MEKONG INSIGHTS

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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 atlas to offer detailed perspectives on socio-economic reality of Lao PDR**

_Vientiane, Laos –_ The Ministry of Planning and Investment and Switzerland jointly launched on December 10th the Socio-economic Atlas of Lao PDR and a publication entitled “The Geography of Poverty in Lao PDR”. This is an achievement of a two-year project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Department of Statistics, the Lao National Mekong Committee Secretariat, and the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South.

“The Atlas offers, for the first time, reliable information on spatial patterns of socio-economic characteristics and poverty in the country and this at the level of all 10,500 villages in the Lao PDR,” addressed the Ambassador of Switzerland to the Lao PDR, H.E. Dr. Rodolphe Imhoof “It constitutes an essential tool which will support the implementation of the 6th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP). It has also the potential to contribute to the development of the future 7th NSEDP.”

The project emerged from the recognition that the existing valuable information on the socio-economic situation of the Lao PDR remains insufficiently used, particularly due to the difficulty to access and analyse it. The Socio-Economic Atlas, which translates dry statistical data into colourful maps, constitutes an innovative tool to bring reliable and comprehensive information on the socio-economic status to the broad public in a user-friendly and open manner.

The Atlas presents seventy indicators of the human condition of the people of the Lao PDR based for the most part on data collected in the National Population and Housing Census of 2005. It contains a comprehensive set of maps showing a wide range of socio-economic aspects of the Lao population at the village level, accompanied by thematic analysis. For the first time, census data have been mapped with such a high degree of spatial disaggregation. *(Cont’d in p.2)*

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The Swiss Cooperation Strategy in the Mekong Region aims at facilitating global and regional socio-economic integration, improving human security and safeguarding natural resources in the region.
The Atlas exists in both print and CD-Rom formats to provide interested general readers, students and researchers, and policy- and decision-makers with information on the socio-economic characteristics of the Lao population and the spatial distribution. It can serve as a basis for stimulating discussions on the current socio-economic characteristics of the country and on any future developments. In this way, the Atlas is expected to contribute to linking knowledge and decision-making hence making development in the Lao PDR more sustainable and equitable.

Breaking the silence on domestic violence

_Hanoi, Vietnam_ – Hundreds of men and women with white ribbons on their chests gathered in an event which took place since early morning of November 25th. All of them signed on a large white cloth to pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

These was one of activities jointly conducted by Hanoi Women’s Union, the Centre for Women and Development, Non-governmental Organisations and supported by Switzerland and other international donors under the theme “A World without Violence” to commemorate the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

At the event, members of Domestic Violence Prevention Clubs from five districts in Hanoi shared their knowledge and experiences on domestic violence prevention through art performance, plays and poems. Most of the members in these clubs used to be women affected by domestic violence.

As part of the day, an exhibition of tools used by violated husbands was opened with more than 40 tools representing 40 real stories about domestic violence. According to Mrs. Van Anh, Director of the Centre for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women and Adolescents (CSAGA), many of the affected women, who were beaten by those tools, have joined the Domestic Violence Prevention clubs and became active peer educators.

Domestic violence takes place in many families in Vietnam regardless of economic conditions, social background in all rural and urban areas. According to Capital Security newspaper, domestic violence happens in every one of five families in Vietnam. It is alarming that the domestic violence situation has increased and got more complicated despite the fact that the living standards have been improved.

“Domestic violence happens everywhere. In Hanoi, we have received a lot of letters from women asking for support and in many cases we have directly requested concerned authorities to intervene to protect affected women,” said Mrs. Nguyen Thi Minh Ha, Chairwoman of Hanoi Women’s Union.

“Through the event and mass media, we would like to raise the public awareness on different types of domestic violence against women,” said Mrs. Thuy, Director of Centre for Women and Development. “Inappropriate behaviours toward women and maltreatment of women must be stopped.”
Since 2005, Switzerland has supported Vietnam to combat with domestic violence through various programmes ranging from grassroots to national levels.

**Advocacy and policy influence:**
- Raising awareness among Parliament Members about the importance of a domestic violence prevention law which then led to the law development and adoption by the National Assembly in November 2007.
- Facilitating and creating a platform for civil society to contribute inputs and comments on the draft Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and related decrees.
- Supporting Ministry of Health to include health workers into systems of supporting domestic violence victims, developing training manual and providing training programmes for health workers.

**Grassroots interventions:**
- Working with local authorities and non-governmental organisations to develop effective models of grassroots interventions to stop violence, raising awareness with a focus on men, boys, and male perpetrators, providing counselling to violence affected women.

**Provision of support to domestic violence victims:**
- Together with other donors, providing technical and financial assistance to the Centre for Women and Development to establish and operate the first shelter for women and children affected by domestic violence in Vietnam.

Switzerland has recently supported the Family Department, Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism to set up a piloting database system on domestic violence situation and monitoring the implementation of the anti-domestic violence law. Furthermore, it started to work with UNODC to help the government build capacity for the law enforcement and justice sectors to response to domestic violence amid the newly approved law.

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**Helping the poor to navigate the inflation storm**

*Hanoi, Vietnam* - Switzerland has funded the Institute for Development Study, a non-governmental organisation, to conduct a study on the impact of inflation on the poor in Vietnam. After five months of research, the report executive summary has been produced and submitted to the Consultative Group meeting held in Hanoi last week. It is expected that the final report will be widely discussed and distributed to Parliament members as soon as it is published in early 2009.

The main purposes of the study are not only to gain a better understanding on to what extent and how the poor have been affected by the adverse price shocks in the last two years but also to gain some knowledge on how the poor themselves have responded to this adverse situation and what they expected from others to help them to mitigate the shocks. This study will also make a quick stock-taking of what have been done at different levels to help the poor to deal with the shocks and make recommendations on how to help effectively and timely the poor during the turbulence times.
Switzerland continues to support Vietnam’s forest sector

**Hanoi, Vietnam** – Vice Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Hua Duc Nhi and Ambassador of Switzerland to Vietnam Jean-Hubert Lebet signed an agreement in late November for the second phase of the Trust Fund for Forests (TFF). Over a period of the next three and a half years (2008-2011), the total contribution of Switzerland to the TFF will be CHF8,400,000 (around US$6,250,000).

“Through the TFF, Switzerland would like to support Vietnam in achieving the objectives set out in the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy (VFDS) 2006-2020, thus contributing to poverty alleviation, sustainable forestry management and economic growth,” said Jean-Hubert Lebet.

During the first phase (2004-2007), Switzerland contributed CHF1,670,000 (around US$1,250,000) to the TFF and its achievements have been recognised.

Established in June 2004, the TFF is a mechanism which aims to align ODA resources towards a more effective means of supporting key sectoral programmes defined in the Socio-Economic Development Plan and the VFDS, using existing Government procedures and facilities.

In economic development, the TFF aims to contribute to the improvement of the overall condition and value of the country’s forests, timber supply and business models in a sustainable manner. In rural livelihood, it is expected that forest land is allocated to households and communities, and local communities are participating in planning, development, and management of forest, and thus sharing the benefits.

In addition, the TFF will focus on the environment environmental perspective of forests by improving the protection of critical watersheds and globally significant biodiversity in the Central Highlands, and by enhancing the conservation management of special use forests in the South Central Coast.

The major support is put on areas where numerous poor ethnic minorities are living and are dependent on the forest resources. It is expected that the living conditions of more than 500,000 men, women and children in poor provinces will be directly improved and even more will indirectly benefit from increased earning opportunities.