



**MR. SOMBATH SOMPHONE**

Executive Director

Participatory Development Training Centre

180 Ban Nakham of Luang Prabang Road

Sikhottabong District, Vientiane

Tel/Fax + 865-21-219-130

Email: [ssombath@yahoo.com](mailto:ssombath@yahoo.com) or [padetc@padetc.org](mailto:padetc@padetc.org)

Sombath Somphone's early life took place amidst uncertainty and turbulence as Laos was swept into the Indochina War. He eventually escaped this by winning a scholarship to the University of Hawaii, where he earned degrees in education and agriculture. By 1980, he was home again. That same year Sombath helped launch the Rice-Based Integrated Farm System Project, to help Laotian farmers achieve food security. The ensuing years exposed him intimately to the world of rural Laos and to the complex obstacles awaiting development workers in its remote scattered villages.

Drawing on these lessons, Sombath founded PADETC in 1996 to foster sustainable, equitable, and self-reliant development in Laos. Up till now it is the only officially recognized organization of its kind in the country. Sombath has led it to emphasize eco-friendly technologies and micro-enterprises and to enhance education by introducing fuel-efficient stoves that spare women hours of daily labor collecting wood, by promoting locally produced organic fertilizer as an alternative to imported chemical fertilizers, by devising new processing techniques and marketing strategies for small businesses such as organic mulberry tea and brown rice and sun-dried bananas, and berries, by initiating garbage recycling in the capital city, and by organizing stimulating extra curricular programs for the youth. Today PADETC is designing new compassion-based child-centered lesson plans for primary schools as a way to move toward holistic education.

Although Sombath heads a full-time staff of fifty-three, much of this work is carried out by teams of young volunteers and trainees who exemplify his commitment to participatory development and experiential learning. They conduct community services to provide basic life skills to rural youth and rural communities. They also act as teachers assistants in inquiry learning in and outside of classroom situations. As they do so, Sombath makes certain that they are also learning to think, to plan, to act, and to lead.

In 2005, Sombath received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership from the Government of the Philippines and the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation, in recognition of his hopeful efforts to promote sustainable development in Laos by training and motivating its young people to become a generation of leaders.