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.

New development project to enhance sustainability

Vientiane, Laos – Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) signed an agreement on August 4th with Village Focus International (VFI), an INGO working in Laos, for the development of a new project.

The Rights-LINKS (Land, Information, Networking and Knowledge) aims to strengthen sustainable management of land and natural resources in Laos through improvements to information accessibility and the participation of key actors including farmers, local government officials, national policy makers and civil society professionals.

VFI, working together with the National Land Management Authority (NLMA) and other partners, will develop networks and platforms to improve coordination across all levels of land planning and management processes.

The six month development phase will focus on a thorough analysis of current land and natural resources management practices in Laos to ensure the programme can establish strategic entry points for it to complement the work of other organisations in the field.

A second area of focus will be the completion of a feasibility analysis and the identification of different scenarios for the establishment of the proposed Rights-LINKS Resource Centre as an independent multi-stakeholder entity that will bring stakeholders together.

The Rights-LINKS Programme will work alongside the authority and other government agencies, civil society and community-based groups.

It is anticipated the initial phase of the program will take three years to complete and will commence in January 2009, following the completion of the development phase.

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Improving quality of life through community management

_Hanoi, Vietnam_ - In early August, Switzerland provided financial support to the Center for Promoting Development for Women and Children, a national non-governmental organisation, to implement a Community Management Project.

This project, which valued at US$ 1,720,000, aims to consolidate and replicate Community Management Model in three provinces of Nam Dinh, Quang Binh, Hoa Binh, promoting the participation of communities in local planning and the decision making process leading to an improved quality of life for all, especially the poor and disadvantaged.

In Vietnam, the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance and Gender Equality Law have created an enabling environment to empower citizens in the socio-economic development process. However, citizen’s empowerment is mainly in the form of community participation, in which people are mobilised to implement the plans and policies of the government and these lack a responsiveness to local needs and priorities.

The project is expected to be an impetus to the promotion of community management, in which local citizens, including the poor and disadvantaged, are considered not only as beneficiaries, but increasingly as partners, planners, managers and leaders.

**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.

Supporting chayote supply chain in Tan Lac

_Hoa Binh, Vietnam_ - Tan Lac, a home of Muong ethnic minority, is an upland district in Hoa Binh Province, about more than 100 km from Hanoi. For the district, maize is the main commercial crop.

In an effort to increase the income of the local people and reduce its dependency on maize, the district started to look for diversification options. As part of this process, the provincial authorities supported a pilot fresh chayote cultivation in five upland communes of the district with the involvement of Muong women.

An area of 3.5 hectares was planted from late October to November 2007. Farmers were provided planting material and training on chayote cultivation. Training on harvest and post-harvest practices was also delivered in April 2008, at the start of the seven-month harvesting season.
From the production perspective, the pilot was quite successful but there was a possible risk which could jeopardize the good efforts made by the local people and authorities - it's the lack of access to the market. If farmers didn't have any buyers for their products, they would not invest in chayote cultivation in the coming seasons, despite its potential to become an important source of income in the local area.

The Small-scale Agro-enterprise Development in the Uplands of Vietnam (SADU) has been involved to help local people and authorities to find the way to the market by supporting the chayote supply chain.

SADU, a project funded by Switzerland, focuses on developing and piloting an Agro-Enterprise Development Process which leads to improved and more efficient product market chains and business development services. Furthermore, the project aims to enhance the capability and capacity of government and partner staff to implement an agro-enterprise and market development process.

In April, the project started encouraging local farmers who had a motorbike and a driving license to take advantage of the opportunity to develop the chayote trading business. Information about demand in provincial markets and contacts of potential buyers in these markets were provided.

In addition, exposure visits to markets in different towns within the province and in the adjacent province of Ha Tay were organised to expose local staff and selected farmers to chayote marketing opportunities.

As a results, five farmers in three communes are now selling chayote on a regular basis. By mid-July, the five local collectors sold nearly 3.5 tons of chayote in Hoa Binh and other towns of the province with profits earned from trading amounted to 3.5 million Vietnam Dong (VND).

"Became a collector in July 2008, I take chayote to the market in Hoa Binh to sell three times per week. Each time I get an average income of VND280,000 (approx. $US17) “said fifty-year old Dinh Hoang Minh, a farmer from Luong Village. "It's much higher than income I get from planting maize”.

According to a project staff, Mr Tien, SADU has encouraged local collectors to bring goods from Hoa Binh for sale in their communities to earn additional profits and create favourable conditions for an increase in farm-gate prices. One collector has made significant profits from the sale of inputs and consumer goods such as fingerlings, fish, litchi… bought in Hoa Binh.

Not only collectors can make profits from trading chayote but farmers, who have cultivated chayote also have higher revenue from selling the products.

“Our family started to grow chayote on our 200 square-meter field in May 2008. We invested VND418,000 and after three months we got VND1,250,000. The net profit we gained was VND830,000,” Ngan Thi Que, 28, a farmer from Ton Village gladly showed the results from her notebook.

“Phuong Huyen, a company in Hoa Binh, has also been purchasing chayote from Tan Lac,” said Tien. “By mid-July the company bought around 4.5 tons, generating an income at the farm gate of more than VND11 million.”

“There are opportunities to expand chayote cultivation for sale in provincial and nearby markets and for daily sales to institutional buyers within the province,” Tien added.
Switzerland helps Vietnam improve trade capacity

Hanoi, Vietnam - A project worth US$2.42 million on trade capacity building in Viet Nam in the post WTO accession period funded by Switzerland started at the beginning of August.

The project will be implemented between 2008-2010 by the Directorate for Standards and Quality of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) with the technical assistance of the United Nations Industrial development Organisation (UNIDO).

"The project aims to assist Viet Nam to further strengthen its national infrastructure for Standards, Metrology, Testing and Quality (SMTQ) and to ensure the effective implementation of its WTO obligations related to Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreements," said Tran Quoc Thang, Deputy Minister of Science and Technology.

It is expected to contribute to promoting exports of safe and environmentally sound products from Viet Nam to international markets, said Thang.

Specifically, the project will strengthen physical conformity infrastructure for internationally recognised calibration and testing services to industry, particularly in export sectors such as textiles and garments and food products.

It also helps formulate technical regulations in several manufacturing sectors for implementation of the Law on Standards and Technical Regulations and pilot food traceability systems to comply with international standards and practices.

This project would help the responsible authorities to successfully implement its obligations and benefit as soon as possible from the advantages of the WTO accession, said Jean-Hubert Lebet, Ambassador of Switzerland to Viet Nam.

UPCOMING EVENT