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Case study: Alternative livelihood



Ms. My Ya Wa and two of her five children at their peach orchard.

Ms. My Ya Wa is a 38 year old Hmong woman from Na Sen Kham village in Oudomxay Province. Before 2001, she and her family grew opium poppy to make ends meet. But to grow opium they had to get up early, climb up a steep mountain for three hours and return only in the evening, leaving very little time to do much else. For all this labor her family made less than US\$ 150 a year. In 2001, opium poppy cultivation became illegal and the authorities urged the community

to stop growing opium poppy and to treat all addicts.

My Ya Wa consequently stopped growing poppies and instead planted peaches in her old opium poppy field and also cultivated 2 hectares of pineapples and vegetables nearby. The village was a target village of the FAO/Japanese Food Security Project, which provided agricultural training and inputs to villagers. UNODC provided support for the rehabilitation of 14 opium addicts in the village.

Pineapples, peaches and peas earn farmers more income than illicit poppy cultivation.

From 2001 onwards, better access brought more and more traders to purchase products from the villagers. In 2005 My Ya Wa earned about 40 million kip (US\$ 4,000) from the sale of pineapples, peaches and vegetables. This is 26 times the income she used to receive from opium. In addition she now only grows legal crops, has more time to concentrate on being productive and has enough income to send her five children to school.