

# Lao solar cells help Indonesia

□ VIENTIANE TIMES

SUNLABOB Rural Energy Systems is the first Lao company to provide development assistance overseas, after a journey to Indonesia in January.

According to a press release, a four man team from Sunlabob travelled to Nias Island, Indonesia, to provide solar energy for 250 new houses built by 'United in Diversity' for victims displaced by the tsunami of 2004 and the earthquake of 2005.

During their two-week stay, the team successfully trained four local technicians and a village committee to continue the project after the departure of the Lao specialists.

In addition, the team found time to install electrical systems in the community centre and in the first 50 homes, for those deemed to be in most need of assistance.

In 2007, almost two years after the earthquake, there are still tens of thousands of internally displaced persons living in camps throughout Nias.

Sunlabob master trainer, Mr Thongdeuan Phengnapa, commented "It is a proud moment for us to be able to share the lessons we have learned in rural Laos to help similarly disadvantaged people elsewhere in the world. It shows that our Lao experience is applicable anywhere in the world where isolated communities will be



One of the Lao company's engineers installs the base of a solar panel in recently ravaged Nias, Indonesia.

without access to large scale energy distribution systems for many years to come."

The Sunlabob crew also included master trainer Sili Khounphannavong, master technician Khamsing Khouthsavannh, Mr Lloyd Osborne, and three translators from Jakarta.

The team was based in Sirombu village on the west of the island, a once beautiful beachfront community where fishing was the main livelihood. Mr Sili Khounphannavong commented "It was quite distressing to see the devastation wrought by the tsunami and subsequent earthquakes."

"Dotted amongst the more resilient coconut trees were the remains of totally flattened houses and broken fishing boats carried inland by the huge wave."

When the time came to leave, the team agreed that they had all learned from the experience, through which a unique bond has developed between the Lao PDR and the people of the island.

Company representatives say that Sunlabob Rural Energy Systems will continue to support Sirombu village in their efforts to develop a self-sufficient energy system and to re-build the community.