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Laos–U.S. International and ASEAN Integration



The project promotes transparent economic governance, inclusive growth and competitive markets. Pictured above, a Lao woman sells her produce.

Photo credit: Mark Walter, USAID LUNA II

The United States Agency for International Development Laos–U.S. International and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Integration (USAID LUNA II) is a four-year, \$9 million activity that is helping Laos to further integrate into the global economy by developing and implementing sound, modern, transparent and inclusive economic policies and regulations. Currently, natural resource extraction has fueled 7.5 percent average GDP growth over the past 10 years. However, per capita income remains low at about \$1,460 and poverty levels are among the highest in Southeast Asia.

Integration within the global economy will help generate sustainable trade and investment, and create the conditions for improved access to economic opportunities and higher incomes for both men and women from all areas of Lao society. Higher incomes are an essential piece of Laos' ultimate goal of achieving middle-income country status by 2020.

INTEGRATING LAOS INTO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The project helps the country to meet World Trade Organization (WTO) accession commitments, implement requirements for establishing the ASEAN Economic Community and continue to meet requirements of the U.S.-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement. The project also provides assistance to help implement reforms that encourage investments that create jobs such as the Law on Electronic Transactions, which will enable electronic commerce and e-government activities and other legal reforms that bring legislation in Laos in compliance with WTO and international best practice.

The project works to improve the economic conditions of women, rural citizens and ethnic minorities by raising awareness through workshops, seminars and media coverage of how trade and investment can lead to increased job opportunities and how these communities can participate more actively in the policy-making process. To encourage broad and inclusive growth, the project collaborates with national, provincial and local governmental institutions; business groups and associations; research institutions and non-governmental organizations.

IMPROVING ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

USAID enhances economic governance in Laos through promotion of more effective and transparent policies. The project works closely with the Ministry of Justice to further develop its electronic gazette – a tool for citizens and businesses to comment on new laws. It is also promoting the Law on Making Legislation to ensure that legislation is developed through a participatory and constructive process in which the private sector and various interest groups are able to comment on and influence draft laws that will affect them.

INCREASING TRADE AND INVESTMENT

By helping Laos to implement rules-based trading commitments embodied by trade agreements, legal transparency is enhanced, risks to businesses lowered and predictability increased. These are important factors for increasing trade and investment. Examples include helping to create a sound legal framework for intellectual property protection and working with the Supreme People's Court and Customs to enforce intellectual property protection. Such efforts will help investors feel more secure about their trademarks and more confident that their intellectual property will be better protected within Laos.

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