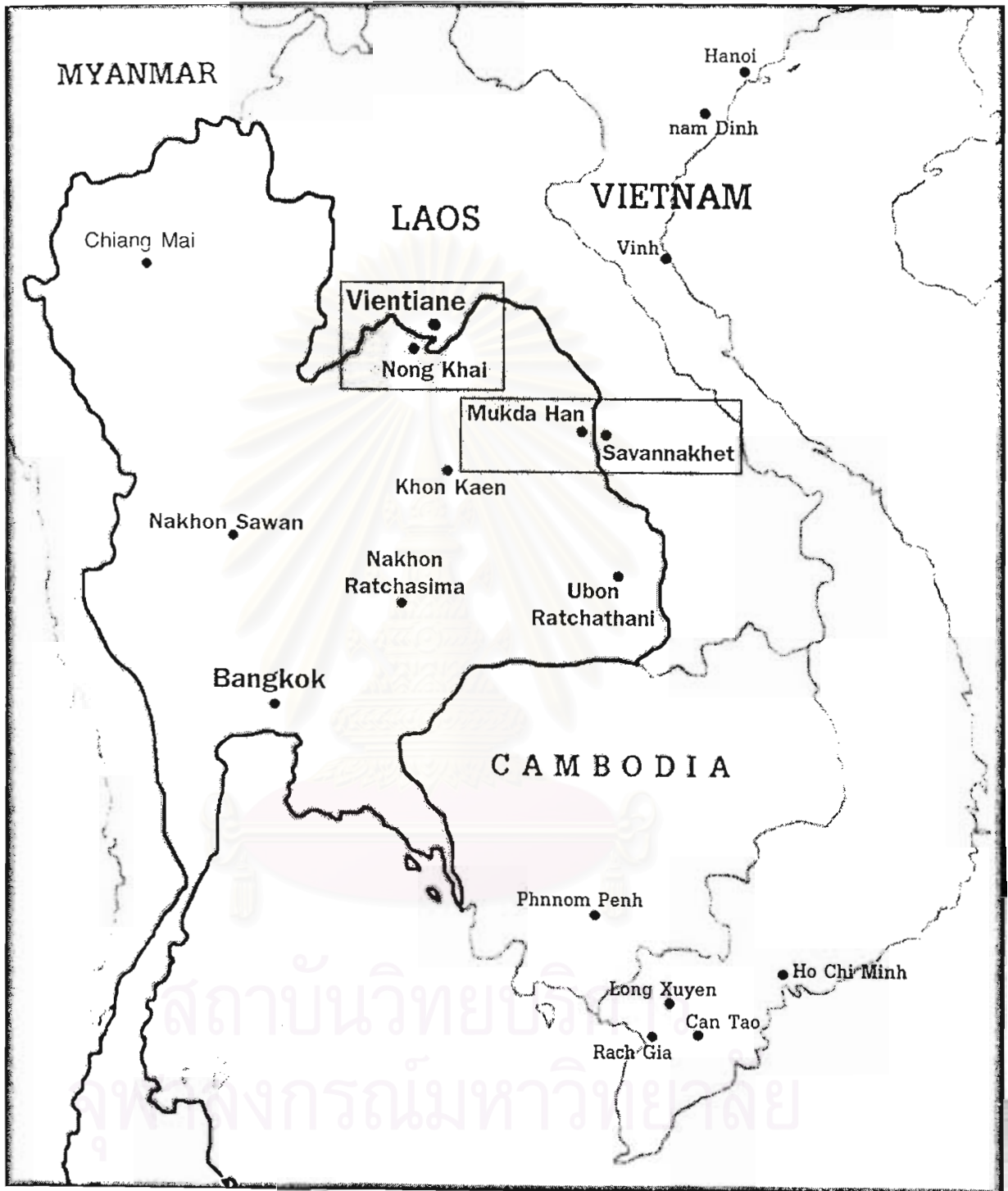
On the Myanmar border, a new "Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge" opened at Mae Sot - Myawaddy border crossing point. Both Thai and Myanmar governments have invested significant funds to improve the roads leading up to the existing small bridge at the Mae Sai - Tachilek border crossing to Keng Tung of Myanmar and eventually to the border with Yunnan province of China. On the Cambodia border, a small bridge was re-built between Thailand and Cambodia at Aranyaprathet-Poipet and subsequently in 1994, the Thai government built "the Thai-Cambodia Friendship Road" from Poipet to Sisophon in Cambodia. Planning for some other small and medium sized cross-border infrastructure development projects are in progress and are expected to take off after easing up of the current economic crisis.

The Thai government's growing emphasis on developing transportation infrastructure to facilitate the movement of people and increase trade across international borders fits into larger designs for improving transportation infrastructure within the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). The six GMS countries - Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Burma and Yunnan Province of China - are all involved in regional and sometimes bilateral efforts to improve international transportation links. The Asian Development Bank is leading the way in transportation infrastructure priorities in the GMS and facilitating necessary funding for their implementation.

Easing these border restrictions is an enormous step towards bringing these economies closer together and for providing rural people with easier access to markets (ADB news release no. 116/99)

It has often been cited that there are links between transportation infrastructure and trans-national population mobility. But it is not all that clear what changes actually take place due to new infrastructure development when compared with their pre-construction period. Is it the sheer volume of people or movement of some special segment of population? Are they transient travelers or traders, or long-term migrants to the area? In some instances, during construction, firms often hire foreign personnel - both laborers and skilled professionals.

**Figure 1 : Map of Thailand and Laos
Showing Study and Control Sites**



These migrant laborers sometimes mix with local people in ways that have unintended but perhaps adverse consequences. For example, male migrant workers may find local women willing to provide sexual services, resulting in increased rates of sexually transmitted diseases and a change in the social fabric of the communities. Yet while the presence of migrants during construction is important, the long-term effects of cross-border migration associated with completed infrastructure are probably more significant. For example, the opening of a new, multilane road that crosses an international border can lead to rapid change in the volume and types of transportation industry (trucks, buses, cars and other vehicles) in the area. These modes of transport will have certain effects on population mobility including the operators of the transports. This may also bring a rapid influx of trade and wealth into the border area, and eventually result in a 'border environment' which is variously described as busy, rowdy, wild or often 'out of normal control' (FHI 1996). The potential impact of the transportation infrastructure on population mobility and the idea that there is a relationship between the behavior and attitude of segments of the migrant population and the spread of disease lead to a hypothesis: *the presence of new or improved transportation infrastructure in border areas contributes to the spread of disease, particularly through increased risk behaviors for HIV/AIDS.*

Very few organizations, particularly governments of the GMS countries and the Asian Development Bank are studying the potential links between transportation infrastructure, trans-national migration and the spread of diseases. Given the high levels of HIV/AIDS in many parts of Thailand and the extensive movement of people across Thailand's borders coupled with the push for greater transportation links between Thailand and its neighbors, the possible nexus between transportation infrastructure, trans-national migration and HIV/AIDS deserves much closer scrutiny. The present study will examine the inter-relationships among the above mentioned factors. It will also discuss the methodological issues of such research in similar circumstances in Thailand or elsewhere in the region. Finally, the study will examine the health and HIV/AIDS programmes in such situation especially those involving cross-border populations which include migrant and mobile population groups.

2. Cross-border Transportation Links Between Thailand and Laos

Table 1 provides a glimpse of the contrast between Thailand and Laos, particularly that of Nongkhai and Vientiane. Laos had a population of 4.9 millions in 1995 which is only 7.6% of the 60.2 million-strong Thai population. GDP per capita of Laos was US\$ 131 compared to US\$ 2,293 of Thailand. These statistics, along with other socio-economic indicators, show great disparities between the peoples of the two countries. Thailand and Laos are by and large separated by the Mekong river except at some small segments in the north and south where the river runs through Laos. The two countries have a long history of close ethnic and cultural relations. People in northeast Thailand speak in Laotian dialect. Because of the river, no direct road link existed between the two countries before 1994. Traditionally, local people used boats to cross the river to visit their friends and relatives on the other side. In 1962, through an inter-governmental agreement, ferry services were opened at the Nongkhai-Vientiane and Mukdahan-Savannakhet crossing points. There was a marked distinction between the two ferries. The former connected the Laotian capital and largest metropolitan with about half-a-million people. The passenger ferries, typically with a capacity of 20 persons per ferry, were operating between Tha Sadet (Thailand) and Tha Deua (Laos). These

**Table 1: Selected Development Characteristics and Forecasts:
Thailand and Lao PDR, 1990 - 2000**

Items	1990	1995	2000
Thailand Population (million)	56.3	60.2	64.1
Nongkhai Population - Urban Area	46,800	53,330	60,370
GDP per Capita, Thailand (US\$)	1,554	2,293	3,037
GDP per Capita, Nongkhai (US\$)	704	1,139	1,578
Lao Population (million)	4.2	4.9	5.7
Vientaine Urban Population	428,000	510,000	620,000
GDP per Capita, Laos (US\$)	124	131	149
GDP per Capita, Vientaine (US\$)	199	208	230

Source: Thai data - NESDB forecasts and "Nongkhai Urban and Business Development Study (1994) and Lao data - Feasibility Study Update, Maunsell-SKP (1991), various tables as presented in the Study on the Usage and Operation of the Mekong River Friendship Bridge, PASCO (October, 1994)

were under Thai or Lao ownership and operated on an equitable roster. Some ferries are still in use at the original place and used mainly by the local residents on both sides of the river, for whom using the bridge is a much longer way and costs more. The vehicular ferry was operated by TL Enterprise Ltd., a joint Thai-Lao company. It was closed about four months after opening of the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in April 1994. The ferry services in Mukdahan-Savannakhet, consisting of both passenger and vehicles operations, are still in use. These are operated by both governments. At a later stage more ferry services have become operational at Nakhon Phanom-Tha Khaek and Chiang Khong-Huay Sai. All in all, movement of people and goods between two countries remained very low, not only because of the physical barriers of the river and poor road infrastructure in Laos, but due to range of 'non-physical' barriers particularly political differences during the cold-war era.

Through a tripartite agreement, the Australian Government funded construction of the "Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge" spanning the Mekong River between Nongkhai and Vientaine (Figure 1). The bridge was officially opened to traffic on April 23, 1994, and this was the first direct link by road between Thailand and Lao PDR.

3. HIV/AIDS Situation in Thailand and Laos

The AIDS epidemic in Thailand was first detected in 1984 and started to show signs of decline in transmission rates among certain population groups by 1995. This remarkable achievement has been attained through the collaborative effort of the government, non-government and private sector in the country. During this period, almost all national HIV/AIDS programmes have targeted the Thai population and only a very few have included migrant populations in their projects, even though these constitute a significant proportion of the adult population in the country (Paul 1997). According to the predictions of the Working Group of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the think-tank for economic and social policies in the country, even with the best HIV/AIDS programming, in 1997 there would be 727,212 (or 1.2% of total population) HIV infected people in the country including 62,123 symptomatic AIDS and 59,547 deaths in the same year (MOPH 1996). With this intense programming, cumulative deaths due to AIDS would reach one million by the

year 2010. HIV/AIDS prevalence in Thailand is remarkably high in the northern region bordering Laos such as Chiangrai, Nan and Phayao, and low in other parts of the border.

In Laos, there are only a few reported cases of HIV infection (UNAIDS-Laos, 1997). The reasons for this low reporting could be in part due to the virtual isolation of people from the outside world and also the inadequate surveillance system in the country. However, in recent years, the authorities are reporting increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS cases in parts of the country often citing linkage between cross-border travel and the disease (Savannakhet Provincial AIDS Office, 1997).

4. Objectives of the Project

The Overall objective of the project is to study the potential links between cross-border transportation infrastructure development, subsequent local and trans-national population migration and mobility and the resultant health problems, particularly the transmission of HIV/AIDS in the development area.

Specific objectives of the project are -

1. To provide an analysis of the changes that occur in the transportation industry (road, water, rail etc.) due to cross-border road-bridge development.
2. To study the changes occurring to local and mobile/migrant population groups, their demography and mobility during various phases of a cross-border bridge development, i.e. pre-construction, construction and post-construction.
3. To provide an in-depth analysis of the changes or transformation occurring in people's risk situation during various phases of transportation infrastructure development that could influence transmission of HIV/AIDS in the area, and elaborate the key factors affecting risk behavior.
4. To study the existing programs, if any, that are undertaken to rectify health problems including HIV/AIDS in such a development project, and to provide a critical review of the intervention programs in such situation.
5. To clarify the methodological issues associated with research on transportation infrastructure development, trans-national migration and health problems and lay the foundations for future work in the area in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries.

5. Site Selection and Feasibility Study

ARCM initially prepared a short-list of three recently completed transportation infrastructure projects, i.e. cross-border bridge development projects of possible interest for the study. All these three bridges linked Thailand and at least one other neighboring country. The three selected sites were -

- “Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge” at Mae Sot - Myawaddy;

- “Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge” at Nongkhai - Vientiane;
- Aranyaprathet - Poipet cross-border bridge and “Thai-Cambodia Friendship Road”;

Two other sites, i.e. Mae Sai-Tachilek on the Thai-Burma border and Sunai Kolok-Gual Periok on Thai-Malaysia border, were initially considered but later excluded because of their unsuitability for the study. A feasibility study was then carried out by ARCM researchers in all three sites to determine which one was best suited for a full study.

Table 2: Comparison of three Proposed Project Sites

Points	Aranyaprathet-Poipet	Nongkhai-Vientiane	Mae Sot-Myawaddy
Border demarcation	Less prominent, small canal, little control over movement of people.	Prominent, wide river relatively controlled movement of people.	Medium with a small river, little control over movement of people.
Bridge development	Replacement of an old bridge in 1993.	New bridge in 1994 replacing a ferry and boats	New bridge in 1997, used boats in previous years.
Security situation in the area	Unstable, often affecting population mobility in the area.	Stable security around bridge area. No immediate threat.	Stable in the near vicinity: sometimes affected by situations.
Local govt. relations	Not so good. Inconsistent relations.	Appears to be good. Consistently improving.	Not so smooth. Striving to improve relations.
General political situation	Unstable. No clear policy on cross-border population movement	By and large controlled population movement as agreed upon.	Develop consistent flow of people between the countries.
Immigration procedure: --locals	No official immigration. Local movement to the border towns.	Official immigration. Local population can easily cross border.	No official immigration. Local travel to the border towns .
Immigration procedure: --foreigners	Foreigners cannot travel except those working in Cambodia.	Foreigners are allowed to travel with visa or can receive visa on arrival	Foreigners cannot travel except those in special circumstances.
Sources of data	Not so easily available as Aran is a district and Sakeo is a new province; not enough data about the bridge.	Data sources are easily available in Nongkhai as it is a province and the bridge has an official status.	Not so easily available as Mae Sot is a district and provincial data is not very specific about the bridge.
Control site	Tapraya: not so suitable as there is no river crossing; often constrained by security and political problems.	Mukdahan: suitable with ferry as pre-construction Nongkhai; consistent political influence on movement.	No clear control site in sight; it may be difficult to get a good match.
HIV/AIDS transmission	Very high transmission in Poipet.	Very low transmission in Nongkhai.	Medium to high transmission in Mae Sot.

The feasibility study team examined the following issues:

- nature of border demarcation and the significance of the cross-border bridge-road development: new bridge or replacement? road access from the bridge to the nearby cities?

- external factors affecting the population movement along the proposed road-bridge site: open flow or controlled movement? local government relations, immigration agreement between countries and inter-country relationship?
- nature and volume of transport and population movement in the adjacent areas and between the countries;
- sources and availability of data on transport, population mobility and health situations of the target population, including HIV/AIDS;
- interest and cooperation from the government offices, NGOs and private sector; identification of suitable local partners, key informants and general access to the population;
- to determine needs for a control site and its availability in the close vicinity of the case site; provide justification for a case-control approach;

Following the feasibility study visits to all three proposed sites, and after much deliberation, Nongkhai - Vientaine was chosen as the preferred study-site with Mukdahan - Savannakhet as the control-site. Table 2 above provides detailed comparison of the three sites, illustrating the characteristics of the three sites and their comparative advantages and disadvantages.

6. Study Methods, Data Collection and Analysis

Conceptual framework:

A schematic conceptual framework of cross-border infrastructure development and HIV/AIDS vulnerability is given in Figure 2. It shows that the infrastructure development project typically followed three distinct phases, i.e. pre-construction, construction and post-construction. Three major variables used in the study are: changes in the transportation industry, number and composition of local and mobile populations, and finally risk factors and risk behaviors, i.e. risk situation for HIV/AIDS transmission. The scheme also shows that the changes in the study variables could have been influenced by external factors such as political situations, economic changes and impact of other development programs in the area.

Case-control study:

As the infrastructure development occurred in three phases over a period of several years, certain changes had taken place to the study variables. At least some of the changes were caused by external factors totally unrelated to infrastructure development, such as political relations between the countries, ethnic and cultural links on both sides of the border, and economic development in the area. In an effort to eliminate the effects of these external factors, a control site (Mukdahan-Savannakhet) was used. Mukdahan-Savannakhet has the same transportation link, i.e. passenger and vehicular ferries similar to Nongkhai-Vientaine before the bridge construction, and immigration procedures for Thais, Laotians and foreigners. It has no cross-border bridge now but one is planned in the near future. The data of the case-site has been compared with the time-matched data of the control-site. The obvious changes in the study variables at the control-site have been implicated as the key external factors in the case-site. In any event, extensive qualitative analysis has been carried out to isolate the impact of the bridge and transmission of HIV/AIDS while keeping in mind the overall impact of cross-border population movement between Thailand and Laos.

Study period:

The total period covered by the study was six years from 1992 - 1997, divided into three phases: pre-construction before 1992, construction 1992 - April 1994, and post-construction April 1994-1997. Only a short duration of the pre-construction period was used because of the great difficulty in data collection from the previous years. However, some additional data from 1990-1991 were used where available.

The study was conducted in a period of eight months beginning in mid-November, 1997 and ending in mid-July 1998. The first two months went into site selection, feasibility study, preparation of detailed project document, selection of research methodology, local partners and selection of population segments. The following six months were devoted to complete field data collection, conducting individual and key informant interviews, meeting with the government officials, analysis, synthesis and writing of the final draft report.

Data Collection and Analysis:

The following methods were used for the initial phase of data and information collection from the case and control sites. As most of these data were collected in Nongkhai and Mukdahan, it was essential to identify some competent and reliable local partners in both places. They in turn identified key local informants, peer informants and other sources of information. They also collected secondary data from the relevant sources.

While the thrust of the study focused on the data and information collection on the Thai side of the border, relevant information has also been gathered on the Laotian side. This is to ensure validity of some of the information on both sides of the border. However, only a few field visits have been carried out on the Laotian side of the border and it is very likely that some of the information might have been missed.

These are the methods for data and information collection:

1. Secondary data on transportation, population and HIV/AIDS (and other communicable diseases) epidemiology were collected from the relevant government, NGOs and the private sectors in Nongkhai, Mukdahan, Vientiane and Savannakhet. Some bridge specific data were available from AusAID, Bangkok (funding source of the bridge) and its hired consultants. For the planned Mukdahan bridge, additional data were collected from the Ministry of Transportation and other relevant sources.
2. Qualitative analysis of the above data was carried out with the relevant sources using interviews and cross-examinations. Interpretation of some complicated data and projections were carried out with other independent sources.
3. Socio-behavioral data relevant to HIV transmission were collected from the sites by various methods as follows (see annex 5 for detailed breakdown):
 - individual interviews of 101 individuals from five major population groups using structured questionnaire;
 - 17 key informant interviews using open ended questionnaire;
 - oral history of five individuals representing the population groups;
 - a case study of *Pattaya Issarn*, a river side rest and recreation venue in Nongkhai;
 - participant observation throughout study;

**Figure 2: CROSS-BORDER TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND HIV/AIDS VULNERABILITY
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

BRIDGE DEVELOPMENT PHASES				
	PRE-CONSTRUCTION Before 1992	CONSTRUCTION Jan 1992 - Apr 1994	POST-CONSTRUCTION Apr 1994 - Dec 1997	
STUDY-SITE: Nongkhai-Vientaine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ local people ○ mobile groups ◆ Transportation ◆ Risk situations for HIV/AIDS transmission 	Net changes in each of the components from pre-construction phase	Net changes in each of the components from the pre-construction and construction phases	HIV/AIDS situations among mobile population and local people
EXTERNAL FACTORS	Political situation Economic changes Development program	Political situation Economic changes Development program	Political situation Economic changes Development program	Comparative analysis between two sites: Sensitivity analysis:
CONTROL SITE: Mukdahan-Savannakhet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ local people ○ mobile groups ◆ Transportation ◆ Risk situations for HIV/AIDS transmission 	Net changes in each of the components from the past situations	Net changes in each of the components from the past situations	HIV/AIDS situations among mobile population and local people
TIME-MATCHED WITH THE CASE-SITE				

4. In addition, senior government officials and local/national intellectuals were interviewed to elicit external factors affecting Thai-Lao relations, socio-economic development and in particular movement of people between the two countries.

Following analysis of the data and information collected during the initial phase, subsequent field visits and qualitative analysis was carried out to validate interpretation of the data. A draft report of the study will be circulated among the local partners as well as other interested groups, following which a workshop will be organized to consolidate final analysis of the data and the results. The workshop is expected to provide an opportunity to the relevant local and national authorities and interested agencies to express their view on the issue and develop a comprehensive plan of action for the future, including intervention programs.

Study variables:

Many factors relevant to population mobility were considered to be contributing to the high risk behaviors such as unsafe sex, unsafe drug use and untreated STDs that eventually would lead to HIV transmission among the concerned population. These factors are arranged into three major groups for the analysis of the situation as follows:

- transportation industry - by road/bridge and water/ferry;
- population mobility - local and migrant/mobile groups;
- risk situation (environment and risk behavior) for HIV transmission;

Transportation industry data included the Thai and Laotian vehicles crossing the river in Nongkhai-Vientiane by bridge or ferry before and after opening of the bridge. It examined the trend of vehicle use during three phases of construction as well as changes in specific segments of the transportation industry. It also examined the road and water transport industry situation from the pre-construction phase and make projections without construction of the bridge. Trend pertaining to vehicle use were then compared with the control-site i.e. Mukdahan-Savannakhet. In addition, indirect evidence of vehicle use data was obtained through vehicle registrations in Nongkhai and Mukdahan and included incidences of road traffic accidents in the area.

Population mobility data included those for the local Thai and Laotian, and mobile/migrant Thai, Laotians and foreigners. It examined the trend of cross-border population movement by bridge and ferries during the three phases of construction, as well as changes in specific segments of the population. For the purposes of this study, the target populations has been grouped into six categories: tourist, traders, truckers/drivers, migrant laborers, sex workers and local residents. Each of these groups contain Thai and Laotians. Only a few of the groups contain foreigners e.g., tourist and traders.

Risk behavioral data for HIV/AIDS infection was collected from all six population groups as indicated above. This was the most difficult one to analyze in this context. Risk factors of importance are discussed in the following sections. Special attention was given to the reliability of the data and information of the past events, i.e. pre-construction and construction phases. Behavioral data for HIV/AIDS was partially supplemented by epidemiological data for HIV/AIDS in Nongkhai, Mukdahan, Vientiane and Savannakhet although these data were expected to reflect the situations of the local Thai or Laotian population and not necessarily

that of the migrant and mobile Thai, Laotians and foreigners. However, some quantitative and qualitative analyses of these data provided useful clarification of the situation of the migrants.

PART II: STUDY FINDINGS

7. Overview of Thai-Lao Relationship

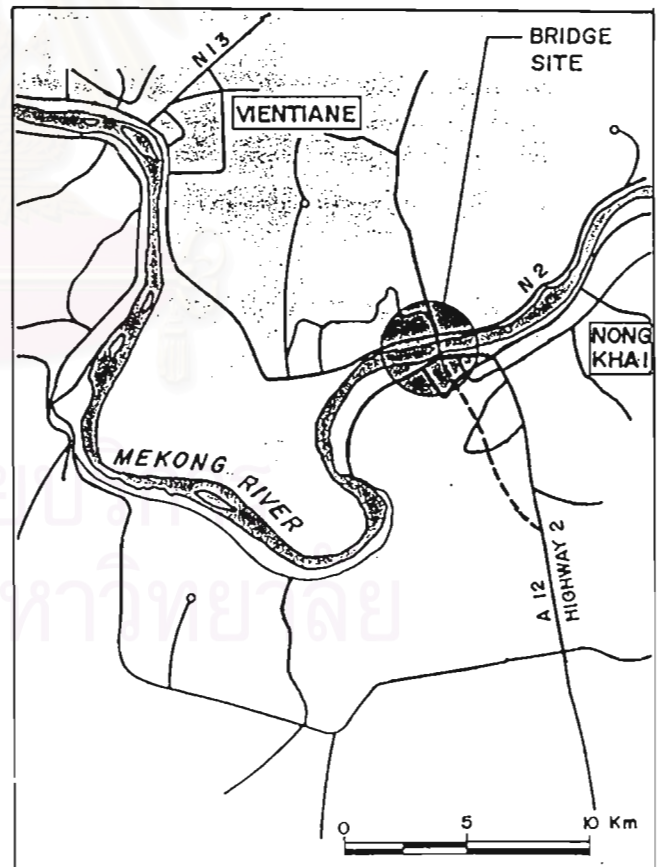
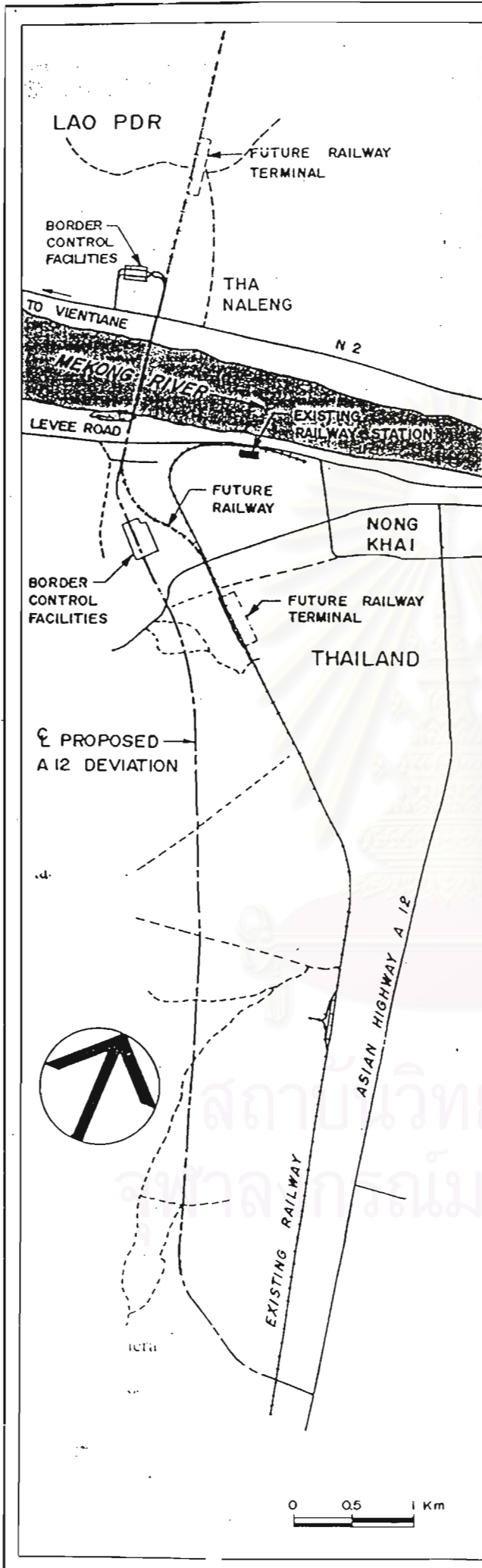
Thailand and Laos have a long history of strong cultural bonds. The two countries have a long border. With the exception of a small part in the lower north across Nan and Leao provinces of Thailand, the Mekong river separates the two countries (see Figure 1 Map). The fertile valley of the Mekong river has been a major influence on the life of peoples on both sides. They speak the same language and Buddhism is the dominant religion in the area. The people continue to move and settle from one side of the river to the other. Many ethnic minorities e.g. Hmong, Tai Leu, Kmu or Yao live on both sides of the river. They regularly commute to visit their friends and relatives on the other side of the border. There are official Thai immigration checkpoints at Nakon Phanom, Mukdahan, Nongkhai town, Beung Khai and Sri Chiangmai of Nongkhai, Chiang Khong and Chiang Kham of Chiang Rai, Ban Huay Deu of Uttaradit, Pibun Mangsahan and Kong Jiam of Ubon Ratchathani and Khemmarat of Amnat Chareon. There are other border crossings that open on specific days e.g. Ban Khok opens once a week for a market and Mahlong opens only on the Buddhist Sabbath day. By and large, it is very common for the local Thai and Laotian to cross river without any border pass. In addition to Lao PDR embassy in Bangkok, there is a consulate in Khon Kaen which issues visas for foreigners and Thai nationals.

In the early 1960s, vehicular and passenger ferries were introduced in Nongkhai-Vientiane and Mukdahan-Savannakhet, which improved the formal passage of goods and people between the countries. During the Cold-War era, Thailand and Laos were on opposite sides of the conflict, which affected the cross-border population movement. Since the late 1980s, with the transformation of political situations in the region, there has been a gradual opening of such cross-country barriers. More and more people started traveling between the countries. Laotians come to Thailand for visits, trade and businesses, and more importantly, in search of better paid jobs. Thais go to Laos for visits, trade and investments. In addition, Thailand maintained its traditional role as a “gateway” to Laos. This was in part a true reflection of the Thai government’s stated policy of “turning Indochina from the battlefield to a market place”. In the face of heightened mobility, trade and investments, both countries perceived need for a cross-border bridge.

8. Construction of the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge

In the late 1980s, there was an important change in Thailand’s foreign policy towards its three Indochinese neighbors. It abandoned its years of political confrontation and economic isolation and instead adopted active dialogue on trade and businesses with them in what has been hailed by the then prime minister Chatchai Choonhavan as “turning Indochina from the battlefield to a market place”. This initiative encouraged development of various transportation infrastructure with Laos and Cambodia. In 1992, with the funding from the Australian government, Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge construction was started (Figure 3 Map).

Figure 3: Map of Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge



Adapted from Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge Feasibility Study 1992

For the purposes of this study, the bridge construction was divided into the following three phases and attempts were made to analyze the changes in the transportation industry, population movement and HIV/AIDS situation during these phases and sought logical explanation for each of them:

- Pre-construction period: Before 1992 (1989 -1992)
- Construction period: 1992-April 1994
- Post-construction period: April 1994-1997

Construction workers: The main construction company was John Holland of Australia. Several Thai or Laotian companies were the supplier of construction materials and labours for the main company. According to a senior Thai highway official, it was not a labor intensive construction as the company used heavy equipment for the purpose. On average 150-200 laborers were employed in the construction site, equally divided into Thais and Laotians. Most of the Thai worked in skilled or semi-skilled jobs whereas the Laotians did the unskilled or manual works.

A Thai highway official and a local community leader state that the most workers were in the age range 30-40 years, with a few younger men. There were only a few women - both Thai and Laotian - in the work force, most of whom did the unskilled jobs. As implied by the age range in the cultural context, most of the laborers were married and some of their wives accompanied them and worked at the construction site. The workers lived separately by nationality and, more specifically, among their close friends. Most of the Thai skilled workers rented houses in Nongkhai and some of them had their family with them. The local community leader says that a few workers got married with local Thai women or found a minor wife. It was rather a rare occasion to see a worker getting married with another worker. Laotian workers used to live on the Laotian side of the bridge where they developed a camp. The workers became quickly familiar with the local situation as they came from the nearby areas and spoke the local dialect. It was especially true of the local entrepreneurs who were making some extra business with the workers, as well as thousands of visitors to the site.

Most of the workers had a good cash income compared to what they usually earn. There was a commitment on the part of the construction company to balance the expenses on both sides of the border. Laos received more for labourers and accommodation of foreign experts, while Thailand received more for the supply of materials and machines. In general, the labourers did not have a lot of free time for rest and recreation as many of them used to work over-time for extra income. Usually they lived around the construction site. They used to drink (alcohol) in the evening or on holidays. Some of the young men, especially those who were unmarried or without wives, used to visit sex workers. No special sex establishment opened in the area.

Several community residents insist that there was no evidence of intravenous drug use among workers. A first aid center in the construction site used to treat minor illnesses and the company had a contract with Nongkhai government hospital for further treatment of workers. There was no reported increase in crime or robbery as the economy was doing rather well during that time. Many local residents whose lands were acquired or purchased by the government for bridge construction received cash payments. They were happy with their fortune. Some of them built new houses, bought a new car or motorcycle or spent heavily on consumer goods. Some of them, however, indulged in over-spending in recreation and gambling. There were reported increases in traffic accidents in the area. As a whole, the

construction workers themselves had only a minor impact in the area which was largely overshadowed by the increasing number of tourists and visitors in the area.

A rail link construction between the two countries is in progress. Thailand already has a rail line connecting Nongkhai with rest of the country. It only required a small diversion to pass over the bridge, together with relocation of the existing train station from close vicinity of the bridge to a slightly distant location. The Thai side of the rail line is almost complete (see Figure 3 map). In Laos, there is no existing rail system and the construction of the track is yet to begin.

Post-construction: The bridge was officially opened to traffic on April 23, 1994. It was a big event in this rather sleepy corner of Thailand and the bordering Lao as well as whole Mekong sub-region. It provided much hope to many people in the region, especially with the prospect of increased tourism and trade and investment in Laos. See detailed analysis of the changes in the following section.

9. Transportation Industry

Pre-construction phase or before 1992 there were vehicle and passenger ferries between Nongkhai and Vientiane. The vehicle ferry was located slightly outside of Nongkhai town but close to the present bridge (see Figure 3 map). The passenger ferry was at the Tha Sadet and is still operational at the same location. These ferries were doing a remarkable job transporting goods and people between two countries. In fact, the flow of people and goods between the countries was not so much controlled by the physical barriers such as bridge, road conditions and transports but by the non-physical barriers such as the inter-country and regional political situations, economic activities, and custom and immigration procedures. However, there were several problems for the smooth running of the ferry system. They had limited capacities and, therefore, were not able to serve unusually high numbers of vehicles. Also, they had to wait overnight on either side of the river. The situation was especially difficult during the rainy season when the river rose and the strong current created unsafe conditions for ferries to cross. Mechanical troubles with the ferries were another factor which needed constant maintenance. As a result of both the physical and non-physical barriers, traffic flow between the countries remained rather low (Table 3). In addition, the economic progress in Laos was rather stagnant for decades and there was not much reason for increased transportation across its border. However, in the late 1980s, due to the revised Thai policy of 'turning Indochina from a battlefield to a market place', there were significant improvements toward closer political relations and greater openness of travel and trade between the two countries. This situation placed extra pressure on the existing ferries and it became clear that it would be impossible to sustain the growth of transportation across the river. As a result, the need for a cross-border bridge became clear to all concerned parties.

Construction phase: While the bridge was still under construction, movement of vehicles into Nongkhai grew steadily but not many of them actually crossed the river (Table 3 and Figure 4). Apparently, most of the vehicles stopped in Nongkhai and did not cross the bridge. This was due to difficult immigration and custom procedures on either side of the bridge as well as limited capacity of the vehicular ferries. Most of the people visited Nongkhai and its surrounding areas. Some of them extended their trip to Laos by crossing the river in ferry boats. This increased vehicular movement was in anticipation that Nongkhai would

eventually become a major tourist and trade center in the region. Nongkhai police reported increased number of traffic accidents in and around town during construction phase, an indirect indication of increased traffic volume. Police in Vientiane reported similar problems of traffic accident on their side. One policeman went on to say, “ we probably have the highest number of traffic accidents per population in whole Asia despite having a very small vehicle fleet”.

Post-construction phase: After opening of the bridge in April 1994, there was a sharp increase in the number of vehicles crossing the river. One-way vehicle movement between Nongkhai and Vientiane rose from monthly average of 1,458 in 1993 to 3,111 in 1994 or 113% increase over previous year (Table 3 and Figure 4). This sudden increase was due to the obvious impact of the bridge as well as streamlining of immigration and custom procedures. This impressive growth continued in 1995 when the cross-border vehicular movement increased by 53.6% over previous year.

**Table 3: One-way Cross-border Vehicle Movement
Between Nongkhai and Vientiane, 1992-1997**

Vehicles Types	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Car	n.a	n.a	2,819	8,621	9,330	11,649
Pick-up	n.a	n.a	3,786	9,259	10,878	15,856
Small Bus	n.a	n.a	9,306	4,028	2,526	3,074
Large Bus	n.a	n.a	4,971	2,132	566	493
6-W Truck	n.a	n.a	5,120	8,957	8,183	7,902
10-W Truck	n.a	n.a	5,287	10,403	10,074	9,320
>10-W Truck	n.a	n.a	6,039	13,942	12,290	14,545
All Types	12,000	17,500	37,328	57,347	53,847	62,839
Average/month	1,000	1,458	3,111	4,779	4,487	5,237
% Change	--	45.8%	113.4%	53.6%	-6.1%	16.7%

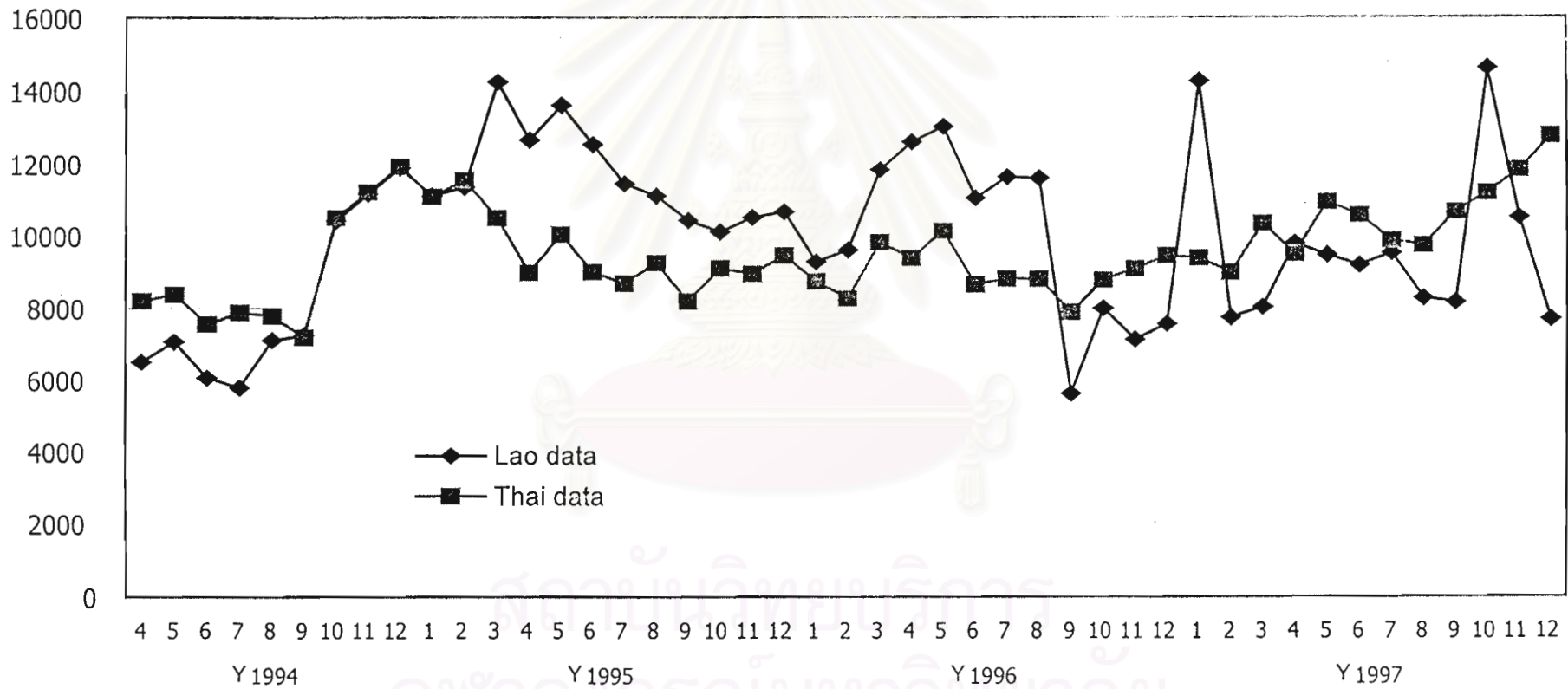
Data source: Department of Highway, Nongkhai, Thailand

Notes: (1) Represents flow only in one direction. It is assumed that all vehicles returned to their home country after travels. So two-way vehicle movement over the bridge was double of the above figures.

(2) From March 1995, large shuttle bus movements excluded from count data. This explains very large decline in this category since bridge opening. Large bus movements shown above for 1996 represent bus movements between Laos and Thailand. The decline in small shuttle bus movements has resulted from a progressive changeover to large shuttle buses, but as noted above, statistics on those movements are no longer recorded.

There was no clear seasonal pattern, except that the number of vehicles slightly increased during the months of April and May each year, probably because of the traditional New Year “water festival”. Nongkhai hosts a large and illustrious ceremony in the town and on the beach of the Mekong river called ‘Pattaya Issarn’ (see box).

**Figure 4: Monthly Two-way Vehicle Movement
Between Nongkhai and Vientiane 1994 - 1997**



However, it was not possible to maintain this impressive growth of vehicle crossing for too long and in the following two years, i.e. 1996 and 1997, there was a slight decline in vehicle movement. This can be attributed to two main reasons. First, there were certain changes in the policy for passenger vehicles. Small and large passenger buses were not allowed to cross over the bridge since the second half of 1995 and replaced by the newly introduced shuttle buses. The shuttle buses were not counted in the given statistics. The second, which is less obvious, is that the Thai and perhaps Laotian economies slowed down during this period and less number of people were going out for tours and travel.

There were some other notable changes in the types of vehicles crossing over the bridge. The number of passenger cars, pick-ups and all kind of trucks continued to increase over time. It should also be noted here that actual number of vehicles crossing the bridge is slightly higher as reported by the Laotian immigration and customs departments compared to that of Thailand (see Figure 4).

The reduced waiting time of the vehicles before and after construction of the bridge has been very significant. At present it takes about 5-10 minutes to arrange border pass and custom checks compared to several hours by the ferry in the past. Because of this situation before bridge construction, the vehicles had to queue up at waiting location on both sides of the river. Now the vehicular movement is very fast and there is no reason to keep any special area for waiting vehicles.

Comparison with Mukdahan-Savannakhet

Passenger and vehicular ferries have existed in Mukdahan-Savannakhet for almost the same time as in Nongkhai. Before the opening of the bridge, the number of vehicles using ferries in Nongkhai was only slightly higher than Mukdahan although no precise statistics is available for the latter. But the situation changed dramatically in Nongkhai following the opening of the bridge. In 1995, 33,302 vehicles crossed the Nongkhai bridge, an increase of 102.5% over the previous year, compared to 9,103 which crossed by ferry in Mukdahan, which is actually 6.3% decrease over previous year (see Table 4). In 1996, the number of vehicles decreased at both places, probably due to overall sluggishness of the regional economy. There was some increase in 1997, especially at Mukdahan, due to "rainbow" trade effects with Vietnam.

Several Mukdahan sources anticipate that, after construction of the planned Mukdahan-Savannakhet bridge and upgrading of the route #9 across Laos and Vietnam, and the Danang sea-port in central Vietnam, there will be a significant boost for trade with Vietnam, and perhaps China and other Pacific rim countries. As a whole, the number of vehicles crossing at Mukdahan remains stagnant during 1994-97 period compared to the large increase in Nongkhai.

**Table 4 : Comparison Between Heavy Vehicle* Movement
in Nongkhai-Vientiane and Mukdahan-Savannakhet**

Calendar Year	Nongkhai-Vientiane		Mukdahan-Savannakhet	
	# Vehicles	% change	# Vehicles	% change
1994	16,446	--	9,717	--
1995	33,302	102.5	9,103	-6.3
1996	30,547	-8.3	8,693	-4.5
1997	31,767	4.0	10,614	22.1

Data source: Department of Highway, Nongkhai and Mukdahan, Thailand;

** Heavy vehicle means 6-wheels or larger size; excludes sedan cars, pick-ups and passenger buses. In Nongkhai, in addition to these heavy vehicles other vehicles cross the friendship bridge (see Table) which is almost non-existent in Mukdahan.*

Traffic accidents:

As a by-product of the bridge construction and faster driving practices, road traffic accidents have increased significantly in both Nongkhai and Vientiane. The two-lane road from the bridge to Vientiane city is rather congested and road traffic awareness and the control system is inadequate. As a result, traffic accidents on this road are very common. This might be one important reason why Laotian authorities are reluctant to open up this road free for all cars and vehicles coming from Thailand. On the Thai side, road infrastructure is good and the Thai authorities allow all Laotian vehicle to travel as far as Udon. The overall increase of traffic accidents in Nongkhai is similar to rest of Thailand that is economic development has led to a sharp increase in the number of vehicles in the country. In Mukdahan, however, there was no significant increase in the reported traffic accidents during this period.

10. Population Mobility

Movement of people between Thailand and Laos, two culturally-close countries, is nothing new. For centuries, ethnic Laotians settled along the fertile plains of the Mekong river. It is said that centuries ago the people of Savannakhet in Laos had established Mukdahan in Thailand. The vast majority of northeastern Thai people are considered to have the same origin and speak the same language. Many Laotians migrated to Thailand in the past and still have their kin and relatives in Laos. So peoples of both countries, especially those living along the river, travel back and forth rather easily.

Official records of the people crossing the Mekong river are of those passing through the formal immigration check points such as ferries and at bridges. Many other people in Nongkhai and all other border provinces cross the river by boat are not recorded in any immigration statistics. One knowledgeable Nongkhai source says that farmers of Pon Phisai district of Nongkhai lease land on the Laotian side of the river and do farming there by hiring Laotian laborers. These Thai farmers cross the river almost everyday to supervise their farms and bring back their farm products to Thailand.

Despite the presence of well managed data collection systems in both Thailand and Laos, some significant differences exist concerning the consistency and clarity of data on population movement. More specifically, population movement data from the Laotian side does not match with that of Thailand because of significant methodological differences (Table 5 and Figure 5). Therefore the analysis provided below is based on the best possible data made available during the course of this survey and not necessarily depending the validity of one or the other sources of data.

Two-way yearly population movement between Nongkhai and Vientiane is presented in Table 5 and Figure 5. Thai data is presented from 1991 to 1997. Lao data is available only after the opening of the bridge on 23 April 1994. Figure 6 provides the average monthly population movement between Nongkhai and Vientiane. Thai data show that population movement steadily increased before the bridge was opened, i.e. from 1991 through 1993. This was because of the economic boom in Thailand when many visitors went to see the bridge construction and greater political openness between two countries. But after the opening of the bridge in April 1994, movement became sluggish until mid-1995, after that the flow actually declined apparently because of weak economic situations. Nongkhai immigration department, however, clarified that they were excluding some special groups of people from their count which might be one of the reason for the declining statistics. Laotian data however shows a steady increase in the population flow since the opening of the bridge (see Figures 5 and 6). That means there was no real decline in the flow of people between the countries. In fact, there was a significant increase in 1996 as result of simpler immigration procedures, especially on the Laotian side. Figures 6 also shows some seasonal variations in the population movement which increases in April and May each year at the time of the traditional New Year festival in both Thailand and Laos. This trend continues upward until August and then declines September probably because of harvesting season. Mobility again increases in October through to December and New Year's Eve.

**Table 5: Two-way Yearly Population Movement
Between Nongkhai and Vientiane**

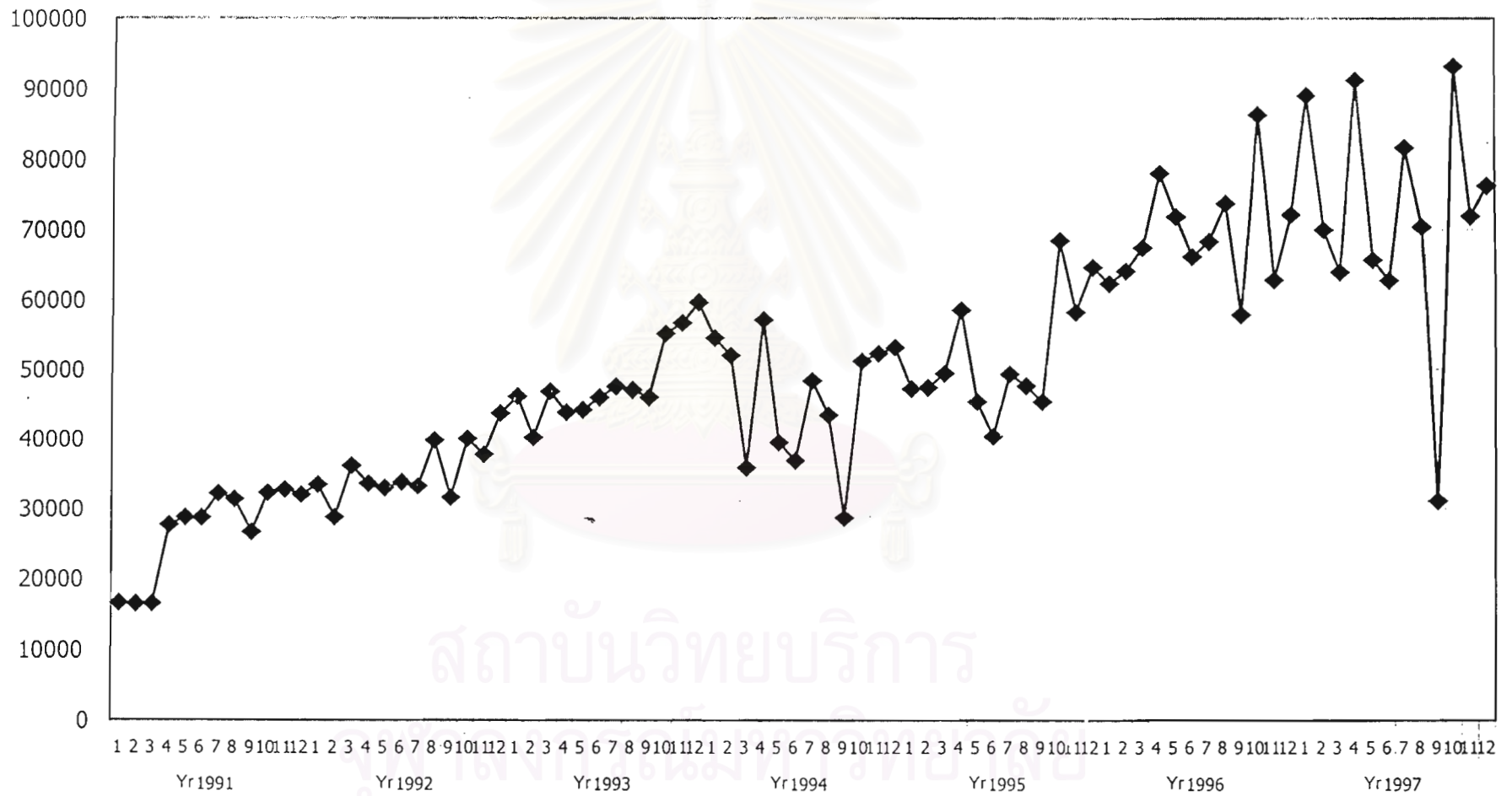
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Thai data	322,088	424,401	579,065	556,397	614,120	429,795	444,162
Lao data	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	529,961	621,508	830,194	880,140

Data source: Thai and Laotian immigration offices

It was not possible to get any proper statistics concerning nationality of people moving across the bridge. From interviews with the key informants it became clear that there are more Thais, followed by Laotians and a relatively small number of foreigners. For the purposes of this study, people crossing the bridge are categorized into the following groups:

- (i) tourists - Thai, Laotian and foreigners,
- (ii) traders - Thai and Laotian,
- (iii) truckers - Thai and Laotian,
- (iv) sex workers - Thai and Laotian,
- (v) migrant labors- Thai and Laotian,
- (vi) local population - Thai and Laotian.

Figure 5: Monthly Two-way Population Movement
Between Nongkhai and Vientiane, 1991-1997



No precise breakdown of the population groups is available but the local information sources strongly indicate the largest group is tourists, followed in order by traders, truckers, migrant laborers and sex workers (see section on individual groups). Local Thai and Laotian people continue to go back and forth as before, perhaps more than in the past and sometimes to explore business or investment possibilities.

Most of the Thai come from the Northeastern region and have close cultural links with Laos. They go for one or two days visits to Vientiane and its surrounding areas. There are a significant number of cross-border traders who usually make a day trip to Vientiane and return on the same day. A relatively smaller number are involved in investment or major businesses in Laos. A smaller but important group are the truck drivers who go to Vientiane and its surrounding areas quite regularly. Truck drivers, tourists, most traders and businessmen cross over the bridge while some small traders and local people use the ferry boats.

The vast majority of Laotians come from Vientiane and its close vicinity. The main group are the visitors and tourists. A large number of small traders come to Thailand regularly. Officially, Laotian and other foreign migrants are not permitted to work in Nongkhai and the neighboring provinces. However, because of labor shortages in the past years, a significant number of Laotians were informally employed in certain jobs such as construction, agriculture, retailing, restaurant, sex and entertainment businesses in the past years. The present economic slow-down in Thailand has significantly slowed down economic activities in Nongkhai and the resultant employment opportunities. The returning Thai migrant laborers of Nongkhai and the northeast who used to work in Bangkok and other industrial areas of the country are taking over jobs from the Laotians. A relatively smaller number of Laotian truck drivers come to Thailand, compared to Thai drivers going to Laos. This is because of the larger trade volume that Thailand is exporting to Laos. A number of Laotian sex workers work in Nongkhai both in direct and indirect sex businesses. Most of the Laotian tourist, visitors, truckers and traders go to Udon, the largest city in the area, and only a few stay in Nongkhai. Udon has large markets and businesses as well as hotels and entertainment businesses. "Nongkhai is too dull and we find nothing much to do here" says one young Laotian visitor.

Most of the foreigners are tourists, the great majority come from Europe, followed by USA, Japan, Australia and South Asian countries. They plan to have a glimpse of Laos and the great Mekong river. Many stay 3-4 days in Nongkhai before proceeding to Laos, while others simply stay for a day or two to arrange a visa for Laos. Some tourists or foreigners come to Nongkhai-Vientiane to renew their Thai visa.

Overall, the population movement between Nongkhai and Vientiane has grown steadily since 1990, i.e. before the beginning of bridge construction. This was largely because of long standing cultural links of the people of two countries and was boosted by the greater political openness in these years. The bridge facilitated the flow of large numbers of people but it may be said that it was more important in maintaining the high levels of growth rather than in initiating the momentum of population movement.

Comparison with Mukdahan:

Vientiane is the capital city of Laos and is connected by road links throughout the country. It is also the main commercial and industrial center of Laos. As a result, almost all major activities in the country surrounds Vientiane and its neighboring areas. While Savannakhet province has the largest population outside of Vientiane, it does not have political and economic importance as Vientiane. It is however, the major city in the southern Laos and strategically located in between Thailand and Vietnam. A second Thai-Lao bridge at Mukdahan-Savannakhet is in the advanced stage of planning and is expected to begin construction within a few years. Another project to upgrade road number 9 connecting Savannakhet and Danang sea-port in central Vietnam (see Figure 1 map) is getting strong support from the governments of the concerned countries as well as potential funding sources. This combined road-bridge construction connecting Thailand, Laos and Vietnam is popularly hailed as a "rainbow project" signifying specter of economic development in the areas.

According to the local sources at Savannakhet and Mukdahan, population movement in Mukdahan-Savannakhet have increased significantly over the past few years. This may not reflect in the given data (see Table 5) as many more people make 'unofficial' visits in the area. One local Thai immigration officer says, "traditional relation between Mukdahan and Savannakhet is like that of a brother and sister. We can not be too serious about immigration procedures if we have to maintain this good relation".

Table 6 shows that following opening of the bridge, number of people moving between Nongkhai and Vientiane continued to increase at an impressive rate of 17%, 34% and 6% in 1995, 1996 and 1997 respectively. In contrast, in Mukdahan, there was 4%, 7% and 0.2% reduction in the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 respectively. One must be very careful in the interpretation of these data as the numbers themselves may not be the true reflection of the situations in the ground. Much more qualitative analysis is required to understand them fully. In any event, it is the opinion of all concerned in Mukdahan and Savannakhet that population movement between the two countries will dramatically increase if the planned bridge-road project connecting Mukdahan-Savannakhet-Danang is completed. This project will also increase movement of Vietnamese to Laos and perhaps, Thailand. One local Laotian observer comments, "I will be concerned about large movement of people and trade between Thailand and Vietnam that may actually overshadow the much smaller Laos. Many Laotians fear that Laos will become a gatekeeper and not the main player in this whole game".

**Table 6: Comparison of People Movement
in Nongkhai-Vientiane and Mukdahan Savannakhet**

Calendar Year	Nongkhai-Vientiane		Mukdahan-Savannakhet	
	# People	% change	# People	% change
1994	529,961*	--	105,351	--
1995	621,508	17.3	101,180	-4.0
1996	830,194	33.6	96,692	-6.8
1997	880,140	6.0	96,777	-0.2

*Data source: Nongkhai-Vientiane data from Immigration Dept., Vientiane, Laos (*available 1994 data from 24/4/94 - 31/12/94 is extrapolated for the year); Mukdahan-Savannakhet data from Immigration Dept. of Mukdahan.*

11. Trade, Economy and Social Impact

The trade volume between Nongkhai and Vientiane continued to grow even before opening of the friendship bridge (Table 7). As Laos is a land-locked country and there is no good road communication with Vietnam, China or Myanmar, Thailand remains its main trade partner as well as the 'gateway' to foreign markets. The two-way growth of trades between the countries was remarkable during the period of 1991 to 1994, i.e. prior to the bridge opening. The volume of trade gradually slowed in the following years, perhaps because of the economic crisis in the region. Overall, exports from Thailand to Laos overshadow the small volume of imports from that country. This is due to large varieties of consumer goods and services that Thailand exports to Laos. In comparison, Laos exports logs, electricity, some minerals and handicraft to Thailand.

**Table 7: Value of Trade between at Nongkhai-Vientiane, 1989-1997
(in Million Baht)**

Year	Exports from Thai to Laos	Growth Rate (%)	Imports from Lao to Thai	Growth Rate (%)	Total Value	Total Growth Rate (%)
1989	958	-	358	-	1,316	-
1990	1,056	10.23	441	23.18	1,497	13.75
1991	1,516	43.56	463	4.99	1,979	32.20
1992	1,934	27.57	359	-22.46	2,293	15.87
1993	3,286	69.91	352	-1.95	3,638	58.66
1994	4,222	28.48	663	88.35	4,885	34.28
1995	4,841	14.66	492	-25.79	5,333	9.17
1996	5,131	5.99	495	0.61	5,626	5.49
1997	5,496	7.11	310	-37.37	5,806	3.20

Data Source: Thai Customs Office, Nong Khai

Box 1: Pattaya Issarn

Had Jom-ma-nee or Pattaya Issarn is located on the Thai side of the Mekong river just next to the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. This white sand, fresh-water beach appeared after heavy erosion of the river bank. The beach exists during dry season from January through May when the water level is low. In the old days villagers used the area for vegetable gardens. They also used to go out there for rest and relaxation - sitting, singing, eating or drinking with family and friends. In the early sixties the government developed a training center and some offices in the area. Because of the influx of the outsiders, local people gradually changed from the usual farming to small businesses that serve the students and government staff. They also build small huts and cottages along the bank of the river during the dry season.

A big change in Pattaya Issarn came about in 1992 when construction of the Thai-Lao friendship bridge started. The place became very popular as people from all over Nongkhai

Box 1 Continued...

and the rest of the country started coming to see the new bridge. Here they can enjoy the fresh-breeze, swim in the river, eat at the beach restaurants or have a beach-party in the evening. It has become a cheap way to visit the water front for the Issarn people as the real sea-beaches are very far from them. So, very lovingly people named it Pattaya Issarn, after the a popular beach resort city. The beach restaurants at Pattaya Issarn are open throughout the day and early evening. Some them remain open longer if they have customers. Several hotels, guest houses, restaurants and entertainment places such as discotheque, karaoke, beer-bars and restaurants opened up in the nearby area. During Songkran (Thai New Year), thousands of people from all over the country come to Nongkhai and Pattaya Issarn. They enjoy Songkran water festival in style by splashing river water, traditional dances, beauty contest and other joyful activities. At the beginning the beach was a public place. But as the local economy started to gain momentum, the municipal authorities introduced lease and tax systems. Most of the earnings go into the local public welfare program.

Pattaya Issarn is a good attraction for many Thai and Laotians visitors to Nongkhai. The sex workers, mostly young "freelance" Laotian girls working in Nongkhai town, also frequent it. While they go there for a bit of fun and relaxation, they avail themselves the opportunity to attract clients. Some of them make themselves contacts with the clients and go with them to hotels, guesthouses or elsewhere. Others simply give their phone number and ask the clients to contact them later. Their clients are the usual visitors to the place - both locals and outsiders. There is at least one restaurant in the near vicinity that used to provide sex services in its premises. It is not clear if it still has the rooms for sexual services or not. The whole sex workers situation is in line with the overall pattern of sex services in Nongkhai that have switched from usual brothel or entertainment places to indirect sex workers. However, it is quite significant to see the growth of commercial sex network in Pattaya Issarn which may eventually change its old reputation as a fun place for the family and children.

Four large hotels and several guest houses were built in anticipation of tourism and other businesses in Nongkhai. Two new large department stores were opened. Several other shop-houses were built in and around the town, some of them near the bridge. An Indochina market was opened in town mainly for local and foreign tourists. Several restaurants, beer-bars, night clubs, karaoke, discotheques and other entertainment places also opened. All these were in anticipation of increased number of tourists and visitors to the town following opening of the bridge. At present, many of these places are under-utilized and some of them were closed. Many investors' expectations have not been fulfilled. In part, this is thought to be due to the recent melt down of the Thai and regional economies. Because of the anticipated prospect of future trade and business, land price speculation sky-rocketed in Nongkhai. Many local people sold their land to the rich investors and opted for the cash offer. Once again, many of them had no clear idea what to do next with their cash. Some of them bought cars, pick-ups and motorcycles. They spent heavily on consumer goods, entertainment and gambling. Some of them got involved in traffic accidents and a few even died. Without any productive investment, many others used up their cash and resorted to day laboring or sam-lor driving. Some went to Bangkok or other places looking for jobs. At the same time, a small minority did well with their cash and prospered in local and regional businesses.

Thailand remains the largest investor in Laos. Several small and medium sized Thai companies are involved in infrastructure, garment, construction, electricity, mining, telecommunication, hotels, agribusiness, and other investments. It should be mentioned here that because of these investment and other trades, many Thai staff are either permanently stationed in Laos or travel to Laos quite frequently.

Comparison with Mukdahan-Savannakhet:

Trade value in Mukdahan-Savannakhet in 1989-1997 is presented in the Table 8. It shows that the value of trade in Mukdahan-Savannakhet has grown steadily over years and amounted to 3.7 billion Baht in 1997 compared to 5.8 billion Baht at Nongkhai-Vientiane in the same year. It showed an almost similar pattern of growth rate as in Nongkhai-Vientiane during 1993-1995. But unlike Nongkhai, where the trade slowed down in recent years, Mukdahan showed an impressive growth of 84% in 1997. The later situation is thought to be related to the "rainbow" relations between Mukdahan and Vietnam through Sanannakhet. This relation is expected to grow in coming years and will certainly be a big boost following completion of proposed road-bridge construction from Mukdahan to Danang of Vietnam.

**Table 8: Value of Trade between Mukdahan and Savannakhet, 1989-1997
(in Million Baht)**

Year	Exports from Thai to Laos	Growth Rate (%)	Imports from Lao to Thai	Growth Rate (%)	Grand Total Value	Total Growth Rate (%)
1989	370	--	692	--	1,062	--
1990	185	-50.0	745	7.7	930	-12.4
1991	181	-2.2	726	-2.6	907	-2.5
1992	355	96.1	388	-46.6	743	-18.1
1993	570	60.6	442	13.9	1,012	36.3
1994	1,620	184.2	249	-43.7	1,869	84.7
1995	1,785	10.2	281	12.9	2,066	10.5
1996	1,769	-0.9	239	-14.9	2,008	-2.8
1997	3,467	96.0	227	-5.0	3,694	84.0

Data Source: Thai Customs Office, Mukdahan

12. HIV/AIDS Risk Situations

As mentioned earlier, people crossing between Nongkhai and Vientiane can be broadly categorized in the following groups:

- Tourists - Thai, Laotian and foreigner,
- Traders - Thai and Laotian,
- Truckers - Thai and Laotian,
- Sex workers - Thai and Laotian,
- Migrant laborers - Thai and Laotian,
- Local population - Thai and Laotian.

Due to differences in their socio-economic backgrounds, mobility pattern and contacts with people on either side of the border, Thai and Laotian are exposed to different risk situations for HIV infection. The following determinants are used in the study to measure HIV vulnerability:

- Purpose of mobility;
- Length of stay in Nongkhai, Vientiane or surrounding areas;
- Place of stay - hotel/guesthouse, rented house, with friends, etc.;
- Accompanying persons, especially spouses or regular sex partner(s);
- Cash-flow vis-a-vis disposable income;
- Mode of rest and recreation while on trip;
- Peer pressure or group activities;
- Sexual activities with people other than the spouse:
 - CSWs - direct or indirect;
 - Friends or casual acquaintances;
- Drugs use and alcohol consumption;
- Knowledge of STDs and AIDS;
- Knowledge of HIV transmission;
- Knowledge of HIV prevention;
- Self-perception of HIV vulnerability;

Other issues that are not mentioned above but are related to the risk situations for one or more groups are discussed in the following sections.

Tourists and visitors

A great majority of people moving between Nongkhai and Vientiane are tourists and visitors. No breakdown of data is available for the Thai, Laotian and foreign nationals. However, it is evident from local information sources that there are more Thai tourists than Lao, and that foreigners form only a small segment of the tourist flow in the area.

Thai tourists and visitors: Before the bridge construction, only local Thai people living along the border used to visit Laos as it was difficult to get a border pass for people coming from distant provinces. Like foreigners, they travelled with passport and visa. After beginning of the bridge construction, more and more Thai people started to visit, many of them from the northeastern provinces. They would go to see the bridge construction and go shopping at the Indochina market in Nongkhai. Only a few of them would cross by boat to the other side of the river. It was typically a day trip from the nearby provinces, but people coming from far away would stay overnight in Nongkhai or Udon. After the bridge construction, more and more people are visiting Laos. It is now easy to obtain a border pass in Nongkhai and there are easy transportation and immigration procedures. However, the Lao government has some regulations to control the flow of tourists. Thai tour buses are not permitted to enter Laos. So the Thai tour operators have to rely on the Laotian transport companies on the Laotian side. This creates some difficulty in arranging comfortable travel from the bridge to Vientiane or elsewhere in Laos.

Most of the Thai tourists going to Laos (estimated by a tour operator around 85%) return to Thailand on the same day. Those who can not get back to their homes in Thailand on the same day usually spend a night in Udon, which is the largest city in the area. Only small

numbers of them would spend a night in Nongkhai. Thai tourists usually would not stay overnight in Vientiane and complain about expensive but poor quality accommodation. In general, Vientiane hotels are about two or three times more expensive than the similar or better quality hotels in Nongkhai or Udon.

The main attraction for Thai tourists in Laos is the people and their culture. "Laotians are very closely linked with our *Issarn* Thai people. So we have come here to see it with our own eyes" - says a middle-aged Thai visitor. Others come to visit family, relatives and friends in Laos. Most Thais visit important historical sites in Vientiane such as *That Luang* or Golden Temple and *Prathu Chai* or Victory Gate. They also go to *Talat Sao* or Morning Market and *Talat Lang* or Evening Market for shopping. Some groups of visitors go to Nam Ngum dam, which involves either an overnight stay at the lakeside guest houses or a return to hotels in Vientiane.

Some Thai tour operators estimate that about 10-15% of Thai tourists stay overnight in Laos, mostly men. Of those who stay overnight, many go to night entertainment places. Night life in Vientiane is lively. There are several nightclubs with live music and a dance floor. For a man, it is easy to find a paid "dance partner" in the club for a reasonable price. Although the role of these girls is to provide dance partners and company in the club, many of them would go to spend night with their clients. Thai tourists can generally afford such services. There are also many beer-bars where one can meet girls will spend a night with the clients. Male Thai tourists like to patronize Laotian sex workers as one Thai proverb says, "*you come to Laos, you must reach Laos*", which means in Laos you must sleep with a Laotian woman. Many Thai men perceive that "Laotian women are clean, beautiful and AIDS-free". It is also a new experience for the Thai men who do not usually have the opportunity to visit a foreign country.

The main attraction for Thai tourists in Nongkhai are the Friendship Bridge and shopping at Indochina market to buy goods from the Indochina countries, as well as China, former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. Another attraction is to go to *Pattaya Issarn* next to the bridge on the Thai side of the river (see box). They also visit night spots or sex workers. The appeal of Laotian girls is reflected in the rapid increase of Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai in recent years (see section on sex workers).

In general, a great majority of Thai tourists have a good knowledge of HIV/AIDS and they know how to protect themselves from HIV infection. But many of them are not quite sure about the HIV/AIDS situation in Laos or, more specifically, Laotian sex workers. However, knowledge itself is not enough to change their behavior and practice. Many men still do not use condoms with the sex workers or casual partners in Laos. This is evident from the 1997 Sentinel Surveillance of the sex workers in Nongkhai which showed that 21% of them are HIV positive. Despite these facts, most of these men do not consider themselves vulnerable to HIV infection.

Laotian tourists and visitors: Thousands of Laotian visitors come to Thailand each month. At present Laotians coming with a border pass to Thailand can stay up to three days in the border provinces, officially within 15 kilometers of the border. But in a revised agreement, they can now travel to Udon Thani, which is 50 kilometers from the border. According to a local estimate more than half of the Laotians crossing the Friendship Bridge go to Udon and the rest visit Nongkhai and its surrounding areas. A great majority of them come from

Vientiane and its surrounding provinces. Some of them are rich Vientiane elite, but a great majority are common people with average income. They come in groups with family and friends - men usually outnumbering women. In Nongkhai, they visit temples, go shopping in the market and eat at local restaurants. Almost all of them return home on the same day. Only a handful of them - predominantly young men - stay overnight in Nongkhai. There are a few cheap hotels in Nongkhai that are popular among Laotian visitors and businessmen. Some of them also stay with their Thai friends. In the evening, there are only a few things they can do other than going to night entertainment places. Some of these visitors take the opportunity to visit or call in a sex worker. It is usually cheaper to go to a brothel, but most of them prefer to call the sex worker to their hotel room. Some of the Laotian men like to try Thai girls just for a "new experience". However, many have a clear preference for Laotian CSWs, because they feel that it is easier to deal with Laotian girls than Thais, and possibly safer in terms of HIV/AIDS.

Many Laotians go to Udon Thani, especially those who have a lot of money. These young rich Laotians receive money from their relatives abroad, or have a good businesses in Laos. They find Udon more attractive because of its large shopping centers as well as entertainment facilities; "Nongkhai is rather boring", remarks a young Laotian visitor. While many of them return to Laos on the same day, a significant number of them - mostly men without wife or girlfriend - stay at hotels in Udon.. They have money to spend but do not have the same opportunities as in Thailand. There are a number of hotels and restaurants in Udon that are popular among the Laotian visitors and businessmen. They often receive good discount through tour operators in Laos or Thailand. These Laotian visitors also like entertainment places such as massage parlors which they do not have in Laos. This is a new experience for them. So they either visit a sex worker in the massage parlor, or call in one to their hotel room. There are a few Laotian sex workers in Udon but they are not as easily available as in Nongkhai; in any case, these rich Laotians prefer to go to massage parlors that have Thai CSWs.

Some Laotian tourists like to visit Bangkok, Chiangmai or Pattaya. They do this by obtaining a valid passport and visa. Usually they go in groups and sometimes with the whole family, in rented vans. Some young Laotian women have Thai boyfriends and they visit them regularly in Nongkhai or Udon. Some young Laotian women come to Nongkhai or Udon to visit their friends and learn about the jobs in shops, restaurants, houses or as sex workers. They may stay on to work or return to Laos and come back later by boat to work in Thailand.

In general, Laotian tourists and visitors like drinking beer or whiskey; few of them take *ya ma* or *ya ba* (*methamphetamine pills or injection*) as it is something new to Laos. There is no evidence to suggest that there are significant IDUs among Laotians.

Lao people, in general, have less knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS than Thai people. Many of them believe that AIDS is a Thai problem and Laos is still unaffected by the disease. This view is also reflected in the official Laotian media, which still downplays the significance of AIDS in their country. There are also fewer HIV/AIDS programmes in Laos, including the availability of condoms and treatment for STDs. As a result, Laotian men visiting sex workers in Nongkhai often do not like to use condoms, and at the same time the Laotian sex workers may not be strict about condom use with their clients, especially if they are Laotians. Even in Udon, some Thai sex workers think that it is not necessary to use

condoms with the Laotian clients. Condom use among sex workers in Vientiane is very low (see sex workers in Vientiane).

In summary, a significant number of male Laotian visitors engage in commercial sexual activities in Nongkhai, Udon or elsewhere in Thailand. They visit Thai or Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai, and Thai sex workers in Udon and other provinces. Because of their low level of awareness and self-perception of low HIV vulnerability, both Laotian clients and CSWs do not use condoms on a regular basis. This situation certainly places many of them in a very high-risk situation for HIV infection.

Foreign Tourist: Most of the foreign tourists in Nongkhai (and perhaps similarly in Vientiane) come from Europe, followed by USA, Japan, Australia and South Asian countries. In the past, they used to come to Nongkhai to have a look at Laos from a distance, as it was difficult to get a visa to Laos. Now they can visit Laos by obtaining a visa in Bangkok, Khon Kaen or at the Friendship bridge border crossing point. As a result, the number of foreign tourists is dropping in Nongkhai. Many stay 3-4 days before proceeding to Laos. Some of them simply stay for a day or two to arrange a visa to go to Laos where they spend several days. Some tourists stay and gather information for their work. Usually foreign tourists or visitors arrange Laotian visas in Bangkok or Khon Kaen. In recent months visas are available on arrival in Vientiane at a cost of US\$ 50. The high cost of a visa remains a strong deterrent to many tourists visiting Laos. In comparison, Thailand requires no visa for many nationals or offers free visa to several others, at least for 30 days.

A majority of the foreign tourists travel alone. Most of them are men but the number of female tourists is increasing in recent years. While there are young male and female tourists, there are also numbers of middle aged and some older couples coming to Nongkhai. As stated earlier, the main tourist attraction in Nongkhai is watching the great Mekong river and Laos from a distance but there are also many beautiful temples in Nongkhai and its surrounding areas. Tourists also like to go out bicycling in the near vicinity and witness the rural life and culture of local people. One major tourist destination in Nongkhai is to visit “village handicraft” places such as silk weaving. Back in Nongkhai, tourists often spend time chatting among themselves, reading books, writing letters to family and friends. In Vientiane, foreign tourists visit the same places as Thai tourists but do it in a leisurely way in several days. Some of them also travel to Luang Prabang and other historical places. The ‘unspoiled’ natural beauty of Laos is a major tourist attraction.

In general there are two distinct types of foreign tourist in Nongkhai-Vientiane. One group is more interested in the social and cultural aspects. This group usually spend time visiting historical sites and natural landscapes. They are not so keen on the night life or the sex industry. But it is not uncommon to see some of them getting emotionally or sexually involved with local Thai or Laotian men or women and at least a few of them ending up in “marriages”. Others may visit night spots and bring in sex workers to their hotel or guesthouse. It is easy to get sex workers in Nongkhai but is not so easy in Vientiane (see section on CSWs). One Laotian government official explains, “foreign tourists come to Laos to see its natural and historical beauties, and go to Thailand for sex services”. In reality, sex workers are available in Laos and the increasing number of tourists may raise the demand for sex services in Laos, following pattern set in Thailand.

The vast majority of foreign tourists have good knowledge of HIV/AIDS and its prevention. However, it is not so clear what they actually practice, especially those who get drunk or take drugs. It is reported that marijuana is easily available in some parts of Laos and some foreign tourists openly admit using it. It is reported that a new drug route has opened up from the “golden triangle” to the Lao-Cambodia or Lao-Vietnam borders, passing through Laos.

Long distance truckers

According to Nongkhai Highway Department statistics, 62,839 vehicles crossed the bridge in 1997 (Table 3) and about half of those are heavy vehicles transporting goods between the two countries. By taking an average of two persons per heavy vehicle, there were about 63,000 truckers trips in that year. Because of the higher volume of trade from Thailand to Laos, the number of Thai truckers are greater than the Laotian truckers.

Thai truckers: Most of the Thai vehicles crossing over to Laos transport goods from Northeastern provinces but sometimes from as far as Bangkok and other industrial districts in Thailand. Before the bridge construction, there were only a few truck companies doing this business but after the opening of the bridge more and more companies are now permitted to operate in this sector. The truck drivers usually come from Nongkhai, Udon and other northeastern provinces and are familiar with the local situation and speak the same language. The truck companies have joint ventures with other Thai and Laotian companies and formed a transportation network.

Most of the drivers go to Laos usually for a day trip and return in the evening. If they have difficulty in unloading goods or some other problems, then they stay overnight in Vientiane or nearby places. Usually they sleep in the truck to safeguard their goods but sometimes they go to guest houses or stay with Laotian friends. Because of the close relationship between the two countries, many Thais have friends in Laos and vice versa. Usually the drivers would join together and drink local beer or whiskey. Some of them would visit sex workers or bring them to their guesthouses. As mentioned earlier, Laotian women are very popular among Thai men. Most of the truckers claim to use condoms but they often do not carry condoms with them. It is very difficult to get a condom in Vientiane late in the evening when the drug stores are closed as their sale is not allowed outside such as beer-bars, night clubs, hotels etc. Some Thai truckers have Laotian girlfriends or “minor-wives” whom they have met through their repeated travel to the area. As these women are relatively steady partners, they rarely use condoms with them.

Box 2: A Thai Truck Driver

I left my home in Udon at the age of 18 to work as a driver's assistant in Samut Prakan. That was the most exciting thing that ever happened in my life as I was getting bored at home after quitting school. I did not like to work in the farm like many other villagers. I became a burden to my family, doing nothing but eating up the meagre family income. My father was a truck driver who supported me, my sister and a brother. My mother, in addition to taking care of the family and children, would also work in the rice field. I had to help her since my boyhood like many others in the village.

Box 2 Continued...

I worked with the Samut Prakan company for about two years (1992-94). This job provided me excellent opportunities to travel all over the country, especially the South and North that are so different from my native Udon. I enjoyed every trip out there. Some of the drivers I used to go with were there were very nice people. They would let me drive once we were out of Bangkok or other big cities. Within a year I picked up my heavy vehicle driving license at the age of twenty. At our destinations, we used to go for a drink and then visit the sex workers in the town or road side rest areas. Some of these girls were really pretty and all of us had good time out there. There were some nice Shan girls in Mae Sai and Chiangmai and we would never miss the opportunity to visit them every time we were there. I almost fell in love with one of them.

In early 1994, my father managed to get me a driver's job with his old company in Nongkhai and he decided to go back to his old farm and lead a leisurely life with his fellow farmers in the village. This job brought me back to my home town and allowed me to visit my mother and family more often. I was excited to go to Laos by crossing the newly built Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge over the Mekong river. My new job was to transport goods from Udon or Nongkhai to Vientiane and vice versa. I used make 12 to 15 trips to Laos a month. Usually several of the company trucks went in convoy to Vientiane, unloaded goods and came back to Nongkhai on the same day. But sometimes if we could not finish our job, we stayed overnight in Laos. That happened almost all the time if we went to Nam Ngum dam. At night, some of the drivers guarded our trucks while others went out for a relaxation. We used to drink with the Laotian friends and then visit the sex workers in the town. I was a single man and did not have a girl friend. Even my married friends did the same in Vientiane. There was no one really watching us and we felt free to do a little bit of men's life out there.

Our Laotian friends would show us the restaurants and beer-bars in the town where we could find girls. It was easy for us to talk to the Laotian girls as they speak the same dialect. Laotian friends also showed us the small guest houses where we could take the girls. Laotian girls are very popular among the drivers as they are "fair-skinned, beautiful, clean and free of kama-rog or STDs/AIDS". Most of us did not bother to use a condom with them as we were told by our Laotian friends that AIDS was not a problem. Even when some of my friends wanted to use a condom, they could not find one in the late evening. The girls did not carry condoms with them and the restaurants did not have it either.

Apparently, they were available in the drug-stores only but were closed after dark. I got kama-rog twice and treated by taking drugs that I bought from the drug store. I was told by some of my friends that they got kama-rog too. One of my older friends who also worked as truck driver for several years died last year apparently from AIDS. Sometimes I am afraid of AIDS too as I visited so many sex workers in many different places. Our company people would occassionally tell us about AIDS but we basically ignore these advice when we are outside our home town and especially after drinking in the evening.

I used to take ya-ma or speed-pills like many of my friends while driving a long distance. It was rather easy to get it almost everywhere in Thailand especially in Chiangmai. I never took any drug injection and do not know anybody who does take it. I think I know about AIDS and

Box 2 Continued...

how it is transmitted by sex and injections. I don't think it can be transmitted by eating or working together or sharing a toilet. However, I am not quite sure what I will do if I have to live or work with someone who has AIDS.

Since the middle of 1997, things changed in my company, and in February 1998, they laid me off along with some others. I tried in vain to get into some other jobs including my old company in Samut Prakan. Now I am back to Udon and decided to invest my savings to buy a sam-lor and drive it. I don't like driving at day time because the roads are congested and it is hot out there. I prefer to drive at night instead when it is more peaceful. Another reason for driving at night is that it is easier to earn from the men who look around to find sex workers. I help them to find girls and receive tips from the girls and the men as well.

I now live with my girlfriend. She is older than me and I think she loves me a lot. I do not visit sex workers any more. I do not use condom with her because we do not see any use of it. I never told her about my past sex behavior. No, I would not like to take a AIDS test myself because I am afraid of a positive result. I am not ready for it and probably never will be.

When the drivers from other places come to Nongkhai, they stay in company houses or rest places. Most of the drivers are married but only a few of them bring their wives with them. So even in Nongkhai they have the chance to visit sex workers and in fact this might be easier to do here compared to Vientiane because of their familiarity with the local situation. In Nongkhai they can choose between Thai or Laotian CSWs, often preferring the latter.

At least some of the Thai drivers take *ya ma* or *ya ba* when they are on long trip. This is a serious problem among drivers, youths and teenagers in the area and many other parts of Thailand. There is no evidence of IDUs (heroin) among this group perhaps because of low availability as well as high cost of the drugs.

Lao truckers: Lao transport companies send goods from Laos to Thailand which are usually limited to logs and timber, leather, animal bones, agricultural products, ores and minerals. These kinds of products often take considerable time for loading and unloading. Lao trucks are allowed to travel to Nongkhai and Udon where they unload their goods and return to Laos usually on the same day.

Similar to the Thai truckers going to Laos, a great majority of the Lao truckers return home on the same day. Only a few of them who can not finish their jobs spend the night in Nongkhai or Udon. In Nongkhai, they usually stay in the company godown or in small hotels. Some of them bring along Laotian girls, not their wife but maybe a friend or acquaintance. Some of the drivers go to visit sex workers at Soi Tan (red light district) in Nongkhai or similar places. "Some Lao men like to visit Thai sex workers for a new experience" - says a Lao trucker. They usually do this on their first visit to Thailand. They also like to go to night clubs, karaoke or coffee shops. Concerning sex workers, they prefer to have the Laotians because of easier communication and less bargaining for condom use. Laotian drivers are not so interested in *ya ma* but like to drink a lot of beer or other alcohol. After they get drunk they go to the brothels and forget about all the prevention they learned about. Some of them get STDs

and self-treat by purchasing drugs. Some of these truck drivers might get STDs from the Vietnamese sex workers, as they also go to Vietnam border at Lao Bao or other places

Laotian truck drivers have many misconceptions about HIV/AIDS e.g. if a man does not ejaculate inside the vagina, then he can not have AIDS, or if a woman looks healthy then she cannot have AIDS, or after sexual intercourse if you wash immediately that should reduce the risk for HIV infection. One of the drivers said, "people dying from AIDS can infect others ... as the AIDS germs come out of the dead body and swarm across the room to find a new host. It is like the dog-flee walking out of its body after the dog dies. It is dangerous to stay in the room with a dead AIDS victim".

Laotian Migrant Workers

In 1996-97, the Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, registered and issued one-year valid work permits to 293,652 (as of April 1997) out of an estimated one million undocumented migrants workers in Thailand. About 11,594 or 3.95% of these registered workers were Laotians (Paul 1997). In reality, there are many more Laotian migrant workers in Thailand who were not included in the registration process. Police immigration figures from Savannakhet indicate that a total of 55,844 Laotians legally travelled to Thailand in 1997, including 27,056 women and 8,584 children. But another 24,517 made the crossing to Thailand illegally in the same year. It is not clear how many of them went for employment. However, a Savannakhet Women's Union survey of four sample villages in the province indicated that out 3,443 people, 509 (15%) went to Thailand, of which 40% were women. The situation is similar in the surrounding areas of Vientiane and other border provinces. It is less so from the Vientiane municipality itself as the economic activities there are relatively good and the unemployment rate is lower. Reasons for migration to Thailand are cited as -

- lack of job opportunities at home,
- farming is 'boring' for young people,
- income from farming is low and slow,
- easy seasonal work in Thailand during harvest season,
- friends and relatives with experience encourage them to go,
- no clear information and guidance for migration,
- unaware of the risks of working illegally,
- image of better income and savings than Laos, and
- prestige and higher social status from working in a foreign country.

In Nongkhai, many Laotians used to work in construction sites during the economic boom years of 1991-95. They also worked in agriculture, retail businesses, domestic and entertainment services, including commercial sex. Because of the present slowdown in the Thai economy, construction work has slowed down. Therefore, the needs for migrant workers has decreased. But some Laotians still work in construction because the Thai laborers often do not like to do the hard, dirty jobs and the employers often prefer to hire cheap Laotian laborers. The Laotians also work in the agriculture sector, retailing, entertainment and domestic services. Some of the Laotian workers come with their families and work together. Many others come alone or with a group of friends. They usually work and live in the same place, as provided by the owners. One employer said, "they do not go out too much, perhaps because they are afraid of police arresting them", which is apparently common in Nongkhai

and Udon. If they get arrested, the employers may pay for their release but the amount would be deducted from their salaries. Usually they stay in Thailand for a few weeks or months depending on the types of work they do. But they return home quite often to take money. Laotians seem to be very "home sick" and need to visit their families quite frequently. Many Laotian workers like to go to work in Bangkok, Chantaburi, Rayong, Chonburi, Samut Prakan and other economically prosperous areas because of much higher earnings. But this is rather a risky option as they may fall into the traps of employers, police and gang groups. This is much worse for the women workers who decide go to these places.

In general, Laotian laborers are cheaper than Thais as they accept half or one-third of the wages of the Thai laborers. But this income is already a good amount compared to what they can earn in their home country, especially those coming from outside of Vientiane. Normally they do not spend a lot but try to save as much as they can to take back home. But some of the youngsters and single men like to enjoy their stay in Thailand. They like to group together in the evening and drink alcohol. Only a few would go out for sex workers as it is too expensive for them. When they do, they usually go to the cheap brothels. "Peer pressure" seems to be a strong factor among the Laotians. Some of them have Thai or Laotian girlfriends or boyfriends, and therefore do not engage so much in commercial sex. "I know some Laotian women fell in love with Thai men and now living with them in Thailand" said a local Nongkhai resident. We met a Laotian man married to a Thai woman in Nongkhai. They now have three children, all going to Thai school. There are many young Laotian women who work in domestic services or private retailing businesses. "Nothing much is known about their social and sexual networking" remarks a Thai shop-owner. Preliminary observations indicate that at least some of these women have sexual relationship with Thai men or sometimes with fellow Laotians.

Most of the Laotian migrant workers do not have clear knowledge of STDs and AIDS. In fact, this is something that they would not usually discuss with others, especially if they are unmarried. "Laotian women are very conservative about this" remarks a Laotian health worker. "They will not usually go to a doctor for STD treatment. This is especially difficult for the young unmarried girls who feel very shy to talk about it and the doctors ask too many questions about their relation". They have many myths about STDs and several methods of quack treatment. Even the doctors and pharmacies in Laos do not have access to updated knowledge, diagnostic and treatment methods. STD services are rather scarce in Laos and are available only in a few big cities. So most of the Laotian workers do not take any preventive measures for STD/HIV. Even those who know about HIV/AIDS, do not protect themselves because of their self-perception that they are not vulnerable to HIV infection. They believe that AIDS is a problem for Thai people. In fact many of the documented HIV/AIDS cases among Laotians have links with Thailand. One Savannakhet health officials claims, "all AIDS deaths in our province have been among people who had gone to Thailand" (UNICEF 1996). "This might have been true in 1996 but now HIV/AIDS is in Laos and Laotians are transmitting the disease among themselves irrespective of their link with Thailand or other foreigners" - comments another health official.

Thai migrant workers:

There are only a small numbers of Thai migrant laborers in Laos. One small group of about 100 men are involved in underwater chain-saw logging in Nam Ngum lake, where forest trees were submerged following construction of a large hydroelectric dam. Another group of Thai

workers are employed in various mining and logging companies throughout Laos while others are employed in the Thai-owned companies or joint venture projects. These migrant workers do very hard jobs in difficult conditions. They well paid but are away from their families and therefore, usual social bindings. So they seek periodic entertainment during weekends or days-off, and often engage in commercial sex. As they speak Laotian dialect and are familiar with the local social structure, they find it very easy to arrange these encounters despite relatively tight police control over commercial sex. Some of the Thai workers, however, have local Laotian girlfriends or minor wives. Most of the Thais know about HIV/AIDS but because of their belief that the Laotians are AIDS-free, they often engage in unprotected sex with them. This is much different from Thailand where same people will almost always use condom with the sex workers. The attitude of the Laotian women is same as the Thai workers. One Laotian girl who has a Thai boyfriend explains, "I don't see any AIDS in Laos, so I am not afraid of it". Her friend has a supporting word, "he cannot have AIDS because he looks so healthy".

Cross-border traders and businessmen

The third largest population group crossing the Thai-Lao bridge are the traders and businessmen. There are two distinct groups among these men and women. The first group is involved in local trading of consumer goods and other commodities. These traders - both Thai and Laotian - are usually local people on both sides of the border although a few of them come from neighboring provinces. They know the local situation quite well and usually have friends and contacts on the other side of the border. They trade in consumer goods and seasonal products. Indochina market in Nongkhai, and Morning and Evening markets of Vientiane have a large number of these traders. Men and women are equally involved in these businesses. They have semi-permanent border passes and usually make daily trips and return home on the same day along with their products. However, some of them, especially men, stay overnight on the other side of the border. These traders usually earn good sums of cash and can afford to spend on recreation, and sex services may be at the top of their list. This seems to be more common among Thai traders going to Vientiane. They go to the beer-bars or night club and take the girls to their guest houses. Some of them have a steady partner or minor wife in Laos similar to the Thai migrant workers.

The second group is involved in large scale businesses and long-term investments in Laos. As stated earlier, Thailand is the prime investor in Laos. The company managers and staff visit Vientiane, Udon or Nongkhai periodically. They have an office and staff to manage their business interests. They stay in comfortable hotels and dine in expensive restaurants. In Vientiane night clubs, Thai businessmen are very popular among hostesses. There they drink and find a girl of their choice to sit and dance with them. Once they like each other, then they can go to their hotel room. One of the night club hostesses says, "Thais are very nice, gentle, and generous in paying". Another hostess adds, "Thai people are our first choice of clients because we can speak and understand their needs easily". For many Thai men this is a very attractive deal, as the girls are pretty and do not cost as much as in Thailand. Some men have steady relations with the girls, or even have them as their 'minor wife'. Because of their close relationship with the girls and misperceptions that the Laotian girls are AIDS-free, many of these men do not use a condom with them. Despite their good knowledge about AIDS, many of these Thais tend to ignore 'safe sex practice' in Laos. As stated elsewhere, Laotian girls also do not insist on condom use which is largely because of their ignorance about the disease. Similarly, Laotian businessmen like to visit night clubs and massage parlours in

Udon. While the Thai CSWs there have good knowledge of AIDS, it is very doubtful if all of them use a condom with their clients. Preliminary investigations indicate that they are more flexible about not using a condom with Laotians.

Local population in the border districts

This is perhaps the most intriguing point in the whole issue of cross-border population movement. While some of the local people of Nongkhai and Vientiane are among the mobile population groups, namely traders, truckers and tourists, many of them are not. But even then they come in constant contact with the mobile population passing through their town and interacting with them in many ways. Some local men and women get acquainted with the people visiting their place and develop emotional and sexual relations. This is especially true to the people operating hotels and guesthouses, tour companies, restaurants and retail businesses. In many instances, they end up in casual sex encounters and nothing more. Local Thai men and women may also develop sexual relationship with the migrant workers from Laos.

Laotian sex workers are an extra attraction for the local men to visit sex venues. One Nongkhai resident says, “some of my friends go to night clubs just to meet Laotian girls especially those working out of the house. They are pretty and perhaps, AIDS-free”. “We usually take them to a ‘short-time’ hotel” says another resident who work in a hotel. “Generally speaking, our local Thai population are also more vulnerable to HIV transmission due to the presence of migrant and mobile population in Nongkhai, concludes the former.

Commercial Sex Workers

Like many other places in Thailand, Nongkhai has a sizable commercial sex industry. Prior to 1992, i.e. before construction of the bridge, most of the sex workers were in brothel-based ‘direct’ services such as Soi Tan. There were smaller numbers of ‘indirect’ sex workers in the restaurants, coffee-shops, karaokes, night clubs and other entertainment places. Most of them were Thai who came from the northeast and north of Thailand. There were reported cases of trafficking of younger girls in the brothels. At that time, there were a few Laotian girls in the brothels but not outside as indirect CSWs. Table 9 shows the number of sex establishments and sex workers as recorded by the public health department. However, the actual number of sex workers could be much higher as many indirect sex workers go undetected in the government surveillance system.

**Table 9: Number of Sex Establishments
and Sex Workers by Types in Nongkhai, 1991- 1997**

Calendar Year	Number of Sex Establishments	Number of Sex Workers		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
1991	65	198*	-	198
1992	68	244*	-	244
1993	30	112	43	155
1994	25	141	8	149
1995	55	140	215	255
1996	133	144	25	169
1997	140	110	130	240

* Mixed direct and indirect:

Data source: STD/AIDS Department, Provincial Health Office, Nongkhai, Thailand.

During construction of the bridge, the sex industry in Nongkhai changed rapidly. One reason for this was that the number of construction workers increased significantly mainly because of construction hotels, department stores, houses, roads and highways and not necessarily the bridge. At that time, the number of tourists, visitors and traders rose rapidly. In addition, many local residents sold their land to the investors and speculators. During the period, the local economy enjoyed its 'boom years', and there was an increased demand for entertainment services and sex workers. In addition to the brothels, there were some restaurants in town that used to provide sex services on the premises. At that time, many new karaoke bars, beer-bars, traditional massage, and night clubs also opened and provided indirect sex services.

However, during 1993-94, the Thai government launched a nation-wide campaign to curb child prostitution. This policy resulted in closure of many brothels and red light districts as it is partially evident in Table 8. After the opening of the bridge in 1994, CSWs activities intensified. But because of active surveillance on child prostitution in 1993-94, and subsequent implementation of the new prostitution law in 1995, there was a significant shift in the sex industry. Brothel based sex workers declined sharply, especially child prostitutes. Within a very short period, the number of indirect sex workers increased to fill the vacuum. Many sex workers now rent houses in the town and provide services in the hotels and guest houses. They conveniently pose as a 'house girl' or 'student' and develop network with the potential clients through the hotel boys, sam-lor or *sky-lab* drivers. Another important change is that since the opening of the bridge, the number of Thai sex workers dropped and the Laotian girls moved in. While some of the Laotian girls work in brothels, a great majority of them operate out of houses. They are very well linked with the sam-lor or *sky-lab* drivers who guide their potential clients to the houses and send them to the hotels and guesthouses. These drivers receive a lucrative 10-20% commission on the charges for the girl. It is important to note that unlike many other Thai cities and large towns, there is no massage parlor in Nongkhai that offers direct sex services, which is so common in many other places including Udon and Mukdahan. However, there are a number of traditional massage parlors and some masseurs work as indirect sex workers. Many other indirect sex workers could be found in restaurants, night clubs, karaoke, discos, and even in hotels and guest houses. In summary, the changes in the commercial sex industry in Nongkhai during the study period are as follows:

- overall number of sex workers remain almost unchanged or slightly increased;
- at present there are more indirect sex workers than the direct;
- it is difficult to trace all indirect sex workers;
- more Laotian sex workers than Thai if compared with the past;
- sex workers are usually over 18 years, and thereby less child prostitutes;
- most of the Thai or Lao sex workers are working 'voluntarily', and thereby, a decrease in trafficking or forced prostitution;
- Laotian sex workers are popular among many Thai clients for their beauty, cleanliness and supposedly AIDS-free status;
- Laotian sex workers are also popular among Laotian clients who find them more accommodating and less demanding for condoms;
- indirect sex workers have more freedom to move around and/or leave their work as they like;
- CSWs especially indirect ones may choose their clients and perhaps have more bargaining power for their activities such as number of clients and use of condom;

Thai Sex Worker: Thai sex workers in Nongkhai are available in both direct and indirect sex services. In the past most of them were in brothels and trafficking of child prostitutes was rather common. As mentioned earlier, that situation has significantly changed and at present most of the Thai sex workers come by themselves or with their friends. Most of them come from poor farming families in Ubon, Korat or other northeastern provinces. Usually they have broken families after being widowed, divorced or deserted by their husbands or boyfriends. Some of them have children, elderly parents, young brothers or sisters to take care of. They are in need of money to support themselves and their families. They usually know what their job entails and some of them have worked as sex workers elsewhere.

In the brothel, *mama-san* provides housing either in the brothel itself or in close vicinity. They usually stay in job for one to four years visiting home once or twice a year. In the past, each of the brothel sex workers used to serve up to eight or ten clients a day but it is now down to two or three. A *mama-san* claims, "This is because of the bad economy and men don't have enough money to spend anymore". Some brothels now also provide indirect sexual services at the hotels, guest houses or even private homes. Thai sex workers usually perform oral sex and very rarely, anal sex. Usually there are extra charges for these special acts. They claim to use condoms with all clients in all types of sexual acts (100% condom!). However, this can be strongly disputed because of the high HIV prevalence, i.e. 21.33% positive in 1997 (Table 12). They often do not use a condom when newly arrived (traditionally called as opening of virginity), with the regular customers, boyfriends or husbands and sometimes under pressure from the customers or *mama-san*. Most of the sex workers take contraceptive pills, that may be another indirect indication of low compliance of condom use.

While they usually earn good money, they are not so good in saving their income. Some girls drink, smoke or take *ya ma*. They also like to gamble among themselves or even with outsiders. At least some of them are also too keen to spending on consumer goods. For minor illnesses, they buy medicine from the drug stores. If they have severe problems such as vaginal discharge and pain, then they go to the government health office and rarely to the private clinics. They know quite a lot about HIV/AIDS, but not without misunderstandings. For example, some of them think that by checking blood every three months they will be safe

from AIDS. Most of them however think that sex workers are at high risk because of multiple contacts, and possible breakage of condoms. They also believe Thai people have more AIDS than Laotians. Some of them have already seen former sex workers with AIDS. But even then they do not see other options and continue to do the same high risk job and wait for whatever happens to them.

Laotian Sex Worker:

As mentioned in the previous section, at present there are many Laotian girls working as sex workers in Nongkhai. They usually come from a rural background mostly from the surrounding areas of Vientiane. Most of them are single but a few of them are divorced or separated. In Laos, they used to work in the farm, factory, or as a tailor. Some of them did not have any formal job. They are typically guided by their friends and relatives who usually know what the job entails. Only in exceptional cases were they misled by informants or agents. This is much different from the past when a great majority of the sex workers were forced or enticed in to sex work. Usually, they come by boat without a border pass and return in the same way. A few of them come with a border pass by bridge or boat and pay a fine of 50 Baht or more for each day of overstay in Nongkhai. Usually they work like this for about a year but they go home quite frequently, often once a month, or every six weeks. One *mamasan* quizzes, "Lao girls are very home sick. They want to go home every few week". Some of them come back with their sisters, friends or relatives who stay on while they take a long absence. In this way they maintain their link with Nongkhai. Most of them say that they work like this to support their family, such as education of their siblings or children, or for medical treatment of parents. However, they appear to spend freely on luxury goods, and consumer items such as radio, television or other electrical appliances.

Demand for the Lao sex worker is very high in Nongkhai. There might be two main reasons for this. One, most Laotian girls are much younger than the Thai sex workers, which makes them more attractive in the eyes of clients; and two, Thai clients generally perceive them as "clean, beautiful and AIDS-free". The other reason for the high demand is that some Thai or foreign clients simply want to have new experience with the non-Thai. Most of the girls rent houses and live with someone they know. They usually have a Thai agent who arranges for their stay and takes care of their living arrangements. The agent also develops networks with the hotels and guest houses, and *sky-lab* and *sam-lor* drivers who bring in clients, or take the girls to the hotel room. Some others work in the restaurants, night club or traditional massage parlors, and provide indirect sex services. Only a few Laotian girls can be found in brothels.

Most of their clients are Thai and Laotians, although there are a few Indians, Westerners and Japanese. According to the girls, usually the clients behave well unless they are very drunk. Like their Thai counterparts, the Laotian sex workers claim to use a condom in all sexual encounters, which can be strongly disputed in the same way as the Thai or even more so. "It is easy to convince a Laotian sex worker not to use condom" - claims a Laotian client and several Thai men agree with him. "With 100% condom compliance HIV infection rate ought to be much lower" - remarks a knowledgeable AIDS worker. "This is still a great dilemma in Thailand and we have to face this harsh reality some time soon" he concludes. Some sex workers have Thai boyfriends which often means someone they met through their work, probably an old customer. These boyfriends visit them on a regular basis, or sometimes stay together. They usually do not pay for the sexual services, and more importantly, do not use a condom which could be one of the contributing factors for the high HIV prevalence.

Box 3: A Laotian Sex Worker

I was a pretty girl in our Vientiane community. When I finished grade seven, I stopped going to school. Then after a few years at the age of 19, I was married to a rich man. I really loved this man and everything was going on well until five months later I came to know that my husband had another wife and I was his "mistress". All of a sudden my whole life had changed. I cried and cried. I fought with him. I wondered about my life. Finally I decided to leave him for my parents and engage myself in the family business. I also decided not to marry another man as my first love was so brutally crushed by my ex-husband.

My family had a good business in Vientiane. A few years after I left my husband, our business collapsed and the family had a huge debt of about 300,000 Baht from the bank and others. I am the eldest of nine children of my parents but I do not like to talk a lot about it. I wondered about our financial situation but could not find any good solution. I heard about Soi Tan (red light district in Nongkhai) from my friends. So one day I decided to come and work here as a sex worker and earn money to repay the debt of the family.

I came to Nongkhai by crossing over the Friendship Bridge as I had a proper passport and visa and went straight to Soi Tan by a sky-lab. It took me about four months to adapt to my new life. I knew from the beginning the kind of work I have to do but did not know its real pains. And I also knew that I could not be in the same social class of my past but I needed money to support my family to get out of the debt situation as well as support education of my younger siblings. During the first month in Soi Tan, I earned about 50,000 Baht. I went back home to Vientiane to give money to my parents. I lied to them that I was working in a Thai department store and borrowed extra money from my boss. I also told them that I had a rich Thai boy-friend and was living comfortably with him.

At the beginning I had about ten clients a night but now the number of clients have decreased to about 2 or 3. This is not because I am getting older but I think it is because of the present economic slow down. My clients are Thai, Laotians and a few foreigners. I charge my clients 200 Baht for a short time service in the brothel and 500 Baht in a hotel room but 1,500 Baht for a full night. About 50% of my earning goes to the mama-san and the rest for myself. In addition, I make a good sum from the tips that my clients give me. My objective is to save a minimum of 500 Baht a day. If I can not do it, then I would stop spending on anything for that particular day. I usually send about 15,000 Baht a month to my family - 10,000 of which goes for the debt payment and 5,000 for expenses. As of now, I have another 100,000 Baht in debt which I hope to repay in next one year or so. Then I would like to save some money and re-open my business in Laos

I manage to relate well with my clients and take it as 'business-like relation' which means return them with services for the money they pay for. Most of my clients like me a lot. Although I am 35 now, they usually look for me first when they come here instead of much a younger girl. If I am not available, they will wait for me or come back later. I also maintain very smooth working relations with the mama-san. Otherwise, I have no close friend in Nongkhai and never tell my real story to anybody, why should I? After work I usually rest in my room - usually thinking about my future. I always remind myself that I have a mission to

Box 3 Continued...

do good for the family. So there is no reason for me to spend money for worthless things like drugs or alcohol. I feel sorry for my co-workers that they do not save their money. Most of their money goes into eating, drinking, gambling etc. In the end, I think they will not be able to get out of this place.

I know about AIDS but I am not afraid of it because I put condoms on all of my clients, often two at a time. I convince them very well that this is important for their life as well as me. Sometimes I have a problem with the drunken men but nonetheless they had to use condom before having sex with me. I don't like oral or anal sex but I do masturbation if the clients want it but even then I would use a condom. I never got any STD. Once I got some bad itching possibly fungus which might be due to too many clients I had served during that period.

I certainly do not like my work as a sex worker but I never resent my decision to come and to do this. I feel proud to succeed with my struggle. If I could go back to my past I think I would do this again. I don't think I had a better choice. I am rather happy to help my family out of this terrible mess. My main worry is that my family and friends in Laos would know about the work I am doing. Once I almost came face to face with one of my relatives in a Nongkhai hotel. Another time I met a friend of my former husband in the market and told him not tell anybody about my whereabouts. I am really scared to go the hotels because someone I know may find me out there.

Some men have asked me stop working here and offered me to stay with them. I don't take it too seriously because most men like to talk like this. I think they are not serious. They might use me for a while and then throw away 'like a piece of dirty cloth'. Some of them might think I have a lot of money and want to have a hand on it. Some others just want to get a little extra attention from me. I especially like a man who drives a oil-tanker. He is from Bangkok and visits me at least once a month and sometimes calls me by phone. He is very kind to me and it seems he really enjoys my company. Once he took me to Bangkok to meet his family and told them that I work in a department store. He offered to pay back all of my debts and asked me to stay with him. I did not agree because I want to deal with my own problem. But I still like thinking about his offer. I think I like him a lot but I can not decide if it would be good to go with him or not. Since I am a Laotian, I think it will be difficult to live in Thailand. For the time being my dream is to save some money and go back to Laos and re-open my own business. I don't know if my dream for a real man will ever come true.

Most of the sex workers know about the transmission of AIDS. They know that AIDS is big problem in Thailand but prefer to do this job anyway because of the good income. They are not so sure about the AIDS problem in Laos and did not hear much about prevention there. As a result they are not highly motivated to protect themselves. "Laotian girls are not so keen to go for STD check up at the V.D clinic and sometimes they forget to carry condoms with them when they go to sleep with a client" - commented a *mama-san*.

The brothel owner charges each client 200-500 Baht for a short time service, about half of it goes to the sex worker. They also go to hotels and guest houses but for a higher rate of about 1,500 Baht for a night. In fact most of the Laotian girls work as indirect sex workers outside brothels and provide services at the hotels. In this way they can earn more in relatively short time and also can go back home any time they like to. Some of the girls drink alcohol but apparently do not take other drugs. Sometimes they go to the market for shopping, and they also like to go to *Pattaya Issarn* for fun and relaxation, as well as taking time to look for lucrative clients.

Comparison of Sex Establishments in Nongkhai and Mukdahan:

Mukdahan has a relatively small sex industry like the city itself. But it also has its own features: there are two relatively large massage parlors with about forty sex worker serving a good number of clients each night. Like Nongkhai in recent years, direct sex in brothels has significantly declined and have been replaced by indirect services. A number of brothels still exist in the old *Soi Klang* area. Overall there are less sex workers these days compared to past years (Table 10). This may be because of current economic slowdown in Thailand and the consequent decline in the demand for commercial sex. Many karaoke and night clubs have only a few sex workers now compared to a very large number during 1992-95. Another important point of difference between Mukdahan and Nongkhai is that there are only a few Laotian sex workers in Mukdahan. There are a few Laotians girls who work in restaurants, karaoke or night clubs which may have indirect sex services. This is quite different from Nongkhai where many Laotian sex workers provide services in the hotels and guest houses from their rented homes.

Most of the clients in Mukdahan are Thai with a few Laotians and occasionally, foreigners. A massage parlor attendant said, "Laotians from Savannakhet like to go to massage parlors. But it is rather expensive and therefore beyond the reach of many of them". Even then groups of Laotians can be seen quite regularly in these massage places. The same attendant adds, "I think if they have more money they will come here more frequently. I can see from their face that they really enjoy it". Some foreigners travel to and from Savannakhet and prefer to rest in Mukdahan because of its better infrastructure. A few of them go to massage parlors or call in CSWs to their hotel room. However, some Laotian CSWs reportedly pass through Mukdahan to work in larger cities in other large northeast cities such as Khon Kaen or Ubon. Several Mukdahan sources anticipate that with the completion of the planned Mukdahan-Savannakhet bridge, there will be an increase in population movement, especially truckers, traders and tourists, that may increase the demand for sex services in both Mukdahan and Savannakhet.

Table 10: Comparison of Number and Types of Sex Workers in Nongkhai and Mukdahan

Calendar Year	Sex Workers in Nongkhai			Sex Workers in Mukdahan		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
1991	198*	--	198	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1992	244*	--	244	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1993	112	43	155	50	--	50
1994	141	8	149	32	41	73
1995	140	215	255	46	54	100
1996	144	25	169	46	54	100
1997	110	130	240	79	??	79

* Mixed direct and indirect; n.a. = not available;

Data source: STDs/AIDS Department of Provincial Health Office, Nongkhai & Mukdahan;

Sex industry in Vientiane and Savannakhet:

Officially, there is no commercial sex service in Laos. There is no brothel or sex worker in the country and according to Laotian government, “any such activities are considered a crime against social harmony”. The police department is entrusted to control these activities throughout the country. There is no red light district in Vientiane that provides direct sex service in the premises. Male hotel guests are not allowed to bring Laotian women to their hotel rooms unless they are ‘officially’ married. The police enhance this by matching personal identification card (ID) that identify their spouse on the reverse side if they are married. If single, the reverse side of the ID should remain empty. This policy is however waived for foreign men and women who can stay together without a problem. As a result of enforcing this policy, there have been many ups and down in the Lao sex industry. Police raid hotels and search its couples for identification. If they find a man with a Laotian woman but without valid marriage document, then both of them are jailed for the offences. In recent months, the authorities arrested about two hundred Laotian women and men involved in “unauthorized relationship” in hotels and guest houses, and “deported” them to the islands in the Nam Ngum lake about 70 km outside Vientiane city. These men and women are housed in separate islands where they have to work and earn their own living. Such police vigilance is still active in Vientiane and most of the hotels or guest houses would not usually allow their guests to bring Laotian women into their room.

However, it is very unclear how strict these policies are as some of the smaller guest houses and hotels allow their guests to accompany Laotian sex workers to their rooms. It is also possible to do this in some hotels that have “dancing place” (see below). This policy certainly does not apply to the private “rented” houses of the sex workers who take in clients. Although this policy of police control is applicable to the whole country, it is less strictly enforced in Savannakhet when compared with Vientiane. There are some hotels in Savannakhet where sex workers are available at the lobby and can be called in for room services.

There are fourteen large “dancing places” in Vientiane. These are sort of night clubs with live music and dance floor. Laotian, Thai and foreign customers visit these places although each group has certain preferences for a venue. A good number of girls work in each of these

places who can be hired to accompany guests and for dancing. Many of these girls are willing to go out with their client for a short time or the whole night. The girls know the hotels and guest houses where it is safe to go. Some of the girls take clients to their "rented" homes (often rented by a group) which is safe in many respects. This is a very active business in Vientiane and much publicized police control seems to have little impact on the girls and their potential clients.

In addition there are dozens of beer-bars, karaoke, night-clubs and restaurants that are frequented by the sex workers. The beer-girls are employed by the beer company to promote sales of their brand. In addition to serving the clients, they also drink beer with them, and often join in the explicit sexually discussions. "These young girls in the bars and night club drink a lot of alcohol and it seems this is becoming a part of our Laotian tradition," says a middle-aged Laotian man. Some of these girls get drunk even before their clients. The similar situations can be seen in some restaurants that open at around noon through midnight. Some of the beer-girls and other young women in these places work "very discreetly" as sex workers. But the process of contacting them is a little complicated and sometimes requires experienced local Laotian men for the negotiation. No precise number of sex workers is available for Vientiane. A close observer in the city has suggested a figure in excess of one thousand, almost all of them indirect. This seems to be reasonable given the size of the city with over half a million people and its growing number of visitors and tourist.

According to Lao government health department, there are no direct sex workers in Savannakhet. However, a recent departmental survey identifies 326 women as entertainment workers, some of whom could work as indirect sex workers. The pattern of entertainment venues are similar to Vientiane such as dancing places, beer-bars, karaoke, restaurants, coffee shops etc. but the number itself is less. The clients make contacts with girls in their work places, and similar to Vientiane, the actual sexual encounters take place in guesthouses, hotels or in some private houses. Police control over hotels and guest houses are less strict in Mukdahan and some hotels have girls in their lobby restaurants. The sex workers have a sort of a freedom of choice if they want to go with a particular client or not. Very little or no pressure is applied by the owners of the venues. However, they are under supervision of the "friendly" service orientated environment. For example, beer-girls must sit and drink with the customers in a very compromised situation to boost sales in the restaurant. In the last five years there has been a very significant increase in entertainment venues in Savannakhet but the types of services remain almost same.

Most of the sex workers in Savannakhet are Laotians and some of them belong to the ethnic minorities from the nearby provinces. There are also some Vietnamese sex workers in Savannakhet who can be found only in selected places. Most of the clients of the sex workers are Laotians, but there are Thai and Vietnamese, and a few foreigners as well. In Lao Bao, at the Lao-Vietnamese border, there were large numbers of sex workers. But in recent months it appears that in both Savannakhet and Lao Bao the number of sex workers are decreasing. A Savannakhet health worker says, "I think this because of the present economic problem in the region and may be better education and awareness of AIDS too". The same health worker is not, however, so sure about the number and scope of indirect sex work in many ill-defined venues.

As indicated elsewhere, Laotian sex workers do not have a very clear understanding about HIV/AIDS. They have heard about AIDS but are not sure about its implications or not so

worried about it. In most instances, they do not carry condoms with them because of fear of police detection. No condoms are available at the dancing places or other entertainment places. They are sold only in the drug stores, almost all of which are closed after dark. So one has to plan ahead of time and carry condoms with them. Most of the local men do not carry condom because they are afraid of being identified by their wife or girlfriend. "Some clients from outside provinces may do so but certainly not in all cases", remarks the same health worker. Some Thai or foreigners also do not carry condoms with them because they expect to get them when they are in need. As a result, a lot of unprotected sexual intercourse is occurring each night in Vientiane and Savannakhet.

Some sex workers get STDs but would not usually go to the hospitals or clinics because they are afraid of being identified by the health staff. In fact, some hospital staff are not yet properly trained in how to deal with the STD patients, especially in counseling and social support. The STD patients usually buy medicine from the drug stores. Often times, this self-treatment is inadequate and is contributing to the development of drug resistance against commonly used antibiotics. Some rich Laotians go to Nongkhai, Udon or Mukdahan for STD treatment but again, this is far beyond the reach of many especially sex workers.

Other population groups:

There are some Laotian students in schools at Nongkhai, Udon, Khon Ken and other northeastern provinces. Because they come from affluent families, they usually have enough money for a comfortable life. As they interact with the local people, they may also be more adaptable to the life style of Thai youths. A Thai teacher observed, "Laotian students here begin their sex life earlier than those in Laos. similar to many Thai youths, they usually have their first sexual experience with a sex worker". It is also quite possible that some of these Laotian boys and girls develop relationship with their Thai friends. There are also older Laotians, mostly government officials who come for short-term training and exchange visits to northeastern provinces. This group tend to frequent the commercial sex venues, especially massage parlors in Udon and other places. Similarly many Thai officials visit Vientiane and other places in Laos. At least some of them take the opportunity to do the same things as the Thai tourists and visitors in Vientiane.

13. HIV/AIDS/STDs Situations

The following analysis of the HIV/AIDS/STDs situation represents an indirect evidence of the HIV/AIDS risk situation in the study and control sites. The data provided here have direct relevance to the local people, only a small segment of which belong to the 'mobile' population. They may not have any relevance to the risk situations of many of the mobile population who simply pass through the province and may not interact so much with the local population. It is therefore that utmost care must be given to the interpretation of these data in relation to the mobile and migrant population in the area.

Data for AIDS and symptomatic HIV cases in Nongkhai and Mukdahan are presented in Table 10. They are compiled based on voluntary reporting systems in the provinces and there might be variations between the data collection methods and coverage in each of the provinces. In any event, it was not possible to identify AIDS cases or deaths from among the mobile groups as there is no desegregated data for them. Table 11 shows a steady increase in

the reported AIDS and symptomatic HIV cases in Nongkhai. In Mukdahan, the number of cases rose rapidly in the last four years. In both places young men were more affected than women. However, the situation seems to be changing rapidly and women are catching up with their male counterparts. Finally, case-population ratio was higher in Mukdahan than Nongkhai during the last four years for which no clear explanation can be given.

Table 11 : Incidences of AIDS cases and deaths in Nongkhai and Mukdahan

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Nongkhai						
AIDS	3	22	33	52	79	123
Symptomatic HIV	10	4	8	16	37	88
Total Cases	13	26	41	68	116	211
Cases/100,000 pop*	1.50	3.00	4.73	7.85	13.39	25.52
Deaths	4	5	5	5	22	44
Deaths/100,000 pop*	0.46	0.58	0.58	0.58	2.54	5.08
Mukdahan						
AIDS	2	2	9	33	57	66
Symptomatic HIV	0	3	36	57	40	59
Total cases	2	5	45	90	97	125
Cases/100,000 pop*	0.63	1.57	14.17	28.33	30.53	39.35
Deaths	2	1	4	10	11	15
Deaths/100,000 pop*	0.63	0.31	1.26	3.15	3.46	4.72

Data source: Provincial STD/AIDS Offices in Nongkhai and Mukdahan

** using 1995 population figure, Nongkhai 866,042 and Mukdahan 317,642*

Deaths due to AIDS was steadily increasing in Mukdahan during the study period with case-population ratio than Nongkhai. In Nongkhai, the number of AIDS deaths increased very rapidly in the last two years. As a whole, there was no significant differences in the number of AIDS cases and deaths at both places. However, both Nongkhai and Mukdahan are among the most affected provinces in the northeastern region of the country along with Khon Kaen and Ubon Ratchathani.

Table 12 provides a comparison of reported STD incidence in Nongkhai and Mukdahan. There has been a remarkable decrease of STD in Nongkhai from 423 cases in 1993 to 80 in 1997 especially those of Syphilis and Gonorrhoea.

Table 12: Incidences of STDs in Nongkhai and Mukdahan

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Nongkhai					
Syphilis	43	7	19	7	6
Gonorrhoea	312	284	262	99	59
Chancroid	19	6	3	3	2
Lymphadenitis	3	1	0	0	0
NGU	46	25	18	20	13
TOTAL	423	323	302	129	80
STDs/10,000 pop*	4.88	3.73	3.49	1.49	0.92
Mukdahan					
Syphilis	21	37	6	15	63
Gonorrhoea	52	37	20	28	16
Chancroid	--	1	--	--	3
Lymphadenitis	2	--	--	2	1
NGUs	6	1	9	4	7
TOTAL	81	76	35	49	90
STDs/10,000 pop*	2.55	2.39	1.10	1.54	2.83

Data source: Provincial STD/AIDS office in Nongkhai and Mukdahan;

** using 1995 population figure, Nongkhai 866,042 and Mukdahan 317,642*

Each STD case per 10,000 population consistently decreased from 4.88 in 1993 to 0.92 in 1997. This trend is very much in line with the overall situation in Thailand. In comparison, Mukdahan had no significant decrease in total STD cases and case per 10,000 population remained well above 2.00 except in 1995 and 1996. In Mukdahan, there was significant decrease in Gonorrhoea cases over the years, and no clear explanation for the sudden increase of Syphilis in 1997.

Finally, HIV sentinel surveillance results of the Thai-Lao border provinces were examined to see important trends in the epidemic. In addition to Nongkhai and Mukdahan, data from two other neighboring provinces with important border crossings were also included (Table 13 and 14). Data of these four provinces were then compared with the Thailand national average. Among the sex workers, Nongkhai had similar HIV prevalence as the national average whereas, Mukdahan had relatively lower infection rates. It will be very interesting to see if the higher HIV infection rate in Nongkhai have any relevance to the high number of Laotian sex workers in the province. In Mukdahan there are only a few Laotian sex workers. In contrast, Ubon Ratchathani had much higher and Nakhon Phanom had lower HIV infection rates. It is yet unknown if Ubon has more Laotian sex workers than Nakhon Phanom which would support a possible link between Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai and the higher HIV infection rate.

Among pregnant women, Nongkhai had a higher than national average infection rate for the last four consecutive years. This finding is consistent with the higher infection rate among sex workers. In Mukdahan, the HIV infection rate was much lower than Nongkhai and that of national average. This is again consistent with the findings of the sex workers. Ubon had

almost similar prevalence as the national average whereas Nakhon Phanom had lower infection rates. As a whole we can see a correlation of HIV infection rate among sex workers and pregnant women in these four provinces. Seroprevalence data from other HIV sentinel groups such as male STD patients have an almost similar pattern.

Table 13: HIV Sentinel Surveillance of Direct Sex Workers in Selected Thai-Lao Border Provinces – 1991-1997

Locations	Jun-91	Dec-91	Jun-92	Dec-92	Jun-93	Dec-93	Jun-94	Dec-94	Jun-95*	Jun-96	Jun-97
Thailand	15.24	21.83	22.97	23.86	28.67	29.52	27.02	33.15	17.79	27.73	26.14
Nongkhai	10.87	14.42	7.40	33.33	17.24	25.00	34.62	n.a.	20.59	7.35*	21.33
Mukdahan	5.00	5.56	20.45	11.90	20.00	8.00	18.75	32.00	15.79	6.67*	6.12*
N.Phanom	12.00	10.87	15.00	25.00	15.63	20.00	25.00	n.a.	12.93	16.95	9.23*
Ubon R	40.00	40.00	23.00	31.70	38.46	42.31	42.00	49.00	26.00	47.71	42.86

Data source: Division of Epidemiology, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand

Table 14: HIV Sentinel Surveillance of Pregnant Women in Selected Thai-Lao Border Provinces – 1991-1997

Locations	Jun-91	Dec-91	Jun-92	Dec-92	Jun-93	Dec-93	Jun-94	Dec-94	Jun-95	Jun-96	Jun-97
Thailand	0.81	0.63	1.00	1.00	1.39	1.50	1.78	1.61	2.29	1.70	1.68
Nongkhai	0.00	0.00	1.05	0.28	0.74	0.00	2.83	1.82	2.56	1.75	1.86
Mukdahan	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.72	0.00	0.84	0.70	0.57	0.27
N.Phanom	1.79	1.67	0.00	0.00	1.16	0.00	0.00	2.15	0.40	0.23	0.80
Ubon R	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.97	1.50	3.24	0.50	0.79	2.05	1.97

Data source: Division of Epidemiology, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand

HIV/AIDS programme in the study area

Thailand has gone through a long way in HIV/AIDS programming. It has now extensive programme infrastructure, human resources and technical know-how to deal with the issue. Both Nongkhai and Mukdahan have almost all important HIV/AIDS programming components such as general public education, promotion of condom use among sex workers, control of STDs among CSWs, blood donor screening, care for the HIV/AIDS affected people etc. Government health department is the main implementing agency for the activities. Like many other services, the public health department has some limitation about the depth and clarity of some their actions. As a result, there is no special programme for thousands of mobile people passing through the province. The only exception are some of the Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai where the provincial AIDS/STD office has made effective contacts. There is no special programme for the Thai mobile people visiting Nongkhai and Vientiane e.g. truck drivers, traders, migrant laborers or tourists. A few NGOs have some involvement in HIV/AIDS issue at Nongkhai but none of them have any significant work with the mobile population. Similarly there is no special programme in Nongkhai, Mukdahan or Udon for the

visiting Laotian or foreign mobile population groups. As a whole, HIV/AIDS transmission among mobile population is not a high priority in the local HIV/AIDS programming.

In Vientiane, HIV/AIDS programming is just at the beginning stage. They are yet to set up proper condom distribution, STD treatment facilities, and education and counselling of vulnerable groups. While it is acknowledged by some national and foreign AIDS workers that mobility of Laotian people is closely related to the HIV transmission in the country, they are yet to develop any significant programme. In recent months, CARE International has begun a project at Lao Bao on the Laos-Vietnam border. UN agencies along with the government and NGOs have completed a rapid assessment on population mobility and HIV/AIDS in five provinces bordering Thailand. They are expected to develop some response (intervention) programme based on this assessment.

14. Conclusions

The Mekong river marks the geographical boundary of the people of Thailand and Laos who share cultural traditions and speak the same language but has never effectively controlled the cross-border movement of people. Due to political antagonism during the Cold War period, the movement of people between the two countries was restricted. During this period, thousands of Laotian refugees crossed river to seek political assylum in Thailand. Many of them resettled in third countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, France etc. and the reminder were repatriated back to Laos.

In the late eighties, because of greater political openness between the two countries, the movement of people resumed. The physical barrier created by the river affected the movement of heavy vehicles and goods but did not affect cross-border travel by the populations. The Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge was built to facilitate the movement of people and goods between the two countries, especially Laos. Without the bridge, it would have been very difficult to improve trade and commerce between them. It is quite evident from the available data that the bridge has definitely attained that stated objective. The bridge has also become an important symbol of renewed relations between the government and peoples of both countries.

The construction of the friendship bridge did not cause any significant displacement or relocation of people in the area. Nor did it have any great impact due to influx of migrant labor for there were only 150-200 workers involved. However, as an indirect effect of the bridge construction, there were many new developments in Nongkhai that is hotels, department stores, shop houses, roads and highways. Many of these projects used the services of a large number of migrant workers from the neighboring provinces as well as Laos. These migrant laborers had an impact on the overall HIV/AIDS situation in the province, but only in the initial phase and were overshadowed by the increasing number of tourists, traders and truckers.

Transportation industry: The friendship bridge has brought about some important changes in the transport industry. The Nongkhai-Vientiane vehicular ferry ceased operation three months after the opening of the bridge in April 1994. Following the opening of the bridge, the number of vehicles moving between Nongkhai and Vientiane increased dramatically especially that of heavy vehicles transporting goods. In comparison, increases in vehicle

movement between Mukdahan and Savannakhet were minimal. Two critical issues are directly relevant to increased transportation and the HIV/AIDS situation – (i) thousands of Thai and Lao truck drivers crossing in both directions; and (ii) an increase in the number of cross-border traders. Both groups showed increased vulnerability to HIV transmission mainly through unsafe sexual contacts.

Population movement: The next important changes brought about by the bridge was the overall population movement between the two countries. It is evident that the population movement intensified several years before the bridge was opened to traffic. The initial momentum of increased movement was created by improved political relations, and trade and business opportunities. It would not have been possible to maintain this upward trend without the bridge because the ferry capacity is not sufficient for the purpose. Thai official data on population movement shows an increase in figure but became sluggish in 1996 due to economic recession. However, Laotian data differently presented a steady climb in the population flow. This means that no real decline in the figure. The bridge has been the prime factor in attracting a large number of Thai, Laotian and foreign tourists to the area. A flow of people between Nongkhai and Vientiane can be classified into six groups. Tourists compose the highest proportion, followed respectively by traders, truckers, migrant labours, sex workers and local Thai and Laotian people, who continue to go back and forth as before. Overall, Nongkhai-Vientiane had a significant increase of population movement compared to that of Mukdahan-Savannakhet.

HIV/AIDS Situation: This study does not attempt to give a precise comparison of HIV/AIDS risk behavior of the various mobile population groups in Nongkhai and Vientiane. It seeks to understand the “risk situation” of population groups based on their mobility pattern, social networking, and sex and drug use behaviour. The study identifies a number of groups who are considered “at risk” such as Thai and Laotian truck drivers who stay overnight outside their home town. Thai truck drivers are particularly vulnerable due to their work conditions, alcohol consumption and misperception about “AIDS-free status of the Laotian sex workers”. Likewise, the traders and tourists staying overnight outside their home country would appear to be vulnerable to HIV/AIDS but may be to a lesser degree than that of the truckers. One group of particular concern is Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai. A lack of awareness about the risk factors associated with HIV/AIDS has resulted in poor preventative measures being taken by them. This includes not using condoms or seeking treatment for STDs. This is specially true for newly arrived sex workers. It takes some time for them to get acquainted with their work conditions and knowledge of HIV/AIDS. By the time they know about the dangers associated with their work, then many of them might have already been placed at risk.

During the study period, the sex industry in Nongkhai has gone through some important changes. This includes: (i) a shift from brothel based direct sex work to discreet indirect sex work; (ii) a decrease in the number of Thai sex workers; (iii) a large increase in the number of Laotian sex workers; (iv) a change from the past “forced” and “child” prostitution to adult “voluntary” sex work. The sex industry is still very active although the present slow economic growth has resulted in some decline in demand for commercial sex. The sex workers in Nongkhai serve Thai, Laotian and foreign clients. The indirect sex service is considered relatively better for the CSWs than the direct: the sex workers can usually choose their clients, serve fewer clients a night (usually one), earn better income and have control over their money, and relative freedom about their work. This situation may be more difficult for

HIV/AIDS out-reach workers. Thus they get fewer health and HIV/AIDS services than the direct sex workers and could be increasingly vulnerable to HIV transmission.

In comparison, Mukdahan has a smaller sex industry with very few Laotian sex workers. They mainly serve Thais and have only a few Laotian and foreign clients. There are three large massage parlours in Mukdahan with certain remnant of the old red light district in *Soi Klang*. These direct sex workers form a significant group there along with to largely unidentified number of indirect sex workers in the restaurants, nightclubs, karaoke and traditional massage.

There are close similarities in the sex industry in Vientiane and Savannakhet in that almost all of sex workers are involved in indirect services. The size of sex industry in Savannakhet is much smaller than Vientiane. Laotian authorities notably the police apply heavy handed control over commercial sex. They arrest and lock up the sex workers and their clients. They also search the hotels and guesthouses to identify couples without valid marriage documents. Despite this many commercial sex occur both in Vientiane and Savannakhet. Due to lack of awareness about HIV/AIDS and an inadequate supply of condoms, most of these sexual encounters are unsafe. In addition, level of HIV/AIDS awareness among the general population is still very low. It is anticipated that this situation will be much worse after inevitable loosening of police enforcement, stronger economic development and transformation of socio-cultural norms, and consequent increase in population mobility in and out of country.

15. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on a situational analysis; discussions with the local partners and key informants; and as experiences drawn from other similar situations. These recommendations should be used to guide a local working group to develop the ideas as they deem appropriate for improve the validity of the information as well as implementation of the proposed activities:

Local Provincial Level:

1. **Formation of a “local working group” on HIV/AIDS for migrant and mobile populations:** The main purpose of this working group would be to develop and/or improve HIV/AIDS services that could be expanded to other health issues if necessary. This local working group can raise fund from local sources and use it for local purposes, and implement necessary cross-border collaboration at the local level.
2. **Organization of a local workshop:** As an initial stage for the formation of the proposed working group as mentioned above, a workshop should be organized in Nongkhai involving all potential participants. The workshop could discuss the findings of this study and the recommendations including the structure, functions and funding of the working group. The group could then prepare a detailed workplan and implementation modalities of the proposed activities. This meeting would also be an important first step for the dissemination of the information to the local audience.

3. **Development of programmes for especially vulnerable mobile population:** The study identifies specific vulnerability of some mobile groups such as Thai truck drivers, Thai and Lao tourists and visitors, and Thai and Lao migrant workers. Special programmes can be developed to improve HIV/AIDS awareness and support services for them. For example, truck drivers can be given special education sessions for effective prevention. This can be done by working through the truckers association and the participating companies as well as identifying and training of group of 'peer educators' in the area. Similarly, Thai migrant workers can be reached through the hiring company and training of 'peer educators'. It is quite possible that most of these programmes can be implemented on the Thai side, and need not to wait for cross-border or cross-country collaboration. However, it will be an excellent opportunity to seek cooperation from the Laotian side and develop programmes on both sides of the border.
4. **Monitoring and review of programme Laotian CSWs in Nongkhai:** Existing programme for the Laotian sex workers in Nongkhai should be carefully reviewed to identify contacts and provision of services. Such a review should include close monitoring of the new arrivals, rapid assessment of their HIV awareness, intensive HIV/STD education for the new arrivals, condom supply and use, and diagnosis and management of STDs. Again, this can be done in Nongkhai without much involvement of Laotian authorities.
5. **Cross-border collaboration between Nongkhai and Vientiane:** There are some areas where cross-border collaboration could be useful. However, such an approach should be as practical as possible so that issues can be effectively dealt at the local level. Some examples of possible cross-border collaboration are – information sharing about communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS, sharing IEC materials, referral of patients between countries, prevention and care to high mobile groups on both sides of the border, e.g. trucker drivers. Joint planning involving both sides of the border can be an ultimate goal but ideally should be pursued after small 'pilot' collaborations have proved successful.

National Level:

1. **Development of national policy on migrant population and HIV/AIDS:** The Thai government should develop policies on HIV/AIDS (including health care) services for migrant and mobile populations. Policies should be clear, precise and practical so that it will be possible to implement these at the provincial and district levels. These policies should become an integral part of the overall policies on migrant population in the country.
2. **Awareness raising and support structure:** The government and its relevant ministries should raise awareness on migrant and mobile population issue among government officials, NGOs and the general public. They could also brief and guide national and international media for proper reporting on sensitive issues involving migrant population. They should also support activities at the district and provincial levels, but more importantly, guide or channel additional resources from local or outside donors to the priority areas.

3. **Mass media programme for Thai and Lao populations in the border areas:** Thai and Loatians speak same language in the border region. It will therefore, be an important step to initiate some good mass media programme such as television and radio, to disseminate information to the peoples of both countries. Thai TV channels are very popular in Laos. So the proposed mass media programming is expected to have significant impact on peoples of both sides of the border.
4. **Special programme for Mukdahan:** By taking into account of the Nongkhai experience, a special programme should be developed for Mukdahan especially before construction of the proposed bridge. It is highly recommended to form a local working group in Mukdahan similar to Nongkhai. The group will then be in a position to make all necessary preparation for their province.



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APPENDIX

Results of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Survey of the Respondents in Nongkhai and Vientiane

The following are the results of KAP survey of 101 individual respondents. Most of the interviews were taken on the Thai side of the border with a few in Laos. In many instances, the initial findings of these respondents had guided the in-depth interviews of the key informants. Some of these respondents were subsequently selected for oral history (see boxes on a *Thai Truck Driver* and *Laotian Sex Worker*). Some of the important findings of this survey were used in the relevant sections of the main body of the report.

Table 15: Gender and Nationality of Respondents

Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	68	67.3
Female	33	32.7
Total	101	100.0

Nationality		
	Frequency	Percent
Thai	49	48.5
Laotian	36	35.6
Foreigner	16	15.8
Total	101	100.0

Table 16: Age and Marital Status of the Respondents

Age		
	Frequency	Percent
< 20 yrs	9	8.9
20-30	29	28.7
30-40	33	32.7
>40 yrs	30	29.7
Total	101	100.0

Marital Status		
	Frequency	Percent
Single	33	32.7
Married	52	51.5
Divorced*	16	15.8
Total	101	100.0

* includes widowed or separated

Table 17: Present Occupation of the Respondents*

	Frequency	Percent
Traders/Businessmen	19	18.8
Sex Workers	24	23.8
Migrant Labours	8	7.9
Truck Drivers	22	21.8
Tourists/Visitors	28	27.8
Total	101	100.0

* including local Nongkhai residents

Table 18: Frequency of Visits and Stay

Frequency of Visits			Stay with Whom		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
First time	27	26.7	Alone	35	34.7
2-5 times	9	8.9	With spouse	18	17.8
> 5 times	46	45.6	Friends	41	40.6
Resident	19	18.8	Others	7	6.9
Total	101	100.0	Total	101	100.0

Table 19: Rest and Recreation of Respondents

Types of rest/recreation	Frequency	Percent
Rest at home	50	49.5
Drink with friends	18	17.8
Visit entertainment places	26	25.8
Other recreation	6	5.9
No answer	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 20: Purposes of Extra Spending While on Trip

Types of spending	Frequency	Percent
Go to entertainment places	17	16.8
Drink with friends	5	5.0
Drink and entertainment	11	10.9
Visit sex workers	6	5.9
Others such as gifts etc	15	14.9
No extra spending	44	43.6
No answer	3	3.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 21: Freedom for Social Activities While on Trip

	Frequency	Percent
Not different from home	43	42.6
More freedom	41	40.6
More freedom at home	16	15.8
No answer	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 22: Peer Pressure to Visit Sex Workers

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, will go	21	30.9
No, will not go	43	63.2
No sure	4	5.9
Total	68*	100.0

* not applicable to 33 female respondents

Table 23: Drug and Substance Use

Types of drugs	Frequency	Percent
Alcohol	56	55.4
Amphetamine	13	12.9
Marijuana	1	1.0
IV Drugs	5	5.0
No drug	26	25.7
Total	101	100.0

Table 24: Health Problems

Illnesses	Frequency	%
No illness	68	67.3
Had STD	10	9.9
Other illness	9	8.9
No answer	14	13.9
Total		

Table 25: Use Condom with Spouse*

	Frequency	Percent
Sometimes	11	10.9
Never Use	36	35.6
No spouse	46	45.5
No answer	8	7.9
Total	101	100.0

Table 26: Self-perception of HIV/AIDS risk

	Frequency	Percent
No risk	48	47.5
Low risk	19	18.8
Medium risk	14	13.9
No answer	20	19.8
Total	101	100.0

* spouse or steady partner

Table 27: Knowledge of HIV/AIDS and Sources

Knowledge		
	Frequency	Percent
Know	73	72.3
Don't know	7	6.9
Not sure	4	4.0
No answer	17	16.8
Total	101	100.0

Source*		
	Frequency	Percent
Television	72	71.3
Posters/Bill boards etc.	30	29.7
Newspaper	33	32.7
Village Information	16	15.8
Others	20	19.8

* multiple answers allowed

Table 28: Knowledge of HIV Transmission

Modes of transmission	Frequency*	Percent
Hetero-sexual intercourse	80	79.2
Oral sex	5	5.0
Anal sex	10	9.9
Sharing meals	7	6.9
Mosquito bites	18	17.8
Blood donation	18	17.8
Sharing blood	11	10.9
From saliva	27	26.7
Shaving blade	4	4.0
Sharing clothes	11	10.9
Sharing toilet	10	9.9
Sharing needle for injection	1	1.0
Mother-to-child	2	2.0

* multiple answer allowed

Table 29: Previous Work as CSW and Job Expectation Before Coming to Nongkhai

Previous Job as CSW		
	Frequency	Percent
First time CSW	17	70.83
Worked as CSW	7	29.17
Total	24	100.0

Job Expectations		
	Frequency	Percent
Knew about work	20	83.33
Didn't know work	4	16.67
Total	24	100.0

Table 30: Purposes and Use of Condom by the CSWs

Condom Use by the CSWs		
	Frequency	Percent
Everytime	21	87.5
Sometimes	3	12.5
Never	0	0.0
Total	24	100.0

Purpose of Condom Use		
	Frequency	Percent
STD/HIV *	20	83.33
Birth Control	4	16.7
Others	0	0.0
Total	24	100.0

* STD/HIV prevention and control

Table 31: Contraceptive Methods Used by the CSWs*

Contraceptive methods	Frequency*	Percent
Pill and Depo injections	5	20.8
Condom	9	37.5
Other methods	4	16.7
No contraceptive	6	25
TOTAL	24	100

* as stated by the CSWs



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