

Hopeful in the Face of Discouragemen

“I want to be successful. I want to have many more and be able to sell them,” said Mr. On Koudthongkham. “I want to be able to afford my children’s education, improve our livelihood, pay for hospital bills when we are sick, and have some funds for my children.”

Mr. Koudthongkham is married to two wives who bore him nine children. Two—daughters—are mentally disabled. He is one of the shrinking cases of polygamy in Laos. Of all his children, only one has made it to college—a sophomore. While another finished high school, the rest did not. They dropped to help their parents in the farm. Besides providing for the two wives and nine children, Mr. Koudthongkham also shares his house with a daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. The extended family grow corn, rice (shifting cultivation) and raise animals—goats, pigs, ducks, and chickens.

The Koudthongkhams were selected as a targeted household because they have two mentally unwell members, and they are poor. They received two goats and two pigs from PICRAIL. Unfortunately, not long after the goats were delivered to their farm, one contracted mouth-to-foot disease and died. However, the remaining one has given birth to two kids.

The two pigs, similarly, grew well until recently, March 2021. Swine flu swept through the district and killed all of them. “They were gorgeous,” said Mr. Koudthongkham. “One gave birth to four piglets. The other was pregnant. I was looking forward to passing on two piglets to another household. But the disease took them all.” Sad and desperate, he planned to discuss with the project the next steps.

Despite the fact that all the animals he received were vaccinated and one of his sons is a veterinarian trained by PICRAIL, the family suffered the loss. [Note that pregnant /lactating pigs are normally not vaccinated,



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and the outbreak happened during this period]. Nevertheless, they look on with optimism and emotional resilience. “I will save up and buy new pigs. I will keep them in a pen as far away from the road as possible,” said Mr. Koudthongkham who believed the disease came through the roads. He also longs for continual technical support from the project, particularly vaccination and training.

Even though they felt downhearted because of the failure, the Koudthongkhams wish to send their thanks for donors, ADRA, and project staff for the inputs and knowledge. They will continue to make improvements and work toward future successes.

