



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Lao People's Democratic Republic

PRESS RELEASE  
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15 January, 2009

## NEW AGRICULTURAL CENSUS TO BOOST DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

**January 15, 2009, Vientiane:** Government officials and donors gathered today in Vientiane to discuss the Agricultural Census, which will be central to provide basic information for decision-making on natural resources and agriculture, agreed senior delegates from the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry and Planning and Investment.

His Excellency Mr. Sitaheng Rasphone, Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, said the census was crucial "for the Government of Lao PDR because we are now moving towards preparing our next Five-Year Plan and adjust our long-term development plan until year 2020 the year we have set to eradicating all forms of poverty."

"Today we start another milestone of strengthening cooperation and collaboration between the Government of Lao with the international community," said by Dr. Phouangparisak Pravongviengkham, Director General, Department of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

"Since Lao PDR's poverty is concentrated in rural areas, improving agriculture and maintaining biodiversity will be the most effective way to achieve the Millennium Development Goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015", said Mr. Serge Verniau, FAO Representative in Lao PDR, in his opening remarks.

Agriculture is the largest economic sector of the country, accounting over 40% of the GDP. But, despite the importance of the agriculture sector in the country's economy, and the growing concerns about land-use changes, there is a lack of comprehensive, innovative and reliable statistical data on the structure of the sector.

The Government conducted its first ever agricultural census in 1998/99. However, since 1999 there have been significant changes in the agricultural sector. Investment in hydropower, mining and industrial plantations have changed land use and reduced the limited land area and labour available for cultivation, food production and harvesting.

"An immediate consequence of these changes is that the 1999 listing of agricultural households and agricultural holdings in Lao PDR is largely outdated, incomplete and unreliable. And as a consequence, the agricultural statistical system is weak", summarised Mr. Verniau. "The current situation jeopardizes all efforts for adequate planning and policy making towards the main goals of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan as well as optimal resource allocation."

Approximately four-fifths of the Lao PDR's population reside in rural areas. Agricultural activities give primary employment to about 80% of the country's labour force. At the same time the rural populations are hardest hit by malnutrition.

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“This has been a very important and necessary meeting with far reaching implications for the country. Our next step is to mobilize funding,” said Dr. Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, Vice-Minister for Ministry for Planning and Investment

The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in cooperation with the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The census project involves two phases: a planning and preparatory phase of about one year and an implementation phase of two years. The total budget of the Census of Agriculture (in-kind government contribution excluded) is estimated at US\$ 2.4 million. The Government has indicated its intention of contributing about 10% to the total budget. The remaining contribution of about US\$2.13 million is expected from Donors and development partners.

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