

Thailand Drought and climate change



Nearly half of the country's 76 provinces are affected by climate disruption, with the northern and northeastern regions being particularly affected. Experts are saying that this could be the worst drought in four centuries.

A change in climate with above-average temperatures is affecting rivers and streams. In spite of the torrential rainfall in the Northeast in 2019 the lack of rain is being felt and the water level of the Mekong is very low. The construction of numerous hydro-electric dams upstream on the river (Laos/China) is not helping the problem. The surrounding land and rivers are in need of rain. The rice field basins are only 30% full

compared to previous years. The dry season, which usually lasts from November to April, could last until June this year, according to specialists!

The government's solutions to the problems include water-saving crops, planting rice every other year, slowing down the pumping of water to farmland to save water for human consumption – and protecting wells from villagers who deplete supply by irrigating their farms! Increasingly the scarcity of “Blue Gold” also leads to an increasingly impoverished agrarian population resulting in quarrels that are sometimes dramatic or even violent. Their daily bread (rice) is at stake!



Agriculture

As soon as we arrived in our centre, we wanted to increase the number of pigs for our own food consumption. Delighted to show what they had studied at vocational school; our teenagers built a suitable and functional layout for the livestock. A dedicated team working on a rota basis takes care of the daily maintenance of the premises to ensure maximum hygiene. A vet regularly checks the animals and teaches the teenagers how to give vaccinations and other necessary care.

However, despite all the precautions taken, the swine fever epidemic raging in the surrounding villages

reached our livestock. Refusing food and suffering from a high haemorrhagic fever, the animals die within a few days and to date, no treatment or vaccine has been found. Fortunately, the disease is not transmissible to humans.

By good luck, the disease was detected very quickly and with foresight the entire herd was slaughtered. To avoid any further contagion, we decided to destroy the old pigsty and to rebuild according to current standards.

Having said that, the price of pork continues to rise and we look forward to restarting our own production. In addition, young people miss this agricultural activity and are looking forward to returning to their responsibilities as soon as possible.



Thammasat University of Lampang

(230 km south of Chiang Rai)

Thammasat is a new university linked to the one in Bangkok. This is the only campus offering a faculty of social administration apart from the one in the capital. Aranya, whom we already mentioned in one of our previous letters, has successfully completed her second year there. If she passes and completes her 4 years, she will be able to aim for a master's degree which will take an additional 2 years. For her - a great challenge and a great reference - for us, great pride!



A day in the week of our young people

Get up around any time from 5am and have breakfast (usually rice/vegetables). Take a shower, complete various tasks – washing dishes, animal care, etc.



Departure for school is between 6 am and 7.15am depending on which school the children attend, and the children are taken there by our own buses. Our teenagers attend vocational schools in Chiang Rai and use public transport.



Lunch is taken at school.

Return to the home is between 4pm and 5pm – this is followed by homework and one hour of practical activities such as gardening, watering, keeping and caring for animals, cleaning etc.



At 6pm it is time to shower and wash their clothes and uniforms. Once a week, school uniforms are washed by the staff in the laundry room.



Supper is served between 7pm and 7.15pm and at 8pm there is a daily meeting where a discussion is had with all the children to take stock of the day – this includes various topics: awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol, various prevention measures, etc. All these activities are supervised by the staff who can intervene in case of problems.

Bedtime is around 9pm for the little ones, a little later for the teenagers. *pour les ados.*



Sunday

Recreational day. Fun activities are offered:

■ Miscellaneous do-it-yourself ■

Recovered old fabrics: Soak the fabrics in liquid cement, spread them on an upside down flowerpot, place them on bamboo sticks and let them dry. They can be left to look natural or painted in colour.



■ Cultivation ■

Mushrooms



■ Other activities ■



■ Sport ■

Our magnificent sports fields invite young people to relax, to measure themselves, to have fun. Football, Handball, Tako (Asian game) etc...

■ Dance ■

Dance is part of the history of the ethnic groups. Initially linked to religious rituals, it is gradually becoming more popular and a tradition. Passed down from generation to generation, children still love to dance. They are able to create impressive and striking shows for the different festivals of the year, mixing humour with their traditional steps and aerobic steps!



■ Drawing/Painting ■

Like everywhere else in the world, children love to draw. With astonishing observation, they often express through their works, their desires, their dreams, but also their concerns and their suffering. Sometimes we discover a specific talent and we encourage them to continue.



■ Reading ■

We try to introduce children to classical reading. It is a discovery for those who are interested and who often come from illiterate or poorly educated backgrounds. On the other hand, the current means of communication (smartphone etc.) does not encourage young people to read books. As we have a beautiful library, we would like to make it available to as many of our young people as possible.



■ Embroidery ■

The first Hmong girls who came to Le Sourire all knew how to embroider beautifully. A leisure occupation for women, their skills were passed on from generation to generation. However, tradition is giving way to modernity even among the mountain people! The introduction of industrial embroidery has affected this skill and this inborn talent is disappearing and with exception of a large minority, the present generation shows no interest in it anymore. We are trying to maintain this tradition.



■ Hmong lessons ■

To ensure that the children keep their mother tongue, Hmong lessons are given.



Little Sarai* and the bees

One night, a member of the staff arrived in the kitchen at Barbara and Prapapone's house calling for help! Sarai had been stung by a bee, which resulted in an extreme reaction. Sarai seemed to be in a secondary state with loss of balance, was highly agitated and anxious. Accompanied by a member of staff, she was taken to hospital immediately and treated by a medical team. They injected antihistamines which worked quickly, and we were very relieved! The attending doctor wanted to keep her in hospital for two nights, for observation. Kanjani, a young student from our home, stayed with Sarai during her time at the hospital as Thai tradition dictates that a hospitalised patient should be surrounded by his family to take care of him.

This kind of situation is communicated to the child's family as soon as possible.

Honeycombs at the centre are common and for the protection of the children, we are obliged to remove them. Nests in gardens, trees, bushes etc. are taken care of by the boys who light a fire close to the insects so that the smoke will make them flee. Closer to the inhabitants or under the roofs of buildings, this technique is obviously not recommended... In these cases, we use citronella which the bees hate, and it makes them leave the place immediately!

*fictional name



The staff

Our staff is predominantly female. Almost all women are victims of a painful and unjust, sometimes violent and distressing past. The Smile (Le Sourire) offers them a new, peaceful and regulated existence. They are properly paid, fed and housed. If before they were dependent on partners who spent their meagre income on alcohol, drugs or gambling, these women had no notion of how to manage finances. We implemented an introduction to self-management, which helped them to open a bank account or take out insurance. Two of them were even able to get a small washing machine installed in their little house! To increase their level of knowledge, some of them take government adult education courses on weekends and have developed a taste for well deserved independence.





The Smile family among many others!
We think of all those who were - who are and who will be with us. Thanks to your solidarity, your benevolence, your fidelity, the story of Le Sourire could be born, develop and grow. Your contribution in all unimaginable forms has given, gives and will give back dignity to a great number of young people exposed to a deplorable and cruel future. Your trust strengthens us and obliges us to continue.
A heartfelt THANK YOU to all and for EVERYBODY.

Barbara Prapapone



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