Mrs. Thong, a resident of Nongduang Thong village in the Chanthabuly district of Vientiane Capital, is a trailblazer in the world of recycled waste. With a keen eye for valuable materials in discarded items, she buys and sells steel, aluminum, and plastic bottles, earning a living for herself and her six-member family. Her daughters work as shop assistants, her son as an air condition mechanic, and her son-in-law also joins in on the business by buying waste.

Every day, Mrs. Thong sets out to buy recycled waste from households and other sources in the Chanthabuly and Sikhottabong districts and sells it at a nearby shop in Khualuang village. She rises early and is usually on the road by 10:00 Am, returning home by 5:00 Pm. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted her routine, leaving her struggling to earn money and provide for her family.

Despite the challenges, Mrs. Thong is determined to overcome the obstacles in her path. She faces stiff competition from buyers in neighboring counties who offer factory prices, and the risk of injury while picking up waste from bins. Yet, she remains undaunted and is always looking for ways to improve. She has attended workplace safety and first aid training organized by The Waste to Value project – Swisscontact and has found the session on wound care to be particularly useful in her livelihood.
Mrs. Thong is not just a waste picker, but a leader and an inspiration in her community. She is dedicated to promoting a safer working environment for herself and her fellow waste pickers, and encourages others to properly manage and separate waste, making the work easier and more efficient. With her unwavering spirit and commitment to a brighter future, Mrs. Thong is a shining example of what can be achieved when we rise to meet life's challenges. “I would like to encourage other people to separate types of waste especially, broken glass which can help waste picker like me work easier.” she said.

• Inception phase: December 2021 – December 2024
• Project duration: (3 Yrs) December 2021 – December 2024
• Funded by: Swisscontact in Switzerland
• Implementer: Swisscontact in Laos and Department of Pollution Control and Monitoring as leading agent for implementation
• Key implementing governmental partners:
  Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
• Target Groups:

“This project is part of the Swisscontact Development Programme, which is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA and other donors.”