

IMPACT STORY

Plastic Free Laos label

“My goal is to see more businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry investing more in sustainability through green practices, and for people in Laos, including tourists, to be more aware of the issue.”

- Valy Phommachak



Image: Valy Phommachak Credit: Swisscontact

Valy Phommachak a young woman driving sustainability initiatives The driving force behind the label is Econox—an environmental consulting group in Laos. The consultancy offers support to members such as providing expertise, guides, and tools to help them achieve the certification. Econox, in coordination with the Small and Medium Enterprise Service Center (SSC), currently manages and implements the label in partnership with the Lao Hotel and Restaurant Association via the Waste to Value project. The consulting firm was founded in 2018 by Valy Phommachak, an ecologist and journalist specialising in Landscape Ecology and Nature Conservation. As a social enterprise, it focuses on environmental protection and sustainable local community development. With over 5 years of experience in training and coaching on environmental issues, as well as youth empowerment, Valy has gained valuable insights from her career and her involvement as a Community Changemaker with the Global Shapers Community Vientiane, a network of hubs led by young people under the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Under Valy's leadership, Econox prioritises inclusivity, involving the government, the

private sector, and the public, particularly local communities, in its key projects. She has spearheaded initiatives to protect approximately 200 hectares of watershed forest and wetlands in Laos, estimated to contribute to the sequestration of 1,600 tons of carbon per year.

“Addressing the plastic issue requires unity from all sectors, including people, businesses, and the government. Managing and developing the label allows our team to garner interest and support from these sectors. Over the years of implementation, we have witnessed positive changes. The label has also received support from various international Non-Governmental Organisations like Swisscontact, boosting its growth.”

In Laos, Valy is a well-known host and moderator and is passionate about identifying and developing young environmental advocates through the Plastic Free Laos label and Econews—the first and only environmental news platform in the country. At the news platform, Valy is currently mentoring young environmental journalists, helping to amplify youth's voices on environmental issues.

Through collaboration with Swisscontact, the network of the Plastic Free Laos label has grown, and the services offered were diversified and strengthened. Together, they have established the technical support for members from the tourism and hospitality sector to achieve Plastic Free certification. This includes a Green Map database available on the website of the Plastic Free Laos label. The database contains an interactive map of SMEs with good ecological practices, recycling collection points, free water refill stations, green product suppliers, and vendors, etc.

Valy's goal for this year is to increase membership and expand the scope of impact. Her team is currently working on the expansion of the Plastic Free Laos label to more regions aside from Vientiane capital and the northern province Luang Prabang. She plans to achieve this by focusing on promoting and marketing the label more, by collaborating with social media influencers and investing in digital media promotion. Valy also plans to invest in creating and developing innovative solutions and initiatives under the label through networking and partnerships with key stakeholders.

Image: The Plastic Free Laos team collected garbage along the Song River side, Credit: Swisscontact



Waste to Value Project

Main objectives: to improve the environmental performance of service sector SMEs through access to green products and better waste management practices; and to enhance the business operations of informal waste pickers to improve their livelihood.

Project duration: February 2022 – December 2024

Project location: Xaysetha and Chanthabouly in Vientiane Capital, Vang Vieng in Vientiane Province

Project partners: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Hotel and Restaurant Associations, Green suppliers and service providers, National University of Laos, Local district authorities.

Target Groups: Service sector SMEs and informal waste pickers

