

“Alumni from DDD have contributed significantly to national development.”

A Conversation with Thip Nouansyvong, graduate of Digital Divide Data

Thongsavanh Souvannasane
August 29, 2025

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Could you please introduce yourself and share about your life before you knew Digital Divide Data? What were you doing before? During your time at DDD, what did you learn and what roles or responsibilities did you have? And after leaving DDD, what kind of work have you been doing, and how have you applied the knowledge and skills you gained at DDD to your new job?

Thip Nouansyvong: Thinking back, I have to tell it as it happened. I first got to know DDD around 2006 through Phab. Phab introduced me to DDD’s scholarship program, which offered English and computer training. At that time, I was in university, around my 2nd–3rd year. I applied and became a trainee student for an initial three-month program, learning mainly English and basic computer skills.

The computer portion covered typing, formatting documents, and proper hand placement. The English portion was practical for real-life use. The classes ran from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m., with morning and afternoon sessions. After three months, I became a staff member, working Monday to Saturday.

From this first period, I gained practical skills, especially typing and basic computer use. DDD provided internet access and technology opportunities that were otherwise limited, helping people develop skills regardless of background. It supported those with fewer opportunities, including the poor, students lacking funds, or people with disabilities. Scholarships covered around 60% of students, and loans were available without interest for tuition.

While working, I also assisted teaching in the mornings while attending university in the afternoons, gaining experience in teaching computer skills, formatting, and basic technology. I worked at DDD from 2006 to 2009, finishing university during this time. This experience built skills in English, computers, internet use, email, and communication.

Looking back, it was a heavy schedule but valuable. DDD offered opportunities to learn, work, and gain life skills. It supported personal growth, confidence, and readiness for future opportunities. After leaving DDD, I continued to work with international NGOs and practice law.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Have you applied the experience you gained while working with DDD to your current job? Compared to others who haven't had prior experience working with DDD, do you feel there is a difference?

Thip Nouansyvong: Of course, I gained many skills from DDD, which have been evident since my time studying there. I learned computer and internet skills between 2006–2009, which were quite difficult to access at that time. I also acquired English language skills, which I later applied to assist university professors, helping with writing, computer basics, and other tasks, skills I could directly use in my professional work. Additionally, I helped professors write emails to communicate with international collaborators.

After leaving DDD, these skills continued to benefit my work, especially my English proficiency. Certainly, these skills didn't come solely from DDD, but DDD provided a crucial foundation that gave me knowledge and abilities far beyond many others. When applying for jobs, having these skills clearly makes a candidate more competitive than those without such experience.

Another great aspect of DDD was the educational scholarships it offered. These scholarships provided opportunities to many who had limited access to education. About 60% of tuition fees were covered, and students could borrow the rest without interest or strict repayment requirements, allowing repayment according to their capacity.

Currently, I work in the legal field as a lawyer, a role I have held since leaving DDD in 2009. Working with international organizations has enabled me to focus on promoting legal knowledge. My prior experience sharing legal knowledge as a volunteer has helped me continue this work. The areas of law I cover are diverse, including family issues, land disputes, domestic violence, human trafficking, drug-related cases, and more. Through collaboration with law consulting firms in Laos and abroad, I currently work with international organizations to provide pro bono legal assistance to those in need.

If asked whether the compensation I receive is fair compared to the experience I gained from DDD, I would say it is fair and sufficient. It allows me to support myself and live under good conditions in the current economic era while also being able to support my family.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: How do you think DDD has contributed to Lao society?

Thip Nouansyvong: I believe DDD has produced personnel who now work across many sectors, whether in civil society, international organizations, or government institutions, reflecting great diversity. I think the alumni from DDD have contributed significantly to national development, regardless of the sector they work in, by fulfilling their respective roles for the benefit of Lao society.

Speaking of my peers from the same DDD cohort, after graduating, it was observed that each of them achieved a certain level of success in their own fields. Some became finance specialists, some worked in the banking sector in responsible positions, others pursued successful freelance careers, and some joined international organizations, gaining recognition from society. Overall, DDD has been one of the entities that nurtured and developed human capacity, equipping everyone who passed through it with knowledge and strong practical skills.

Because DDD is a social enterprise, everyone who has been part of it develops the competence to contribute to society, whether directly or indirectly. Some alumni working in international organizations directly benefit society, while those in business contribute by running enterprises in ways that help society. Overall, DDD's contributions to the public good surpass the personal benefits it provides to individuals.

At present, I observe that DDD also strives to build strong connections between alumni and current students through joint activities, bringing alumni to share their experiences and inspire young people. This creates a valuable opportunity for experience-sharing and mentoring for the next generation.

Regarding DDD's business model, it is considered an excellent example that can serve as a model for other business units or startups, institutions, and organizations to adapt in order to develop socially responsible enterprises.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Nowadays, do the alumni still keep in touch with each other? And what is your perspective on DDD in the present era of technological change, especially with the rise of AI? How do you see DDD's role in today's world? Do you think DDD will still be necessary and remain relevant in this era of technological advancement?

Thip Nouansyvong: When we, the alumni, graduated from DDD, including myself, one of the biggest challenges was meeting up with each other because everyone went their separate ways. If we did meet in person, it was often by coincidence, like bumping into each other at a café. Most connections, however, happen online through Facebook or other social media. If DDD organizes alumni events, it gives us the opportunity to meet old friends, catch up on life updates, work experiences, and exchange ideas about how to collaborate professionally, even if just a little.

Looking to the future, I hope DDD continues its work. Many DDD alumni are now working in diverse fields, and I would like DDD to invite them back to share their experiences with younger generations or even collaborate with DDD. For example, in my own work in the legal field, I can share information and experiences with others, and I am happy to contribute. In the past, I have recommended many people to apply to DDD and at least learned basic computer and English skills through the program.

In today's era, where AI plays a major role in society, this poses challenges for DDD. Regarding the future of DDD, I would like to suggest adding AI courses, for instance teaching how to use AI safely. Just like journalists learn to work safely with AI, young people need to understand how to use AI effectively and avoid risks. Some people misunderstand AI or overuse it, leading to potential dangers or scams.

Regarding the future business model of DDD, I think it cannot operate the same way it did 10-20 years ago because technology is changing rapidly. DDD must reconsider how it adapts its approach. Overall, I want DDD to continue giving opportunities patiently, because young people today have ambitious ideas and need guidance gradually to grow in ways that are appropriate, responsible, and respectful toward others.

Another point I would like to add is that if someone is interested in learning about law, I would gladly contribute and share knowledge.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane: Thank you.

Thongsavanh Souvannasane is a journalist and writer based in Vientiane, Laos. He is an active contributor to The Laotian Times, covering topics including environmental issues, socio-economic development, and regional geopolitics, often highlighting the intersection of local developments with broader regional and global dynamics.

Thongsavanh has also contributed to The ASEAN Frontier, focusing on historical and geopolitical narratives. He is a member of the Global Shaper Vientiane Hub, contributing to youth-led initiatives for positive change.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*