Switzerland increases its support to poverty alleviation in Laos

_Vientiane, Laos_ – The Government of Switzerland is increasing its support to poverty alleviation in Laos. Three project agreements, totalling US$8.6 million, were signed on October 23rd by the Vice-Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Khamjane Vongphosy, the Vice Minister of Finance, Mrs. Viengthong Siphandone and the Ambassador of Switzerland to the Lao PDR, Mr. Rodolphe Imhoof.

“The signing of these agreements demonstrates the strong commitment of the Government of Switzerland to partner with the Government of Laos to fight poverty and to participate to the development of rural communities” said Ambassador Rodolphe Imhoof. The three agreements include the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP), the Northern Uplands Rice-based Farming Systems Research Project (NURIFAR), and the support to the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF).

With the signing of the agreement, the LEAP project enters its fourth phase and is extended until 2012. Farmers who have participated in the past in training activities organized by the National Agricultural and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) have increased production of crops and animals for both home consumption and the market, thereby contributing to the Government’s goals of poverty eradication, food security and commodity production. The method used by NAFES is called the ‘Lao Extension Approach’, which has been introduced into all Provinces of the country. The approach provides farmers – both men and women – with the opportunity to form groups, analyze their own problems, attend training sessions, and practice what they learn in their own fields. In the new phase of the LEAP, the number of farming techniques that are being taught by NAFES staff will be increased by creating partnerships with a wide range of other organizations and projects. Also, the Lao Extension Approach will be expanded into areas that have previously been neglected, such as poor upland communities.

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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.
At the signing ceremony the Vice-Minister, Mr. Khamjane Vongphosy, explained that “Farmers cannot work in isolation any longer. As part of the transition from subsistence to market-oriented agriculture they need to join forces, both among themselves and with the private sector. It is the role of the extension service to help farmers make those connections”.

The four-year NURIFAR project supports the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute and implementing partners to carry out integrated research in the Northern Uplands. The project will develop and test new technologies for upland rice production systems. It is expected that the project will increase agricultural productivity and rice yields in the Northern Uplands by at least 25% among the collaborating farming communities. The project is a follow-up support to the highly successful Lao IRRI project.

The Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) has developed an efficient and effective delivery mechanism to channel resources to poor villages. The PRF enables poor communities to assess their own needs and priorities through participatory planning mechanisms and to determine how best to use resources to maximize their social and economic development on a sustainable basis. Based on the PRF’s good achievements in alleviating poverty, Switzerland decided to make an initial contribution of US$ 1.8 million to the PRF.

In 2007, Switzerland contributed US$7.2 million to support Laos PDR on the two key areas of governance and rural livelihoods. For 2008 and 2009, the total Swiss financial assistance committed to the country amounts to US$22 million.

**Lao high ranking officials take study tour to Indonesia**

*Vientiane, Laos – A study tour to Indonesia for 25 Lao high ranking government officials including a Minister, Vice-Ministers, Vice-Governors with support from Switzerland and the World Bank, within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Fund was held from 26th-30th October 2008.*

The purpose of the trip, which was organised by the National Leading Committee on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, is to learn experiences in programme implementation, evolution and institutional arrangements from the National Programme for Community Empowerment (PNPM).

Similarly to the Poverty Reduction fund (PRF), this programme, which has been implemented by the Government of Indonesia, started as a joint initiative of the government and donors to target alleviating poverty, strengthening local government, and community institutions. The programme has evolved over the last 10 years to become a nationwide community development programme aimed at eliminating poverty.

It is expected that the study tour can bring about significant elements in the on-going reflection for the future development of the Poverty Reduction Fund, especially on how the Programme’s institutional set-up can be reinforced and how additional support from both Government and donors can be accessed, and channelled to local level.
Switzerland helps Vietnam curb domestic violence through improved law enforcement and justice services

Hanoi, Vietnam - The Government of Switzerland has funded USD740,000 for a three-year project to contribute to effective prevention of domestic violence against women through more responsive law enforcement and justice services.

A funding agreement on “Building Capacity of Law Enforcement and Justice Sectors to Prevent and Respond to Domestic Violence in Vietnam” was signed on September 29th between the United Nations on Organized Drug and Crime (UNODC) representative Ms. Narumi Yamada and Ambassador of Switzerland to Vietnam Mr. Jean-Hubert Lebet.

“By improving capacity of the law enforcement and justice sectors in dealing with domestic violence, Switzerland looks forward to contribute to the improvement of gender equality in families in Vietnam as well as to support the government in implementing the recently adopted law on prevention of domestic violence effectively,” said Ambassador Lebet.

The project, which runs until 2011, aims at increasing the capacity of law enforcement and justice sector officers to deal with cases of domestic violence through developing training materials, conducting training courses, supporting the development of regulatory documents to ensure effective implementation of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention.

In addition, it strengthens the victim's legal support through building up the capacity of the Legal Aid Agency, supports the development of specific criminal justice approaches, and raises awareness of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention at national level. The project activities are jointly funded by SDC, USAID, and the UN Joint Programme on Gender Equality.

There is evidence that domestic violence is a serious problem in Viet Nam. According to a Ministry of Public Security report, in 2005 almost 14% of murders in Viet Nam were related to domestic violence. In the first quarter of year 2006, the rate exceeded 30%. In 2005, in over 60% of divorce cases domestic violence was cited as the reason for divorce.

Domestic violence has recently started to be openly discussed and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention was passed in the National Assembly in November 2007. However, effective implementation of the law, which took effect from 1 July 2008, requires extensive capacity building of both law enforcement and justice sector. This project aims to respond to this urgent need.
Strategic objective: To contribute to the development of the private sector, basic infrastructure, trade, and to that of conducive economic framework conditions that empower the poor within the market environment.

Better Work increases work opportunities in export sector

Better Work Vietnam, which is supported by Switzerland and other donors through the International Finance Cooperation (Mekong Private Sector Development Facility) and the International Labour Organisation, was launched in early October.

The goal of this programme is to reduce poverty by expanding decent work opportunities in export sectors. It will accomplish this by improving labour standards and competitiveness of enterprises in Vietnam which are part of global supply chains. Better Work builds cooperation between governments, employers, unions, and international buyers to find scalable and sustainable solutions.

Better Work Vietnam expects to create positive impacts on the export sector which include improving working conditions and job opportunities; increasing market access due to credible demonstration of labour standards compliance; reducing worker turnover and improving productivity for enterprises.

The entry point is the apparel industry in the Ho Chi Minh City area with a view to expanding to other industries and areas from the second year. Better Work Vietnam will offer services to 700 factories with around 700,000 workers within five years of operation.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 11 – 14.11: Head Office visit to Mekong Region
- 24 – 31.11: Feasibility Study Mission for possible PALD Phase II
- Third week of November: TFF signing ceremony

Questions & Feedback: Khuat Quang Hung
quanghung.khuat@sdc.net

Swiss Cooperation Office for the Mekong Region
Hanoi Central Office Building
16th Floor 44B Ly Thuong Kiet Str, G.P.O Box 4, Hanoi - Vietnam
Phone: +844 93 46627 - Fax: +844 93 46633 - Website: www.sdc.org.vn