**PROGRAMME UPDATES**

*Strategic objective:* To improve governance and the development and implementation of laws and policies based on the principles of good governance, democracy, gender equality and human rights.

**One-stop service to cut red tape**

**Vientiane, Lao PDR** – The government has agreed to introduce a system to cut red tape and enable people to more easily obtain state-run services through a One Door Service (ODS) system. The introduction of the system was part of government efforts to enhance the quality of state administration.

Following the initial success of the first ODS centre piloted in Xaysettha District, Vientiane in March 2006, the Prime Minister issued an instruction to pilot ODS nation-wide. The Public Administration and Civil Service Authority (PACSA) takes the leading role in providing technical support to all ministries and provinces in establishing ODS.

In a workshop on the one-door service held in late April, Minister to the Prime Minister’s Office Ms Bounpheng Mounphoxay said ODS was necessary if the government wanted to deliver top-quality services to its citizens. The system was also important in enabling the country to further its national socio-economic development.

The ODS initiative was initiated through the Governance and Public Administration Reform: Support for better Service Delivery (GPAR-SBSD) project and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The goal of the initiative is to improve organisational structures and systems enabling the delivery of more effective accountable and transparent services.

With support from the GPAR-SBSD project, an ODS introductory manual was developed and several introductory workshops were held in the northern and southern provinces of Laos. In addition, the project is planned to provide support to expanding ODS centre’s services in Xaysettha and establishing two ODS centres in Phongsaly and Savannakhet Province.

At present, SDC supports to ODS through the GPAR-SBSD project but is considering to help PACSA directly in the near future once they have a clear road map on how they would like to go and what support they would need.

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"Think before you plant"

Vientiane, Lao PDR - A new set of extension materials for smallholder planter and extension staff were launched in April at the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES). The purpose of these materials is not to promote rubber production, but to help farmers and extension staff make better decisions about if and how to produce rubber.

The materials, which were produced by the Agriculture Information Management Working Group of NAFES and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) with financial support from some aid agencies including SDC as an response to the rubber boom in Lao PDR, aim to help farmers in a decision making process filling the gap in knowledge in rubber planting. It is the first time the extension materials were developed using a participatory process. This process highlights the importance of the target groups’ involvement and the value of a joint research & extension activity.

The materials developed included radio spots to inform about strengths and weaknesses, risks and alternatives to rubber planting. Those are broadcasted national wide for four months on National Radio in Lao, Khamu and Hmong languages.

In addition, a simple checklist was released to help farmers understand the social, economic and environmental factors associated with rubber production and to lead them through the decision making process.

Finally, a reference manual for extension agents and expert farmers was produced to support the technical production process, in case rubber has been selected as the farmers’ priority. Some 20,000 copies of the leaflets and 2,500 copies of the manual are being distributed to all provinces.

Switzerland contributes to sustainable development in Vietnam

Hanoi, Vietnam – After 10 years of implementation, the Capacity Building for Environmental Science and Technology in Northern Vietnam (ESTNV) project funded by SDC has yielded remarkable achievements in contributing to environmentally sustainable development in Vietnam.

Strategic objective: To support the development of livelihood in the uplands and other poor rural areas in terms of increased food security, income and environmental sustainability.
Started in 1998, the project focused on improving capacities and managerial competence of the two research institutes, namely the Centre for Environmental Technology and Sustainable Development (CETASD) and the Centre for Environmental Engineering in Towns and Industrial Areas (CEETIA), to identify and solve problems related to rapid urbanisation and industrialisation.

In Vietnam, the drinking water was controlled mainly in the city by obsolescent criteria and technologies and water source was normally extracted from ground water through tube wells and used directly without any official quality control. These exerted harmful effects on the health of community and was of a great concern for both public and government agencies.

Thanks to support from the project, the two institutes were able to upgrade standard laboratories with full capacity to apply practical research. Over 30 pilot and full scale projects on water treatment and waste management have been implemented, contributing greatly to the improvement of the aquatic environment quality in Northern Vietnam. Through these projects, capacities of these institutes were also developed.

In addition, the project has brought about high quality scientific human resource on the aquatic environmental science and technology for Vietnam. Senior Vietnamese researchers and graduate students were trained in project planning and conducting research with a strong emphasis on analytical quality control and data interpretation. With the assistance from the project, the two institutes initiated cooperation with other universities and institutes in different countries through professional exchange and internship.

The project has created impacts not only on identifying the critical environmental problems but also developing relevant mitigation solutions and has influenced the environment related policies.

**FACTS & FIGURES**

Inflation in Vietnam is expected to average 22% this year, despite the government efforts to restrain the accelerating prices. Already, the consumer price index in May skyrocketed to 25.2%, mainly driven by surging food and construction prices. Overall, the country's inflation in the first four months of this year jumped 15.96%. *(AP 2 June)*
Empowerment workshop strengthens regional knowledge sharing

Hanoi, Vietnam – Fourteen participants from SCO offices in Hanoi and Vientiane gathered in a two-day workshop held in early April to share and learn about empowerment. The workshop facilitated by Reto Wieser from SDC’s Social Development Division aimed to strengthen the participants’ conceptual understanding on empowerment and to embed the issue in a larger frame of poverty reduction.

At the workshop, participants discussed about empowerment in the region, analysed specific interventions and drew conclusions from these analysis. As part of the event, participants discussed options for future learning. Five possible line actions were defined to ensure that empowerment, as a transversal theme of the Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy, is being dealt with appropriately. These actions include making empowerment explicit and developing it in the Mekong regional programme, strengthening empowerment at project level, and monitoring and reporting on empowerment as process and outcome.

Swiss journalists visit Vietnam and Laos

As part of the preparation for the Annual Conference on Development and Cooperation 2008 in Switzerland, SDC’s Head Office mandated a group of 10 Swiss journalists to visit Vietnam and Lao PDR from 26 May to 6 June 2008 to get the insights on the effectiveness of Swiss development aid in the Mekong Region.

The journalists visited Swiss-funded projects implemented in the two countries, talked to beneficiaries to get a better understanding of how their lives have changed positively with support from Switzerland. During the trip, journalists also visited cultural and historical places in Hanoi, Vietnam and Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang, Lao PDR.

This year, Mekong Region has been chosen as one of the spotlight in the Conference with the theme “Challenges of a Dynamic Growth”. The Conference is considered an opportunity to improve the understanding and perception of the Swiss public about development and cooperation between Switzerland and countries in the South.

Earlier, under the auspices of SDC, a filming crew paid a four-day visit to the Sustainable Brick making Project in Nam Dinh Province, Vietnam. The crew came to document the project, which introduced a highly energy-efficient brick kiln, the vertical shaft brick kiln, and to produce a training film. This technology was now already transferred from India to Vietnam, Nepal, Afghanistan and many other countries are interested in it such as Peru and Cuba.