

## **A new stove is benefitting businesses, the environment and people's health in Laos**

- By EU Delegation to Laos, [European Union](#)

Sommay Khamhoung, a mother of two, opened her small restaurant in 2010 selling spring rolls, crepes and desserts in Haisok village, at the heart of Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

She wakes up early, before sunrise every morning, to go to the local market to buy meat, fruit, vegetables and other commodities and to prepare for the day ahead. At home, Sommay's younger sister and her mother, in her seventies, help set up her stove, using traditional fuels, such as firewood and charcoal.

Sommay attracts customers by offering tasty warm meals cooked on the spot, to mainly office workers in the city centre. For this, the stove must be kept burning the whole day. This constant use meant that Sommay had to buy a new stove every five months and at least four sacks of charcoal (25 kgs each) every week.

Her business routine followed the same path for nearly three years, until the constant increase of the price of charcoal coupled with her dependence on low quality and perishable traditional stoves put the survival of her business at risk.

"As a small and family-run restaurant with a tiny income, we could no longer afford such increases in charcoal prices" she recalled.

With no other options, she approached her longstanding provider of cooking stoves to see if something more durable and efficient was available. It was then that she was introduced to the 'Improved Cooking Stove'. Her choices were limited, it was either try something new to save her business or go bust! Going out of business was not really an option as she had to earn enough money to be able to send her two kids to school and look after her family. She decided to go for it.

The stove bought by Sommay is part of the 'Improved Cooking Stoves Programme', a renewable energy project supported by the European Union and implemented by SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, Oxfam Novib and the Lao NGO – Normai. The initiative works to improve the quality, efficiency and safety of stoves in Laos. Currently, many of the traditional stoves being used are inefficient and last only for a few months before they break into pieces.

Sommay and her family have not looked back. The new improved stove is still functioning well after 2 years of constant use. The stove cost only 15,000 kip (€1.50) above the average price of the traditional one, which had to be replaced regularly. And most importantly it consumes much less charcoal and produces better heat – a win, win, win!

"I am so happy to have found this stove because it is not only durable, but also very efficient. I have been able to cut my charcoal bill in half!" says Sommay with a smiling face.

In Laos, over 96% of the population uses traditional biomass fuels for cooking and heating purposes. This high dependence degrades the local environment, demands considerable time in fuel collection, is costly, and creates indoor air pollution. This air pollution causes the premature death of 2 600 people each year, according to the WHO. The burning of coal and wood also adds considerably to greenhouse gas emissions.

This EU financed initiative has recently registered the 10 000th stove sold. The programme aims to replace 25% of the national stove market by the end of the fourth year.

Meanwhile Sommay, who recently bought her fourth improved stove (three for her restaurant's kitchen and one for her family's cooking purposes) has become an active promoter of the stove by sharing her first-hand experience and convincing many of her relatives, neighbours and clients to replace their kitchen stoves. The good thing is that they don't need too much convincing!

**Originally published:** <https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en/european-union/stories/week-47-new-stove-benefitting-businesses-environment-and-people-health-laos>