

# Destitute with *Cheerful spirits*

A usual scene observed by her neighbours includes an old woman waking up early in the morning, sending smoke up the roof of her wooden house, and tapping a few steps before quietness reclaims its place. There is neither sound of children nor chicken around her house. That is Grandma Phone, 58, a bereaved widow living alone in a wooden house. All her children, three daughters, are married and have their own homes elsewhere. None of them reached high school—not to mention stable jobs. They are, likewise, struggling to make ends meet.

The lonesomeness seems to have been broken when her nephew, 19, decided to move in with her. Even so, nothing appears to have minimized her desolation. Grandma Phone remembers what it was like when her husband was still alive, and her children lived with her. There was not a quiet moment. Guests often came to their house. However, after her husband's death, she felt no one wanted to visit her. "People don't come to my house because there is not a man. No one wants to set their feet in my door because I am poor," said she tolerably.

With no external help, Grandma Phone resorts to weaving sinh (Lao skirts) to support herself—the only income generating skill she learned from her parents. After house chores she spends the rest of the day—until 9 or 10 PM— at her weaving frame, making sinh hem for traders. A hem sells for approximately six dollars and



takes around four to five days to complete. At her pace, Grandma Phone earns \$150 within seven or eight months.

Before PICRAIL entered the village, she dreamed of raising pigs and had put every effort to weave as many sinh hems as possible to earn her way. However, what she earned was never enough. She still had to pay for food, utilities, and sundries. Though all her children have moved out, Grandma Phone still cares about them, including her grandchildren. "I want to have a happy home. I want to see my children and grandkids do well—having enough food to eat and a good house," said she.

A part of her wish was answered when a PICRAIL staff visited her house and inquired about her situation. She told the staff, a cultivation officer, confidently and joyfully she wanted to raise pigs. She was overjoyed when two female pigs were delivered to her house, followed by a short training. She was thrilled to learn about feeding, pen management, disease treatment, and vaccination. Though old and poor, she is generous. She shared what she had learned with her neighbours and was adamant in urging them to vaccinate their pigs since pig vaccination is a new practice. In the past, no one vaccinated their swine, and even now very few people do so.

After receiving the two pigs, Grandma Phone works tirelessly to raise them. A pen was built for them. Now, a new task is added to her chore list. Every day she gathers locally available materials and produces feed for her pigs. The feed is produced from banana trees, vegetables, taro leaves/roots, pumpkins, rice bran, etc. As a result of good care, she now has seven piglets. She plans to raise them until they are old enough, return two to the project for rotation, and sell the rest. She believes if all goes well—no disease outbreak, she will sell the piglets when they reach two months old and use the income to improve her life.

For Grandma Phone, life is a fight. Encouraged by her nephew, who is her manpower, she wants to be more climate-resilient by shifting away from rain-fed cultivation. She wants a big, 100-meter pipe for her rice paddy. With the pipe, she and her nephew will be able to consistently grow rice in their 8000 square meter paddy and abandon slash-and-burn practices. This will ensure their steady supply of food, overcoming the annually four-month shortage.

"I don't know how to describe my appreciation of ADRA and the project or donors. I am overwhelmed by your generosity," said she gratefully.

