

Press release

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Vientiane Capital, Laos
03 November, 2023

Swiss Government Funds Land Management Project in Laos

On November 3rd, 2023, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Lao PDR and the Swiss Confederation, a landmark project agreement was signed at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) in Vientiane Capital. The agreement, valued at 4.5 million USD, aims to promote sustainable land management and investments for climate-resilient livelihoods.

The Sustainable Land Management and Investment for Climate-Resilient Livelihoods (SLMIC) project will be executed by Switzerland's Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, in collaboration with the Government of Lao PDR. The CDE has been a longstanding partner of Switzerland in Lao PDR. SLMIC's mission is to assist the Government of Lao PDR in enhancing land management, advocating for quality investments in sustainable land management, and strengthening knowledge, capacities, and processes for the benefit of the most vulnerable communities.

Current land use practices, driven by private investors and individuals, have contributed significantly to economic growth and revenues. They also carry the risk of unsustainable practices, including loss of land use rights for rural populations, large-scale monocropping and excessive agrochemical inputs. These practices resulted in challenges to livelihood safety of rural farmers, environmental pollution and a sharp decline in soil fertility, primarily due to their short-term focus. In addition, climate change, marked by floods, heavier rainfall, and extended drought periods, is exerting additional pressure on the lands of Lao PDR. SLMIC aims to provide vital information to the Government of Lao PDR regarding unsustainable land investments and their combined impact with climate change, which poses a threat to the livelihoods of rural populations in Lao PDR.

The Government of Lao PDR is committed to fostering economic growth that is efficient, clean, comprehensive, inclusive, fair, and resilient to climate change as well as global economic uncertainties. Consequently, they have sought Switzerland's assistance to build upon the successful outcomes of past projects, including Knowledge for Development and Lao Decide Info, to support the realization of these goals. Notably, the establishment of the National Land Concession Information System and results of the Quality of Investments assessment led to the establishment of a cross-sectoral task force by the Prime Minister, resulting in the re-examination and

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subsequent cancellation of 170 concession agreements. The new SLMIC project seeks to further support the Government in its pursuit of a green growth strategy, including scientific research to inform decision-making for sustainable land governance and management.

H.E. Dr. Phet Phomphiphak, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, representing the Government of Lao PDR, emphasized that the project aligns with the Government's Agriculture Development Strategy to 2025 and its Vision for 2030. He underlined the significance of the SLMIC project for the country's socio-economic development and for ensuring sustainable land management.

H.E. M. Pedro Zwahlen, Ambassador of Switzerland to Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, representing Switzerland, expressed his country's enthusiasm in sharing its unique expertise and experience through this support, which also aligns with Switzerland's regional priorities. He reiterated Switzerland's commitment to supporting Lao PDR on its path towards sustainable and inclusive development, emphasizing that investments in sustainable land management and climate-resilient livelihoods play a crucial role in ensuring that no one is left behind.

The signing ceremony marks Switzerland's ongoing commitment to supporting Lao PDR, as this new project is unveiled. It was attended by key representatives from various ministries, including the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy and Mines, and the National University of Laos, as well as representatives from Switzerland and the Centre for Development and Environment.

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