

## World Food Day and International Day and National Week for the Eradication of Poverty

### Seminar on

**CHANGE THE FUTURE OF MIGRATION. INVEST IN FOOD SECURITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.**

Monday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Organized by

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the United Nations in Lao PDR



In his opening remarks, H.E Dr Phouang Parisak Pravongviengkham, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Chair of the Seminar, stated that his sector had focused on improvement in rural livelihoods for national poverty reduction under the 8<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan. The sector plan included the promotion of commodity production, facilitation of market engagement, production based on domestic and international demand, and support to clean, green and sustainable agriculture. As a result, this sector plays a significant part in national social-economic development, which represents 24% of GDP and has an annual growth rate of 2.8-3.3%. However, agricultural production in Lao PDR still lacks stability. It is still small-scale, dependant on nature, and it makes inefficient use of local strengths and potentials. Also, coordination and communication between the various relevant stakeholders in production, processing and markets does not function smoothly. Furthermore, climate change and natural disasters are enormous challenges impacting agricultural production in ever higher levels. A major concern remained the low household economic status and low incomes of Lao farmers, and this poverty was driving rural migration of people seeing employment and better livelihoods. In this regard, he emphasized that the Government of Lao PDR wishes to make migration safe, orderly and regular, and ensure that it contributes to economic growth and improves food security and rural livelihoods, so advancing Lao PDR's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He clarified that the Government believes that proper migration could be ensured through national policy to promote investment in the rural domain and to develop innovative agriculture. This will create business opportunities and jobs especially for youth so that they remain in rural communities, and have more resilient livelihoods. Such investments in rural development will lead to food security and better social protection with access to natural resources while protecting from dramatic climate change. Facilitation of both national and international multi-stakeholder collaboration is necessary to prepare for future migration in Lao PDR and utilize properly migration in rural poverty eradication. He closed by stating that the seminar was a crucial platform for exchange experiences and lessons learned in investing in rural development to ensure food security and to improve rural livelihood by making sure that migration contributes to economic growth.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator and Co-Chair of the Seminar, noted that agriculture remains the basis for the livelihoods of nearly three quarters of the people of Lao PDR, especially including the poorest and those most left behind. It will therefore be crucial to make agriculture more profitable, to strengthen rural livelihoods, and to create the conditions for people to remain in their rural communities. Addressing the many structural reasons which make people move, such as poverty, food insecurity and disasters will help make migration be more safe, orderly and regular, with people moving as a matter of choice, and not out of desperation. The UN agencies addressing the nexus between food security and migration are working with the Government, development partners and local communities to collect data to better understand the main drivers of migration and enable evidence-based policy making to enhance the development potential of migration, and to support various aspects of capacity development at central and local levels. She closed by commenting that the seminar will provide important policy recommendations to the Round Table Implementation Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November in Pakse.

Mr. Chit Thavisay, Director General, Department of Rural Development and Cooperatives in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and panelist, observed key aspects of migration in relation to agriculture and rural development. He emphasized that people are migrating away from rural areas mainly due to poverty, low incomes, poor social services and infrastructure, disasters, and resettlement programmes under major development/construction projects. He stated that it was clear that domestic migration is not just rural to urban but also from one rural area to another. He noted that people do not inform the authorities when they move so they are not registered in their new location. This means that migration is unregulated, and post-migration needs such as adequate living conditions are not addressed. He noted that there is also considerable seasonal migration related to agriculture. He stated that the Government is bringing forward a new Law on “Settlement Stabilization” which also addresses migration, and he clarified that the use of terminology is very important. He indicated that the term “resettlement” is not appropriate and has caused misperceptions amongst the Development Partners. The stabilization includes merger of smaller communities into larger villages, and proportional allocation of land resources including areas for shifting cultivation. He stated that Government resettlement programmes generally improve the livelihoods of local people significantly by modernizing agriculture production, as well as managing and utilizing natural resources more effectively. Challenges remain in some resettlement areas including the scarcity of farm land and of good employment options.

Mr. Khonesy Mahavong, Deputy Director General, Department of Skills Development and Employment in the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and panelist, made observations on investments in skills for human development. He noted that the Labour Law of Lao PDR addressed the human capital needs which are critical for all levels of development, and endorsed the point raised by Mr. Thavisay about the need for appropriate registration of migrant workers inside and outside of Lao PDR. The 2025 strategy for the sector did not project the size of the labour force and did not define clearly enough the types of employment and skills required. But statistics show that the labour force in agricultural is declining and in industry is increasing, with the total work force comprising 660,000 unskilled workers in a total work force of around 840,000 unable to meet market demands. He informed that the Ministry would be addressing the ways to raising awareness of the Law, working to coordinate supply and demand in the labour market through better access to information, and paying special attention to skills development.

Participants then watched a short video on “Youth in Agriculture”<sup>1</sup> recently launched by the LURAS (Lao Upland Rural Advisory Services) project, which was relevant to the topic of the Seminar. The

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<sup>1</sup> Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd4Fvj-HWtM&feature=youtu.be>

film presented many short statements from young Lao people on the agriculture sector as an area for future employment, and summarized the positive and negative aspects of the topic.

Dr. Nguyen Do Anh Tuan, Director General of the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD) of Vietnam and panelist, spoke about the experiences on migration in the agriculture and rural development sector in Vietnam. He noted that 60% of migrants in 2014 originated in rural areas but half of them moved to other rural areas and half to the cities, while 12% moved from cities to rural areas. Most migrants are in the age range 15-30 years old, and about 65% of migrants are single (unmarried). The main motivations for migrating are looking for work (40%) and seeking education (37%). It has been shown that the most common use of remittances is for purchasing food and consumables. To address these issues, the Government of Vietnam is seeking to improve investment opportunities in rural areas, both farm and non-farm, and it is improving infrastructure development and social services. With regard to livelihood opportunities, the aim is to upgrade skills and improve vocational training, experiential learning, and formation of other skills to prepare people for nonfarm jobs. To address the challenges arising from lack of household registrations for migrants in terms of access to social services (e.g. schools), the Government is examining the removal of policy restrictions to rural-urban migration.

Ms. Frederica Meijer, UNFPA Country Representative to Lao PDR and panelist, made observations on the different faces of migration in Lao PDR. She stated that migration continues to increase in scope, complexity and impact and that demographic transition, economic growth and the recent financial crisis are reshaping the face of migration. She noted that the Government is developing a revised Population and Development Policy and a Youth Policy, but that reliable data is needed on people's movements for finalising these policies. Migration data contribute to informed debates on immigration and emigration policies, and form a partial basis for formulating, implementing and evaluating migration. She observed that 55.2% of the population of Lao PDR is below the age of 25 years, and the average age of the female migrants is 16.5 years whereas the average age for males is 21. She noted that 63% of the girls migrate against 14 % of the boys, and that young women from resettled villages account for a high proportion. She recommended that the Government would generate a high return on investments with a focus on schooling, vocational training and building health, social and economic assets for the younger age group, with a special focus on young girls. For growing numbers of young people, migration represents the only viable strategy to find gainful employment and that economic migration can also yield significant benefits to countries and to migrants themselves.

Mr. Jonathan Martens, Senior Regional Migrant Assistance Specialist of the International Organization for Migration and panelist, spoke about migration dynamics globally and in Lao PDR. He observed that migration is a "megatrend" with 1 billion people on the move, being more than at any other time in recorded history. Some 250 million are international migrants and 760 million are internal migrants, with 95 million people in Asia lived outside their country of origin in 2013, and there being 59 million migrants in the region in the same year. For the first time, more than 50% of the world's population live in urban areas, and at a global level around 50% of migrants are women. He noted that SDG 10 includes the facilitation of orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. In Lao PDR, more than one-third of all internal migrants live in Vientiane Capital, representing 15% of the population more than 10 years of age (National Public Housing Census, 2016). Along with previous speakers, he noted that rural people are migrating to the cities primarily due to poverty, but also due to limited access to education and training, limited access to capital and assets, low business and technical skills, limited bargaining and decision-making power, and the low pay of most jobs which are in informal sectors. An estimated 100,000 Lao youth enter the workforce each year, but only roughly 70% find work within the country, and too few of those can be absorbed

by the agricultural sector. Labour migration is one of the key livelihood strategies in Lao PDR, with around 60% of migrants' remittances going to the 1.5 million lowest income people in rural areas. In fact, remittances make up 50% of the income of Lao families who live below the poverty line. He closed by stating the way forward is to understand and address the drivers of migration, while recognizing migration as a resilience strategy.

Two further panellists, Mr. Duangchay Viengvilay, Director of Champhone District Administrative Office and Head of Village Cluster, and Mr. Kia Ousitthideth, President of the Golden Dolphin Water Factory, described the investment programme that had been put into place as part of a poverty reduction programme in the villages of Khampanea and Pakuay, in Champhone District, Savannakhet Province. The panellists described the various types of assistance and support had been provided to develop small businesses, provide equipment, other resources and training to those communities, in a major coordinated programme to generate employment and improve incomes at household level.

Following the presentations, participants and panellists then intervened with observations during the discussion session. It was noted that the evidence base on migration is weak, in particular a lack of sex-disaggregated data, and the requirements for skilled labour in different sectors are unclear. Agricultural productivity is too low to provide decent incomes at household level, which is why people are seeking jobs elsewhere, and the small number of SMEs in rural areas will only increase if the conditions for developing businesses are boosted to encourage investment. At the same time, the costs of commercialization are high with machinery and raw materials having to be imported, which impacts the competitiveness of Lao agro-industries. It was noted that the demand for skilled labour is significantly higher than the availability, and that rural to urban migration is in some degree inevitable. The Chair noted that the agriculture sector in Lao PDR could not be treated in isolation and it had to grow in the context of the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The FAO Representative to Lao PDR, Dr. Stephen Rudgard, provided a summary of the main points arising, and Ms. Kaarina Immonen provided closing comments, which are summarized below.

### **Conclusions**

**We need to address both forced displacement due to natural disasters, but also the root causes of movements of people due to hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change.**

- Generating data and evidence on migration types and patterns, the main drivers of migration, its impact and opportunities so that internal and international migration are better understood.
- Introducing suitable regulation and incentives that take advantage of the positive effects of migration, while mitigating the risks, so that agriculture is more resilient to climate and market variabilities.
- Monitoring food security and markets, and establishing early warning systems to predict extreme weather events such as flood and drought, and facilitating access to aid, food and water as necessary.

**We need to invest more in rural development through innovative policies that create business opportunities and jobs for young people that are not only agriculture-based.**

- Disseminating sound approaches to seasonal agricultural migration.
- Creating an attractive future in agriculture for the rural labour force, especially youth, by fostering opportunities for rural investment, employment, and access to financial services.
- Directly helping vulnerable communities to boost incomes through provision of technical knowledge and skills development, agricultural inputs/services, infrastructure rehabilitation.

**We can reach the SDGs only with the inclusion of all people, including migrants.**

- Facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships at all levels to leverage expertise and resources that can meet immediate and long-term needs of migrants, as well as origin and host communities, and harness their potential for development