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Farming and marketing improvements to boost food security

(By Times Reporters)

The lowland and upland farming systems of rainfed southern Laos have been identified as having elevated risk of hunger and rising rural poverty. Farmers need opportunities to grow reliable food crops and to generate income to purchase food but they are presently constrained by low fertility soils, weed competition, production and market risk including drought and flood and increasing cost of labour. Representatives from the relevant sectors and officials involved the project gathered in Vientiane to discuss the 'Developing improved farming and marketing systems in rainfed regions of southern Laos' project report for the four last years. This report's achievement will outline the research results and recommendations for implementation in the next project as well as serve as a general guideline. The workshop was chaired by the Director General of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), Dr Bounthong Bouahom. This project has created a multidisciplinary team involving researchers from institutions in Laos and Australia. The objectives is to provide for diagnosis and integrated assessment of farming and marketing systems and optimisation, testing and adaptation of crop and livestock technologies and new marketing and extension approaches. It is also sharing of knowledge and pilot scaling-out of varieties, technologies and marketing approaches and alleviation of constraints posed by drought and uncontrolled

flooding. The Lao government recognises the south as an agricultural economy in transition, with a need to ensure that the poor participate in and benefit from the transition process. Ineffective value chains and poor market access, inappropriate product quality, lack of infrastructure, extension and policy support, and complexities of gender roles impede farmers' efforts to change their farming systems. Risk-averse producers have little incentive to invest in better production and higher inputs. Nevertheless, the lowlands and uplands in the south have potential for market surplus in rice, other crops and livestock, and therefore, a better understanding of regional market potential and comparative advantage is important. In the southern rice-based systems, there are opportunities to intensify and diversify the production systems with livestock and other crops, through the development of new technologies, and the adaptation of knowledge from the northern uplands of Laos and neighbouring countries. Through better use of water resources, there is the opportunity to explore the use of supplementary irrigation to secure rice-based systems against drought, and improve prospects for short-duration post-rice crops and forages for livestock production in both the lowlands and the uplands. The project was supported the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and implemented by NAFRI.

(Vientiane Times 16 September 2015)

Foreign Affairs Party meeting kicks off

(By Times Reporters)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday began the Third Congress of its Party organ, with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Secretary General Choummaly Sayasone and Minister of Foreign Affairs Thongloun Sisoulith attending. About 200 Party members represented all 788 members in the ministry by attending the meeting. The Party organ's Acting Secretary Saleumxay Kommasith delivered opening remarks and a political report at the meeting, which reviewed the outcome of the implementation of the Ninth LPRP resolution and the resolution of the Second Congress of the ministry's Party over the past five years under the Party committee leadership. The country's active participation in strengthening regional and international cooperation was highlighted as an achievement of the sector. The active participation of Laos through various coopera-

tion frameworks in the region and the world in the wake of the Party's foreign relations expansion policy has enhanced Laos' reputation and recognition in the regional and international arenas. The implementation of preventive diplomacy with the attempt to build new rules regarding relations in the region, which enhanced the guarantee to secure the new regime and the country, was another highlight in the achievement of the foreign affairs sector in the past few years. In the plan for 2016 to 2020, the country will continue its foreign policy adherence to peace, independence, friendship, cooperation and the expansion of multi-lateral and multi-directional cooperation ties in the form of bilateral and multi-lateral frameworks. The ministry has 57 Party units of which 37 are units of the Lao diplomatic representative offices overseas.

(Vientiane Times 16 September 2015)

Party Secretary General gives guidance on foreign affairs

(By Somxay Sengdara)



Secretary General Choummaly Sayasone (centre) presides over the meeting.

The country's successful hosting of regional and international events along with expanding diplomatic and cooperation ties with foreign countries were outstanding foreign affairs' achievements over the past five years. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Secretary General Choummaly Sayasone pointed to these accomplishments in his address at the Third Congress of the

Party organ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which concluded yesterday. "Despite the fast changing and increasingly complicated global situation with political, economic and social crises such as terrorism, disease outbreaks, natural disasters that have occurred in many countries, under the ministry's Party committee leadership the foreign affairs sector has succeeded in implementing its burdening political duty," Mr Choummaly said. He praised the ministry's leaders in paying close attention to political ideology training for civil servants and Party members so they understood the Party directives and guidance well, and were aware of and respected the law. He also praised the ministry

for implementing foreign affairs activities following their planned priorities under the slogan: 'Preventive diplomacy to advance the mission of national defence and development'. Secretary General Choummaly noted the country's practice of the direction given by the Ninth LPRP Congress on foreign policy adherence to peace, independence, friendship, cooperation and the expansion of multi-lateral and multi-directional cooperation ties in the form of bilateral and multi-lateral frameworks, has brought new atmosphere to the country's foreign relations. He pointed out the number of foreign countries Laos had established diplomatic relations with, which reached 136, and the 38 diplomatic representative offices the country had overseas, while more countries expressed their intention to establish relations with Laos. He also mentioned the clear stance the country had on regional and international issues and disputes, and the government's skills and expertise in solving disagreements where the concerned parties understood and accepted the resolution. Deputy Minister Saleumxay Kommasith was elected as the Secretary Party Organ, and the recently appointed Deputy Minister Mr Sengphet Hounbounhuang was elected as Deputy Secretary. Other members of the ministry's

Party Standing Committee are Mr Thongsavanh Phomvihane, and Ms Khamphao Euntavanh, who were also appointed as deputy ministers recently. The new executive board of the ministry's Party committee has 15 members, in which the oldest members are 57 and the youngest are 47 years old. Mr Choummaly praised Party leaders in the ministry as young people who are knowledgeable and capable. He stressed for the new Party leaders to enhance revolutionary ideology and increase close relationship with members of the general public to find out and understand their living conditions and intentions, especially poor people. He called on the leaders to be role models in learning the Party directives, state laws and regulations, socio-economic development plan of every period, translating them to programmes and projects of each sub-sector for effective implementation. Continuous learning about their professional subjects, especially from working practices and colleagues, along with having clear positions and being sensible as wise counsellors to the government on foreign affairs, was also in the call by the Secretary General on the leaders. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Thongloun Sisoulith also attended the meeting.

(Vientiane Times 17 September 2015)

Poor women to play bigger local decision making role

(By Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth)

Poor women will play more prominent roles in decision making of their local communities in Sangthong district, Vientiane, thanks to a new project promoting gender equality. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Tuesday for the capacity development project between the Vientiane Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (VCAWMC) and NGO Cord Laos. According to VCAWMC, the project had an estimated cost of more

than US\$241,000, a timeframe of two years, from this year to December 2017, with VCAWMC and Cord Laos overseeing the project. The project will be implemented in the target villages of Naxor and Napor with these recognised as the poorest in the district. At the same time, 80 percent of women in these villages have been identified as not having enough understanding about equality between women and men. Speaking at the MoU signing ceremony, Regional Operational Manager of Cord, Ms Auralie Pelle-

treau said the project aimed to improve the technical and operational capacity of poor women of the district and local authorities required for service delivery to the most marginalised, vulnerable groups with a particular focus on the inclusion of women. The project would also contribute to the objectives and strategic directions set out in the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan, she added. Director of VCAWMC, Ms Souphone Vorravong said the project aimed for women of target villages to play a greater role in planning and decision making in their local communities, promote gender equality and greater opportunities for women as well as contribute to poverty reduction initiatives. "Initially the project will work in each of the target villages of Sangthong district to collect relevant information to provide a baseline for the project. Local authorities

will prepare the budget plans to manage the project and also support, monitor, and assess overall project management in the target villages," she said. The project would also strengthen VCAWMC by organising group exchange sessions with other women's groups throughout the district. It would also work to promote and upgrade women's skills in target communities by building community savings funds, she added. She explained the project expects to build women's understanding of ways to improve their livelihoods and deal with capacity development projects. In addition, it would assess gender equality and the development sector. Project facilitators plan to work in collaboration with other cooperation partners and share experiences with officials and experts working in the field of women's empowerment and gender equality.

(Vientiane Times 17 September 2015)

Irrigation expansion needed for bigger rice crops

(By Khonesavanh Latsaphao)

Deputy Prime Minister Mr Somsavat Lengsavath has asked irrigation officials to link the water flowing from an irrigation scheme in Champone district, Savannakhet province to another 500 hectares of rice fields via a pipeline across a river. Deputy PM Somsavat was touring the new Huayphalaeng irrigation scheme which is being constructed along the Phalaeng stream in Champhone district of the province. The construction of the new Huayphalaeng irrigation system will be able to irrigate about 2,000 hectares of rice crops in the district but 500 hectares of rice fields in two villages which share the site of Phalaeng stream are not connected to this scheme as the river is separating them. Mr Somsavat gave the instructions whilst visiting the site of the new Huayphalaeng irrigation system, an official of the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department Mr Navalath Butchampa, told *Vientiane Times* on Wednesday. The new scheme is of

a design where water overflows into channels automatically and can be delivered to crops in both the wet and dry seasons. When he oversaw the progress of this irrigation construction and saw a line of water flowing from Phalaeng stream without being used, the Mr Somsavat instructed the authorities to link the channels to more rice fields where there is currently no water available. The cost of the new Huayphalaeng irrigation scheme is almost 201 billion kip. Currently, it is around 30 percent complete after construction commenced in 2012. In the last four or five months the Party and state has built a 51km long irrigation system as part of the Xesalalong-Xeku project for the people of Thapangthong district, Savannakhet province, at a cost of US\$50.2 million. Construction was commissioned in a bid to increase crop yields for food security and commercial gain. The project was funded via a low-interest loan from the Chinese govern-

ment. Most of the country's dry season rice is grown in Savannakhet and Khammuan provinces and in Vientiane but very little is grown in the north. Total rice production last year in Laos amounted to four million tonnes, including both wet and dry season crops. Of this amount, some was used for domestic consumption, some was stored and some was sold to other countries through informal trade. Most of Laos' rice is sold

along the borders with neighbouring countries. More than 778,000 hectares of wet season rice and over 126,600 hectares of dry season rice are grown annually in these areas. But about 226,000 hectares of rice fields in the flatland areas are totally dependent on rainwater because irrigation channels have not been built in these locations yet.

(Vientiane Times 17 September 2015)

Govt boosts juristic acts against money laundering

(By Times Reporters)

Deputy Prime Minister Dr Bounpone Boutanavong noted recently that the juristic acts to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism play an important role for Laos in tackling and preventing any incidence of the illegal movement of money. "Many countries around the world are now eyeing anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism because it is a threat for national security, while Laos is also working hard to form a legal process for this international issue," he said. Speaking at the 3rd Ordinary Session of National Committee for Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism, Dr Bounpone, who is also Chairman of the National Committee for Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism, said world economic development is seemingly on the rise and technology has also advanced. "Beyond the advance of technology and steady growth of economic development, it can be a loophole for opportunists to carry out illegal activities, especially for money laundering and financing for terrorism," he said. He went on to say that there has been no such case found in Laos but many legal processes have been endorsed and disseminated over the past years. The forms of criminal law regarding money laundering will be an important evidence for Laos to use as a tool for juristic acts against any money laundering and combating the

financing of terrorism. The meeting also highlighted the past achievements of implementing the tasks of the 2nd Ordinary Session and proposed the drafting of an order on confiscating funds for terrorism and advice on reporting suspected acts of money laundering. Over the past years, Laos has been actively scrutinising the tasks of money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism under the international standards, relying on the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Laos became a member of the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) in 2007 and the government also gave the green light for the Bank of the Lao PDR (BOL) to establish an anti-money laundering intelligence unit. In 2010, Laos was evaluated by APG relying on recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force, with the report adopted in July 2011. Meanwhile the government issued juristic acts on anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism, especially for the Criminal Law regarding money laundering in 2005 and the decree on anti-money laundering in 2006. In the future, the Lao government, especially the BOL, is also preparing the formal transformation of the anti-money laundering intelligence unit into the anti-money laundering intelligence agency in order to broaden its rights and role in the field of anti-money laundering. By doing so, it will strengthen the growth of the Lao

economy, social security and also boost the expansion of international cooperation ef-

forts in this regard.

(*Vientiane Times* 17 September 2015)

Govt prohibits log exports

(By *Times Reporters*)

The government has prohibited the export of logs and instructed that timbers must be processed in Laos before exporting to foreign countries. Previously, the government banned the export of logs but exceptions were allowed when the government approved the export of the logs.



Trucks carrying logs from Laos prepared to cross Dansavanh-Lao Bao border checkpoint to Vietnam. (File photo)

The Government Office issued the new announcement No 1360 dated August 8, 2015 that imposes the prohibition. The prohibition means the government will not approve any kind of request for log exports, a senior government official has said. The prohibition was approved at the request of the Import-Export Department under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The Import-Export Department declined to give comment over the issue. Issuing the previous prohibition, the government said the ban was to add value to wooden products by processing the timbers before exporting them, while supplying more logs to fulfill increasing demand for raw materials to local wood processing and furniture plants. Some domestic furniture business operators have already suffered from the shortage of timber. The Lao Furniture Association told *Vientiane Times* in recent months that

some furniture businesses around the country have given up their operations after being unable to source enough wood to fulfill orders. In light of the issue, the association has asked for 30 percent of the government's annual wood quota to sustain their business but this has not been approved yet, association official Mr Bounpheng Phengsisavath said. Most of the furniture makers that are still operating, especially those in Vientiane, are having to buy wood from timber yards instead of using wood supplied under government-allocated quotas. He said the shortage is creating problems for the association as it tries to expand the market because of concerns about product supply. The demand for wooden furniture is high in both the Lao and foreign markets but supply is limited. There is a strong Chinese market demand for Lao furniture if the association is able to supply products in sufficient quantities. 2011 data from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce showed that there were 1,175 sawmills, wooden furniture factories and wood processing plants across the country. According to recent reports, information regarding the amount of wood exported is not available as the government has been unable to collect the information from local authorities. Reports have emerged that high demand for timber and wooden products has resulted in widespread illegal logging and the illegal operation of sawmills. Despite the fact the government has taken action to regulate the illegal sawmills and wood processing plants, the issue remains in existence. The illegal trade in timber topped all cases uncovered in 2014 by the economic police or police in charge of economic case affairs, according to a report from the economic police. In 2014, the economic police

registered 391 illegal cases nationwide including 169 that involved the illegal trade of

timber.

(Vientiane Times 18 September 2015)

Laos needs sustainable income sources

(By Times Reporters)

Laos is facing challenges to secure sufficient income to accommodate the growing demand for state expenditure and investment, according to the Minister of Finance.



Dr Lien Thikeyo.

Speaking at a meeting with National Treasury Department officials at Lao-ITECC in Vientiane on Wednesday, Dr Lien Thikeyo said that one of the main challenges, which caused disruptions in revenue collection over the past several months, was that the country heavily relied on the energy and mining sectors as the main source of revenue. "The world situation has seen complex changes. This has caused a decline in the income coming from these sectors," he said as quoted in the Lao Economic Daily yesterday. The minister did not elaborate any further on the issue. However it is widely known that the lower price of copper in the world market is the main cause of the revenue shortage in Laos. The country exports large amounts of copper to the world market therefore once the price of this commodity drops, it is impossible for the country to keep the revenue collection plan on track. On top of that the mining sector will one day run

out of minerals, posing a challenge for the country to secure a sustainable income. Sepon mine, one of the largest gold and copper mines in Laos, has shut down its gold mining operation in recent times due to an exhaustion of the mineral. Dr Lien said another challenge which the country was facing was because of tax exemption on foreign investment projects, adding that although there was a major increase in foreign investment in Laos, the government was unable to collect the taxes that would otherwise be due on them because of the government policy to provide foreign firms with exemption as part of its efforts to promote foreign investment in the country. Apart from that many business units in the country avoid paying taxes to the government, posing challenges for it to collect sufficient income to meet its planned target, he said. Dr Lien, who also chaired the meeting, expressed appreciation to the treasury officials over their efforts to perform their duties despite the country facing challenges to collect revenue. This outstanding performance has paid a significant contribution to the success in the distribution of salaries to state employees as well as in the payment of state investment project debts. Laos needs to diversify its revenue sources as part of efforts to secure income to accommodate the growing demand for state expenditure and investment in future years, according to economists. They said that the country needs to boost investment in non-resource sectors and small and medium size enterprises so that it will have a sustainable source of income.

(Vientiane Times 18 September 2015)