MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

With this newsletter, the SDC Mekong Programme takes yet another step forward in its commitment to partner with the Governments of Vietnam and the Lao PDR, both committed to reducing poverty, reforming their governance systems and enhancing more sustainable natural resources management practices. These thematic areas continue to be the red thread in the SDC programme while some changes have taken place at the management level since our last newsletter.

SDC’s national programmes will in future be reinforced by a regional programme component to upscale good practice, add value by linking with regional development partners and to increasingly address issues of cross-border importance such as the management of shared biodiversity resources, human trafficking and illegal migration or climate change. Along with this, the Regional Director of the SDC Mekong Coordination Office has shifted to Vientiane, Lao PDR. He will operate from there as the Director of the SDC programme of the Mekong region including the national programmes in Vietnam and Lao PDR while the SDC Hanoi office continues to coordinate the implementation of the SDC Vietnam programme. Along with this change, both SDC and SECO are to deploy new staff into the Hanoi office in the coming months, and SECO has substantially increased its contribution to the Poverty Reduction Fund of Vietnam, resulting in a strengthened Swiss presence while some other donors are phasing down their programmes in Vietnam.

Due to the above changes, but also the approval of a new SECO country assistance strategy and the evolution of many context factors, the joint Swiss Cooperation Strategy in the Mekong Region 2007-2011 is subject to be reviewed and adapted in the 2nd half of 2009, and first steps have been initiated to that effect. And we are pleased to state that the programme is further developing with new initiatives being signed both in the Lao PDR as well as in Vietnam.

PROGRAMME UPDATES

Switzerland reaffirms its support to sustainable development

Vientiane, Laos – The Government of Switzerland reaffirms its commitment to support Laos in promoting sustainable upland farming system and conserving agro-biodiversity in the northern uplands through two newly signed projects.

The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Sitaheng Rasphone, and the Ambassador of Switzerland to the Lao PDR, Mr. Rodolphe Imhoof signed on April 29th the agreements on “The Agro-biodiversity Initiative” and “Support to the Reform of the Agriculture and Forestry College in Luang Prabang” totalling US$ 9.6 million. Read more on our website

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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.
Switzerland, UNICEF help families affected by 2008 Mekong flood

Vientiane, Laos - Funding provided by the government of Switzerland will provide an important boost to the nutritional status of children and mothers affected by last August's Mekong floods, according to an agreement sign on May 15th in Vientiane.

The funds, totaling US$ 700,000, were provided in response to a joint United Nations appeal issued in the aftermath of the disaster.

Read more on our website

TFF operational, contributing to Vietnam forestry development

Hanoi, Vietnam - “Trust Fund for Forest (TFF) is now fully operational and has been contributing towards Hanoi Core Statement: ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability,” says the TFF Final Evaluation Report released in late June.

According to the Report, TFF has been recognised outside the forest sector as an innovative model from which lessons are learned, also outside Vietnam.

Read more on our website

Mid-term Review of two projects completed

Hanoi, Vietnam - A two-month Mid-term Review of two SDC-funded projects “Supporting Public Administration Reform in Cao Bang Project (SPAR-CB)” and “Public Service Provision Improvement Programme in Agriculture and Rural Development (PS-ARD)” completed in May 2009. As the two projects are interlinked, SDC and the Project Steering Committees decided to conduct a joint mid-term review for both development interventions.

The purpose of the review are to support the project owners, the project implementing agencies and SDC to analyse past achievements and current status of the projects, assess and review of feasibility of programme design, and recommend on the programme focuses.

Read more on our website
Promoting Community Management in Vietnam

**Nam Dinh Province, Vietnam** - With 60 households, Block 20, Thong Nhat Ward is a small residential area which is far from the centre of city. Due to narrowed roads, the block is hard to be accessed by vehicles, especially ambulance cars. Medical stores and hospitals locate in distant areas and it takes time and money for local people to have medical check or to go to hospitals.

Retired doctors and nurses in the community found that the problem could be solved with their professional skills if there was a first aid clinic in the community.

*Read more on our website*

An opportunity to earn a living

“I was going to stay home like most women in this area, but I heard about the bamboo pre-processing workshops and my life changed.”

**Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam** - In early 2006, Lu Thi Hoa, 22, left her parents’ home to work in a bamboo pre-processing workshop in the village of Thanh Xuan.

The workshop, X-2, is one of five set up in Thanh Hoa between 2005-06 with support from a bamboo project initiated by IFC-MPDF that would later become Prosperity Initiative’s flagship programme, Mekong Bamboo. The workshop produces semi-finished bamboo products such as raw chopsticks and rough slats, which are then sold to larger companies to make products like bamboo flooring and handicrafts.

*Read more on our website*

**New publication**

**Documentaries on Swiss development assistance in Vietnam**

In collaboration with O2TV, Swiss Cooperation Office in Hanoi has produced two short documentaries on Governance and Rural Livelihood Development. The purposes of these documentaries are to give the public a snapshot of what SDC in the Mekong Region has done to support Vietnam in Governance and Rural Livelihood and Natural Resource Management and to show the impact of Switzerland’s development programme in Vietnam.

The two documentaries are available in DVD format with English subtitles and are best viewed on high definition, wide screen TV. It is planned that the documentaries will be optimized and uploaded onto the internet soon.
Viet Nam, Switzerland hail developing multifaceted ties

*Hanoi, Vietnam* — Relations between Viet Nam and Switzerland have been developing well in many regards such as the increasing two-way trade turnover and effective implementation of Swiss-invested projects in Viet Nam.

These ties have brought about practical benefits to both countries, said Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

*Read more on our website*

### Senior bank executives get management training

*Hanoi, Vietnam* - The Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) held an introductory seminar on July 7th at SBV Headquarters in Hanoi to launch a comprehensive management training program for senior Vietnamese bank executives.

The seminar opened jointly by the visiting Swiss Secretary of State and SECO senior executive Mr. Jean-Daniel Gerber, and SBV Deputy Governor Mr. Nguyen Van Binh.

*Read more on our website*