



**EC/FAO Food Security Programme -  
Phase II  
'Food Security Information for Action'**

## Programme Workplan for Lao PDR

<b>Donor:</b>	European Commission
<b>Implementing Agency:</b>	FAO
<b>Proposed Funding:</b>	€ 216,111 \$ 289,629 (Exchange rate US\$ / EURO = 1.34)
<b>Duration:</b>	3 years
<b>Starting date:</b>	1 April 2005

*The activities selected under the EC/FAO Food Security Programme for Lao PDR were identified during a mission in November 2005 through discussions with the national institutions and partner organizations concerned with food security and nutrition, FAO staff in the country and the EC Country Delegation. These activities will contribute to producing information for better interventions and policy and programme formulation, consistent with the focus of the "Food Security Information for Action" Programme under Phase II. The Programme will closely coordinate with other initiatives aimed at strengthening food security information in Lao PDR, in particular with the Japan-funded Asia FIVIMS Project (GCP/RAS/170/JPN) implemented by FAO and WFP/VAM which has been compiling data and maps on food insecurity and vulnerability since the late 1990s. Discussions are on-going with the Thai Government to establish a collaboration for the implementation of the activities, in coordination with the EC delegations in Lao PDR and Bangkok.*

*The activities selected for Lao PDR are the following:*

- 1. Assistance to the national institutions concerned with nutrition, together with UNICEF and WHO, for the development of a strategic framework for the formulation and implementation of all activities related to nutrition in the country. The framework will highlight priorities, practical actions to be taken and targets to be met.*
- 2. Introduction and implementation of a Crop Yield Forecasting System; the system will improve timeliness and accuracy of crop yield forecasts and support appropriate action to avoid hunger and threats to livelihoods.*
- 3. Capacity-building in the analysis of food consumption data from the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS III), including the production of reliable statistics on food insecurity for measuring progress in achieving targets established under the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) and international initiatives .*

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## Background

Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of the twenty countries selected under the EC/FAO Food Security Programme Phase II. It falls under the Group I Category, i.e. Chronically Food Insecure Countries. The country did not receive previous assistance in Phase I of the Programme. The Asia FIVIMS Project (GCP/RAS/170/JPN)<sup>1</sup> is providing capacity building support to the recently established national FIVIMS Secretariat in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) to develop a national FIVIMS, i.e. a network of information systems that gather and analyze data relevant for measuring and monitoring food insecurity and vulnerability. The establishment of FIVIMS at the global, national and sub-national levels is a recommendation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action (WFS, Rome, November 1996) in efforts to achieve Summit goals of reducing undernutrition and achieving food security for all.

The activities selected for Programme support have been identified during a mission in November 2005<sup>2</sup>, carried out together with the national institutions and partner organizations concerned with food security and nutrition, FAO staff in the country and the EC Country Delegation. This mission built on the findings of a previous mission in June 2005<sup>3</sup>. During the June 2005 mission, feedback was obtained from key stakeholders on the country priorities, on-going initiatives regarding food security information and the potential value-added of proposed activities under the EC/FAO Programme. This occurred during the FIVIMS Inception and Sensitization Workshop (Vientiane, 16-17 June 2005)<sup>4</sup>. FAO divisions participating in the Programme were also involved in the selection process before and after the mission. The activities selected will support the use of information for more effective interventions and policy and programme formulation, adding value for the country in terms of "Information for Action", in line with the focus of the programme during the second phase.

## Problems to Be Addressed

Lao PDR is one of the poorest and least developed countries of South East Asia with an estimated GDP per capita of USD 390 in 2004. Economic development depends to a large extent on rural development and agriculture is the most important sector of the economy, accounting for half of GDP (including forestry and fishing) and employing 80% of the labour force.

Agriculture is dominated by subsistence farming. The most important crop is rice (78% of land under cultivation), 75% of which is rainfed. Other major crops are maize, coffee, sugarcane, tobacco and peanuts. Main constraints to agriculture development are degradation of forest resources, unsustainable cropping practices, lack of access to credit and markets, problems associated with land rights, low level of education, weak communication infrastructure and agricultural services. Livestock is still very under-developed with 95 percent of national livestock herd and over 85 percent of outputs produced by smallholders. However, the poultry sector is beginning to develop in spite of an outbreak of Avian Influenza in 2004 that impacted heavily on the small commercial poultry industry.

Food insecurity remains widespread in spite of significant improvements in the last decade. According to FAO, undernourishment concerned 22% of the population in 2000-2002 (against 29% in 1990-1992). Prevalence of underweight, stunting and wasting among children under 5 were estimated at about 40%, 41% and 15% respectively in 2000. Chronic poverty is a major determinant of food insecurity. According to the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS III), 30% of the population was estimated to live below the national poverty line in 2002/2003 (compared with 45% in 1992/93).

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<sup>1</sup> FIVIMS is an interagency initiative which promotes good practices in building information and mapping systems on food insecurity and vulnerability. The acronym stands for Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems.

<sup>2</sup> See Mission Report of Françoise Trine to Lao PDR, 12-26 November 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See Mission Report of Françoise Trine to Lao PDR, 12-19 June 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The workshop was jointly organized by the MAF and the Asia FIVIMS Project.

Food security at household level is strongly associated with own food production, in particular rice, which to a large extent determines food access within the household, as a large share of the food consumed is self-produced and purchases on markets are constrained by low purchasing power. Rural off-farm employment opportunities are limited. Food prices on rural markets are influenced by highly variable agricultural production and limited access to villages during the rainy season, when half of the villages are not accessible by road. Food insecurity is predominantly seasonal: one third of the Lao population experience rice deficit for four months in a normal year. Droughts and floods are frequent and have recently led to the launching of emergency operations with food aid distributions. There are important differences across regions and social groups. The central and northern parts of the country are richer than the South. There is a high prevalence of food insecurity among rural population living in mountainous areas, where ethnic minority groups are concentrated.

Government institutions have a low capacity to collect, manage and analyse data and information to support food security planning processes. There is both insufficient capacity to analyse data on key indicators and lack of awareness of the relevance of some of these indicators to food insecurity and poverty. Food consumption data were collected during the LECS III but not analysed and key indicators, e.g. indicators related to dietary energy supply and undernourishment, are not available. A more comprehensive exploitation of this data will allow for better assessment and monitoring of food insecurity, especially in identifying and analyzing characteristics of the most food insecure groups. It will provide inputs for the improved targeting of food policies, programmes and interventions, including assessing the impact of specific policies and measuring progress towards achieving the targets set for reducing food insecurity and poverty. For similar reasons, agro-meteorological data are collected but not utilized for crop yield forecasting and production estimates. Based on stakeholders' feedback, regular crop forecasts during the agricultural campaign would be key information for early warning of emerging food crises, allowing timely action to be taken to avoid hunger and the negative impact of crop failures on livelihoods.

Crucial data for decision-making and planning processes is missing in many sectors of the economy. Improving data quality is particularly important for the agricultural sector being given its predominant role in the economy of the country (agriculture contributes 47% of GDP) and the fact that the majority of vulnerable households rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. Current statistics are highly unreliable as they are not based on objective measurement but driven by concerns about reaching production targets established under the National Socio-Economic Development Plans.

Although malnutrition rates are amongst the highest in the South East Asia Region, there is limited awareness of stakeholders of the importance of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition for supporting the two main objectives of government policies for the socio-economic development of the country: promotion of economic growth and reduction of poverty. Many benefits would be derived from a better coordination of partners and common focus on a few key priorities identified together.

## **Ongoing Activities**

The key policy reference document for food security in Lao PDR is the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES). The NGPES identifies food security as a priority under the Poverty-focused Agricultural Development Plan and stresses the need to consider all dimensions of food security, not only issues related to food availability, but also food insecurity and vulnerability at the household level (access and utilisation). The NGPES recognises that there is a need to balance economic growth, socio-economic development and environment conservation for the development of the country. The government is finalizing the National Socio-Economic Plan (NSEDP) for 2006-2010. For the first time, the NSEDP is expected to take into account food security, as a cross-sectoral priority. The NSEDP traditionally focuses on education and health.

There has been limited support from FAO to food security information systems in Lao PDR. The Asia FIVIMS Project recently started providing assistance after the FIVIMS Inception and Sensitization Workshop in June 2005. Activities focus on: (i) building the capacity of the FIVIMS Secretariat, the Focal Point Committee and the Core Analyst Group, who carries out the analytical work, for developing a national FIVIMS. The Focal Points Committee is made up of experts representing different sectors and ministries (agriculture, health, nutrition, statistics. etc.), ensuring the

multisectorality of the analyses; (ii) defining FIVIMS operational framework and methods; and (iii) developing collaboration with MDG and Country Indicator Database Group.

The Theme Group on Food Security has been revitalized with the support of the FAO Representation in 2004 to: (i) back up the government's efforts in achieving its own goals in addition to the hunger and poverty related goals of MDGs; and (ii) provide follow-up to the WFS. Membership includes representatives from relevant ministries, UN agencies, donors, civil society and international NGOs. The Theme Group represents an important entry point for improving the dialogue among and between partner organisations and national institutions. Two working groups have been established under the UN Theme group: (i) the Working Group on Nutrition and Food Security which has the overall objective of supporting and strengthening food and nutrition activities in Lao PDR to reduce malnutrition; and (ii) the Working Group on Food Security Information.

FAO supports the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) with resources from Japan. In line with Government policy, the project is initially focusing on rain fed rice production and agricultural diversification in upland food insecure areas on six sites in four provinces in the northern and middle parts of the country (i.e. Provinces of Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, Vientiane and Bolikhamxay). Additional support allowed for the expansion of activities to two additional sites in the South (Champassack Province). Field activities currently include the implementation of farmer field schools for crops and livestock as well as survey and design work for improving small-scale irrigation.

Other organizations have been active in strengthening food security information. WFP has been implementing a VAM since the late 1990s, compiling data and maps on food insecurity and vulnerability, and will be a key partner of the EC/FAO Programme. WFP and SIDA have trained National Statistics Centre (NSC) staff.

## **Objectives of the EC/FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme in Lao PDR**

The main objective of the Programme in Lao PDR is to strengthen the capacity of national institutions at the central and decentralized levels in collecting, managing, analyzing and disseminating food security information in selected areas with important value added for food security planning through:

- Raising awareness of the Government of the importance of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition and providing support to key national institutions for formulating a National Nutrition Strategy, in consultation with all main stakeholders (Activity 1).
- Developing a crop yield forecasting capacity, using environmental monitoring tools and data, improving the quality and timeliness of responses to food crises and the quality of rice production estimates (Activity 2).
- Strengthening the capacity of national institutions, in particular the National Statistics Center (NSC), in analyzing food consumption data and producing indicators for the assessment and monitoring of progress towards national and international targets (Activity 3).

## **Expected Outcomes at the End of the Programme**

The following outcomes are expected to be achieved at the end of Phase II:

- National decision makers are aware of the importance of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition for achieving the country's development objectives. The national nutrition strategy is endorsed by Government and progressively incorporated into Government's policies. (Logical framework outputs 1.B.1, 2.A.1, 2.B.1, 2.D.5, 3.A.1 and 3.C.1, see Table 1).
- Capacity within the MAF to produce crop yield forecasts is developed. Crop yield forecasts will improve planning emergency interventions and, providing the calibration is made with crop cuttings (being carried out under a regional project funded by

Japan), the quality of crop yield estimates. Main outputs include two national trained agro-meteorology specialists and periodic bulletins targeted to appropriate ministries and interested partner organizations. Sharing of results with neighbouring countries is expected to progressively improve forecasts and methodologies in the two countries covered by the Programme and, in the long term, in other countries of the region as well. (Logical framework outputs 1.A.1, 1.B.1, 1.B.2, 2.B.1 and 3.C.1).

- Strengthened capacity to identify vulnerable groups and distribution of food insecurity through analysis of food consumption data at the sub national level. Outputs will include a report summarizing the findings of the analysis of LECS III data, and a series of tables with detailed results (Logical framework outputs 1.B.1, 1.B.4, 3.A.1).

## Results, Activities and Inputs

The activities envisaged in the present workplan are consistent with the overall logical framework defined in the EC-FAO Food Security Overall Programme Document. The activities proposed for Lao PDR are the following:

### 1. Preparation of a National Nutrition Strategy, building on the previous National Plan of Action on Nutrition

FAO will provide assistance to the national institutions concerned with nutrition, together with UNICEF and WHO, for the development of a strategic framework for the formulation and implementation of all activities related to nutrition in the country. It will highlight priorities, practical actions to be taken and targets to be met. Nutrition is an important priority for the country and there is momentum for this activity, after the successful study tour to Vietnam by decision-makers and technical staff in the Ministry of Health as well as on-going support from UN agencies and other stakeholders. The objective of the tour was to learn from Vietnam's experience in reducing malnutrition and formulating their National Nutrition Strategy (2001-2010). Budget expenditures will be shared between the three UN organisations and their respective support will be integrated into a common workplan. FAO's specific role will be to ensure that the strategy is multi-sectoral and reflects the importance of agriculture and food-based approaches, versus health-based approaches, building on the home gardening project implemented by FAO and SPFS activities. An advocacy workshop will be organized for raising awareness of the main stakeholders. Three dissemination workshops will be organized in Vientiane (with Government, donors, UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs) and in the North and the South (with Governors and provincial staff in Health, Agriculture, Education, etc.) to present and discuss the nutrition strategy and its implementation. The activity will be implemented by the Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division of FAO, possibly in partnership with the Thai Government, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.

Inputs:

- (i) International expertise to contribute to the drafting of the strategy and the development of the materials for the advocacy and dissemination workshops;
- (ii) Financial resources for the organisation and participation in the advocacy and dissemination workshops, publishing materials for distribution during the dissemination workshops and travel.

Outputs:

- (iii) National Nutrition Strategy published and disseminated widely among key national and international decision-makers;
- (iv) Materials (posters, leaflets) related to the National Nutrition Strategy prepared and distributed during the dissemination workshops.

### 2. Introduction and implementation of a Crop Yield Forecasting System

FAO will provide technical assistance for developing capacity within the MAF in establishing a system for crop yield forecasting. This system will improve the timeliness and the accuracy of crop yield forecasts. FAO will assist agro-meteorologists in customizing existing forecasting software using historic and current agronomic, meteorological and satellite data. The activity will be implemented by the Information Center of the MAF (IC). The latter is an appropriate setting as the Center has a coordinating role within the MAF. A working group will be created, probably chaired by the IC and the Department of Agriculture. Membership will include all the units of the MAF that will contribute data, including the Department of Planning, the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service (NAFES) and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI).

This activity will increase the capacity of national organizations to more efficiently and effectively collate and analyze agro-meteorological data and forecast crop production of the most important staple, starting at the time of planting. Two agro-meteorology professionals will be trained and supervised in the customization and use of the system to produce yield forecasts for rice, during a three month stay in Rome working with the Research, Extension and Training Division of FAO (SDRN). The activity will promote collaboration across the MAF, between food security information analysts and food security information producers. Outputs will include regular and timely reports of forecast tables and maps for distribution through appropriate lines of communication for use by decision-makers and agricultural/food security planners. A manual with national guidelines for conducting the forecasting will be produced.

Discussions are taking place with the Thai Government for collaborating on the implementation of this activity. The Center for Agricultural Information (CAI) of the Ministry of Agriculture in Thailand has significant expertise in crop forecasting that could be relied upon for the implementation of the CMFS. CAI privileged relationships with neighboring countries in the context of two projects would be an asset for strengthening networking and partnership with neighboring countries on crop forecasting. The two projects are: (i) the Asian Food Security Information System (AFSIS) Project (funded bilaterally by Japan); and (ii) Project GCP/RAS/184/JPN on "Strengthening regional data exchange system in food and agriculture in Asia and Pacific countries", implemented by FAO with financial support from Japan.

Inputs:

- (i) International and national expertise to customize and implement the forecasting system;
- (ii) Financial resources for data collection, development of reference materials, organization of workshops and travel.

Outputs:

- (i) The Crop Yield Forecasting System (CYFS) customized with national data to produce yield forecasts for rice;
- (ii) Two agro-meteorology professionals trained in customizing and using the CYFS;
- (iii) Regular and timely reports of forecast tables and maps for distribution;
- (iv) Manual with guidelines for producing forecasts.

### **3. Capacity-building in the analysis of food consumption data from the LECS III**

FAO Statistics Division will provide technical assistance for building statistical capacity in the analysis of existing food data collected from the LECS III. The objective is twofold: (i) improve the analytical capacity of national institutions responsible for assessing and monitoring food insecurity, in particular the NSC; and (ii) produce reliable statistics on food insecurity at the national and sub-national levels for measuring progress towards the achievement of the targets established under the country policy reference framework, the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), and international initiatives (in particular the World Food Summit and the Millennium Development Goals), including under-nourishment estimates (Millennium Development Indicator Number 5). A comprehensive exploitation of this data will allow for

improved assessment and monitoring of food insecurity, especially with regards to identifying and analyzing the conditions of the most vulnerable groups. It will provide inputs for better targeting food policies and interventions, assessing the impact of specific policies and measuring progress towards achievements of targets set for reducing food insecurity and poverty.

A user/producer working group will be established from the beginning of the activity to ensure that the results of the analysis match users' needs. A final national workshop will be organized at the end of the activity to validate and widely disseminate the results of the analysis. Support will be provided by the FAO Statistics Division.

Inputs:

- (i) International expertise to assist in preparing data files with LECS III data, conducting a two-week in-country on-the-job training and assisting in writing the report and disseminating the results to target users during a national workshop;
- (ii) Financial support to organize and conduct the training and organize the national workshop.

Outputs:

- (i) About 10 staff in NSC trained in processing and producing food consumption statistics and a similar number of staff from key food security institutions in interpreting and using food consumption statistics for food insecurity assessment;
- (ii) Updated statistics on food insecurity at national and sub-national levels for identification of food insecure population groups made widely available to a large number of users;
- (iii) A national nutrient conversion table;
- (iv) A technical report on "Food Security: Food Deprivation and Determining Factors", prepared by staff from NSC and key food security institutions and validated by main stakeholders during a national workshop.

The Programme will contribute to the funding of a UN Volunteer position on a part time basis for the duration of the Programme for implementing the activities. The Volunteer will have a degree in Agricultural Sciences (food, nutrition, agricultural development), Economics, Socio-Economics or Agricultural Economics and have previous experience in food security planning. Her/his specific tasks, apart from liaising with the various partners and projects involved and backstopping the implementation of the activities in the country, will include:

- (i) Identify a range of on-going activities, programmes, interventions that could benefit from the information which will be generated by the Programme under the three selected activities for Lao PDR;
- (ii) Assist the FAO divisions responsible for implementing each of these activities in designing their respective activity in such a way that they optimize the use and impact of the information produced on on-going initiatives;
- (iii) Document the results in terms of the impact of the information produced on action.

Table 1 below shows how the above areas of intervention relate to the Programme's logical framework:

Specific Global Objectives	Results	Outputs	Areas of Intervention
1 Improve availability and quality of relevant food security information	A - Collection of food insecurity and vulnerability data and information is improved or strengthened	1.A.1 - Food insecurity and vulnerability data and information are improved	2
		1.A.2 - Food insecurity and vulnerability data and information management are strengthened	
	B - Analysis of food insecurity and vulnerability data and information is strengthened	1.B.1 - National and regional capacity to analyze food insecurity and vulnerability data is strengthened	1,2,3
		1.B.2 - Capacity of using environmental monitoring tools and data for food security assessment are strengthened	2
		1.B.3 - GIEWS Workstation is established at global and national levels and capacity in its use is strengthened	
		1.B.4 - National and regional capacity for food security assessment is reinforced	3
2 - Reinforcing capacity in formulating food security policies, strategies and programming based on food insecurity and vulnerability information	A - National and local capacity to produce and use information for policy making are reviewed and updated	2.A.1 - Gaps in national and local capacity to produce and use information for policy making are identified	1
	B - National and local capacity to produce multi-sector food security information is strengthened	2.B.1 - Response mechanisms to crises and food security policy formation are improved	1,2
		2.B.2 - National institutional structures and systems are reviewed	
	C – Dissemination of food insecurity and vulnerability data and information is strengthened	2.C.1 - Integrated food insecurity and vulnerability data and information dissemination systems are strengthened	
	D - Capacity to formulate appropriate food security policies in different contexts using adequate information is increased	2.D.1 - Methodological approaches for integrated use for household, food insecurity and vulnerability data are strengthened	
		2.D.2 - Guidelines to switch from rehabilitation to development using appropriate data and information are prepared	
		2.D.3 - Awareness to embody gender aspects in policies using gender disaggregated information is increased	
		2.D.4 - Capacity to formulate food security and rural development policies in countries with natural resources under pressure is increased	
		2.D.5 - Support to selected countries in preparing strategies and operational plans for food security agricultural and rural development is provided	1

3 - Raise awareness of governments, local actors and international community, on impact of food insecurity & poverty	A - Causes of food insecurity and vulnerability are better understood	3.A.1 - National context analysis of food insecurity and vulnerability are better understood	1,3
	B - Good practices in food security, poverty and rural development, institution building and networking are identified, analysed and disseminated	3.B.1 - Good practices in food security, vulnerability, institution building and networking are identified, analyzed and disseminated at national level	
		3.B.2 - Good practices in food security, poverty and rural development are disseminated	
	C - Dialogue and exchange of experience within the international community are improved	3.C.1 - Dialogue and exchange of experience among international community are facilitated	1,2
3.C.2 - Improved information in qualitative and quantitative terms is provided to the GDPRD			

## Tentative Schedule

EC/FAO Food Security Programme – Workplan for Lao PDR												
Year	Year 2005			Year 2006				Year 2007				Year 2008
Quarter	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
1. Preparation of a National Nutrition Strategy												
2. Introduction and implementation of a Crop Yield Forecasting System												
3. Capacity-building in the analysis of food consumption data from the LECS III												