

**GOVERNMENT OF LAO PDR
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY**

&

**ASEAN FOOD SECURITY INFORMATION SYSTEM PROJECT
(AFSIS PROJECT)**

**NATIONAL SEMINAR
"FOOD SECURITY AND INFORMATION SYSTEM"
VIENTIANE CAPITAL, 6-7 JULY 2004**

Prepared by
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Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
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REPORT OF SEMINAR
On
"Food Security and Information System in Lao PDR"

INTRODUCTION

1. The Seminar on "Food Security and Information System in Lao PDR" was organized by Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, ASEAN Food Security Information System "AFSIS Project" and in collaboration with FAO Representative in Lao PDR. The seminar was financially supported by the ASEAN Food Security Information System "AFSIS Project", funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery of Japan. The main objective of the seminar was: to inform the participants of AFSIS and East Asian Emergency Rice Reserve (EAERR) in relation to food security in this region; to present current actions on food security and policies/ programs in Lao PDR; and more specifically identify relevant food security information needed relevant for food security policy formulation- and programs implementation, including improvement-on- existing food security information systems.-

2. Seminar attended by more than 75 participants representing the following organizations:
 - Permanent Secretary's Office, MAF
 - Department of Personnel, MAF
 - Department of Inspection, MAF
 - Department of Planning, MAF
 - Department of Agriculture, MAF
 - Department of Livestock and Fishery, MAF
 - Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, MAF
 - National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI)
 - National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Services (NAFES)
 - IRRI Project, National Agriculture & Forestry Research
 - Provincial Agriculture & Forestry Office of Vientiane Capital, Luangprabang, Oudomxay, Vientiane Province, Borikhamxay, Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane and Champasack Provinces.
 - Planning Department, State Planning Committee
 - Ministry of Commerce and Tourism.
 - Manager of ASEAN Food Security Information System Project (AFSIS Project) and its Staff in Bangkok, Thailand.
 - Manager of East Asian Emergency Rice Reserve Project (EAERR Project)
 - JICA Expert
 - International Organizations: JICA, FAO, World Food Program

- Representatives of the Delegation of the European Commission-Cooperation Program in Lao PDR and Bangkok
- Lao Swedish Upland Agriculture and Forestry Research Programme
- Non-Governmental Organizations: Action Contre La Faim (ACF), CARE International, Concern Worldwide.

The list of participants and representative appears as **Annex A1**

OPENING SESSION

3. During the Opening Ceremony preceding the seminar Mr. Anonth Khamhung, Director of Planning Department, MAF, on his welcome remarks, warmly welcomed all participants to the seminar and thanked them for their attendance. Furthermore he strongly believed- that a frank exchange of views would help strengthen the existing agricultural statistics systems. He expressed his appreciation to AFSIS Project and especially Mr. Montol Jeamchareon Project Manager for their valuable supports in setting up the seminar.
4. Mr. Montol Jeamchareon, Director of Agricultural Information Center, Office of Agricultural Economics, and Manager of AFSIS Project, pointed out that knowledge on how to tackle hunger and poverty with off-the shelf technologies to increase food and agricultural production were readily available. Yet what was-needed the most was- political commitment, particularly at national level. He also emphasized that the capacity building of statistical personnel and the information network system are the keys to accomplish the aims of the AFSIS Project.
5. H.E. Mr. SITAHENG RASPHONE, Vice-Minister for Agriculture and Forestry formally opened the Seminar and in his speech, he reminded that the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit (WFS) Plan of Action were adopted unanimously by Heads of States and Governments and their representatives of 185 countries and the European Community during the World Food Summit in Rome, 13-17 November 1996. Achieving food security has always been one of the most important policy objectives of the Government of Laos (GoL). The policy of the Government is to support Lao farmer livelihood, which includes the following objectives: (i) Achieving household food security, and (ii) channeling remaining land, capital and labor resource into diversified farming systems enterprise. He informed that the purpose of this seminar was to exchange views and to discuss the way of improving agriculture statistics including modalities and activities. The full text of his- opening speech appears as **Annex 2.**

Session 1: Action for Food Security and Poverty Alleviation in Lao PDR

6. Mr. Montol Jeamchareon, Director, Center for Agricultural Information, OAE, described briefly objectives and activities of the AFSIS Project. He also explained

- about the ASEAN Food Security Network System, AFSIS Web Design, and Data Format covering the network, hardware, AFSIS website and collaboration with other Projects to achieve food security in the Region. The full text of his presentation appears as **Annex 3**.
7. Mr. Anonth Khamhung, Director-General of Planning Department, MAF pointed out the Lao PDR Agricultural Sector Performance from 1976 to 2003. He also discussed - the National Strategy for future agricultural development related to food security and Poverty Alleviation in Lao PDR. The full text of his presentation outline appears as **Annex 4**.
 8. Dr. Mulyo Sidik, General Manager of East Asian Emergency Rice Reserve Project (EAERR Project) presented the importance of EAERR as realization of regional cooperation focusing on food security in this region. He further described EAERR's plan to conduct a project on poverty alleviation as implementation of their program in Lao PDR. Such an important project should be applauded and responded positively by Government of Lao PDR. In this respect, institutions responsible to cooperate with EAERR together with other organizations involved should be able to provide a conducive environment to make this project accountable and achieving its objectives successfully, as it could provide an avenue for strengthening household's food security in this country. The full text of presentation outline appears as **Annex 5**.
 9. Mr. Malcolm Duthie, Representative of World Food Programme, presented the World Food Programme Activities in Lao PDR and provided some useful insights into the nature of food insecurity in general and in Lao PDR specifically. He stressed the importance of getting district level or village level data in order to get a better picture of food insecurity in the country. The full text of presentation outline appears as **Annex 6**.
 10. Dr. Leena Kirjavainen, FAO Representative in Lao PDR reported on the FAO activities "Contributing to the eradication of food insecurity and rural poverty". Three activities were implemented, namely: (1) Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS); (2) Pilot project on Home Gardens for Improved Nutritional Well-being; and (3) the Theme Group on Food Security. The full text of presentation outline appears as **Annex 7**.
 11. Ms. Magali Boyce, Food Security Officer, Action Contre la Faim, explained about the Food Security Assessment and Surveillance System implemented by ACF in LuangNamtha. This was used as a tool to monitor food insecurity and based on the assessment suggest appropriate interventions to improve the food security. Her paper presented the methodology of that assessment (gathering data at macro and micro levels) and its main findings, particularly households coping mechanisms. Then it exposed the follow-up, implemented since then and its use for pertinent activities. Her presentation outline appears as **Annex 8**.
 12. Mr. Mel Jones, Senior Programme Officer, Rural Development from the European Commission in Lao PDR presented the EC's current support to Rural

Development and Food Security Activities in the country. EC provides assistance in the form of rural development and food security projects, most of the projects were implemented by NGOs. Since food security is a high priority for the EC, the EC policy for the next few years would be to; (i) support the establishment of FIVIMS Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System through FAO, (ii) to help government capacity to budget for and manage food security activities, and (iii) to enter into policy dialogue with the Government about food insecurity and village consolidation. Three million Euros are earmarked for Laos for food security activities in addition to the abovementioned activities. The full text of her presentation outline appears as **Annex 9**.

Comments and Conclusion:

- a) It was reminded that although food production was of much importance in improving food security, the production alone could not solve the problem of food insecure. Therefore, there was a need to also look into other areas in addition to production figures in the process of collecting and analyzing food security related data.
- b) The participants suggested that the field surveys should be conducted by well-equipped agencies in terms of infra-structure and manpower to ensure timeliness and accurate data collection. Surveyed areas should also be expanded to cover the lowest level in the local government structure.
- c) Since a rather high percentage of population depends much on fishery and forest products, it is worth noting that agencies concerned should place more emphasis on fishery and forest surveys, apart from the normal surveys on rice and other main crops.
- d) Recognizing that much work and activities had- been conducted on the development of methodology, system for data and information as well as assessment systems for food insecurity and poverty, there was a need to compile all those findings and made them more accessible to all organizations. In this respect FAO and other international donor organizations might provide support and assistance.
- e) The seminar noted that the project on poverty alleviation to be carried out by EAERR, as an implementation of its program activity in Lao PDR should be responded to positively by government institutions and relevant international agencies. The program was- in line with Lao PDR Government plan to eradicate poverty and strengthen food security of the people.

Session 2: How to Find and Provide Information Required for Food Security Policy and Program Implementation in Lao PDR

13. In Second Session of the seminar, Mr. Savanh Hanephom, Director of Statistics Division, Department of Planning, MAF presented his paper on “Food Security Data Collection System: Present Status and Problems”. He revealed problems and constraints encountered future development of agricultural statistics. He further

- explained that MAF needed improved statistics and information for the Ministry's policy formulation and strategic planning. His paper appears as **Annex 10**.
14. Mr. Sengmany , Division Head of National Statistics Center discussed "Agricultural Statistics and Information System in Lao PDR, with Major Emphasis on Food Supply and Demand Data". He explained about the national statistics system, the development policy and programs by the NSC, as well as expectation to implementation of Legal status of NSC (August, 2003), signed by the Prime Minister as "Decree on Organization and Activities of National Statistics System. The decree stipulated structure of the national system (Article 4), included both NSC and "line ministries" as constituting national statistics system. Some major principles were stipulated: people, businesses, groups and government agencies had- responsibility to report necessary information to these statistical surveys; individual data had to be confidential, etc. and poverty line is determined on the basis of LECS data. Paper appears- as **Annex 11**.
 15. Mr. Okeo Souphanthone, Deputy Director of Statistics Division, Department of Planning of MAF, in his presentation "Information Requirement for Food Security Policy and Program Implementation in Lao PDR", informed the seminar about the agricultural policy of the Ministry and stressed the necessity of new data requirements for policy planning and implementation. His presentation appears in **Annex 12**.
 16. Mr. Khamson SYSANHOUTH, Deputy Director of Administration & Personnel, Planning Department, presented "The Strategy and Action Plan for Information Management System". He explained that the system was- intended to store and transmitted natural resources related data, such as statistics, satellite imagery, other geographical information, etc. His presentation paper appears as **Annex 13**.
 17. Mr. Kimihiko Eura, Expert on Statistics, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, explained about "FAO Activities Concerning Food Security Information". He gave accounts of three major projects concerning food security by FAO: (i) "Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries", (ii) "Food and Agricultural Market Projection Model Development", and (iii) "Asia Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (Asia FIVIMS)". FAO contributes to regional food security through these projects. He underlined the importance of close cooperation among AFSIS, JICA Projects and FAO Projects for improvement of data and information in Lao PDR and the whole region as well. His presentation appears as **Annex 14**.
 18. Mrs. Chansy, Official Staff of the Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, Internal Trade Department explained about the role of the Ministry concerning marketing. The primary objectives were to expand, restructure and set up markets in remote and rural areas; organize domestic exhibition of products; promote Lao products domestically and internationally.

19. Representatives from Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) of Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Vientiane (Capital), Vientiane Province, Borikhamxay, Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane and Champasack Provinces informed the Seminar of major problems facing statistical data collection and reporting on the district and province levels. The seminar included a session focused on the discussion of provincial specific activities such as identification of data availability, data collection methods, reporting method (including reporting problems) and requirements for planning at the provincial level. Their paper appears as **Annex 15**.
20. Ms. Karin McLennan, Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping Officer, World Food Programme, presented a paper on “Using and Analyzing Data on Food Security to support Food Security Interventions”. Her presentation showed- a demonstration on various methods of using agricultural data and other data sources to assess vulnerability and food insecurity at the district level. Various examples were presented on how to use livestock data in mapping of vulnerability. Vulnerability mapping could- be used as a tool to assess the poorest districts as targets for development assistance. Her paper appears as **Annex 16**.
21. In the afternoon session, the seminar discussed “Actions Needed for Improving Food Security Information and Possible Approaches. Mr. Anonth Khamhung, Director General of the Planning Department, MAF, moderated the session. Mr. Savanh prepared a concept paper for food security information development. The paper was intended to stimulate the discussion among the participants. It was to have the nature of a guideline. His paper appears as **Annex 17**.

Summary of the Discussion

22. Food security depends much on availability of timely and accurate information concerning production of major food crops, their prices, stocks, trades etc. Generating necessary information and sending it to the users needs to be strengthened in all ASEAN+3 countries. The seminar concluded that improving statistics/information system and establishing close cooperation between the information system and food security programs are of urgent tasks for the Government of Lao PDR.
23. Strengthen CAIS functions: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has decided to expand its activities concerning statistics and information by establishing the Center for Agricultural Information and Statistics (CAIS) in the Department of Planning. The seminar welcomed the decision and expressed its hope that the Center would play leading roles in planning, implementing and disseminating food security data and information as well as human resource development for personnel concerned, in collaboration with national agencies such as National Statistics Center, line departments of MAF and provincial governments.

24. Strengthen field-level capacity: Field-level work was of utmost importance for timely and accurate statistics/ information. The Provincial Governments were requested, therefore, to strengthen human resources and institutional capacity as well as to increase budgets for these activities at the provincial and local levels.
25. Crop forecast and price data: In order to ensure sufficient food supply to people in food deficit areas, early warning of shortage situation is important. It was suggested that MAF would make advanced estimates of food crop production through reports from provincial offices and analysis of reported data, and disseminate them to users. It was also requested to provide current price data to assess the demand/supply situation. Computer network systems might be profitably used for the data reporting and analysis.
26. Improve survey methods: It was noted that MAF and Provincial Governments cooperate with each other to conduct crop cutting surveys for rice. The results of the survey were used to supplement provincial report data in estimating crop area and production. It was suggested that the crop cutting would be continued, possibly with improved sampling plan and expanded scale.
27. National network: Computer networks were quite effective in sending reports from the Provincial Offices to MAF, which contributes to obtaining early data for crop situations and production estimates. AFSIS Project plans to provide fund for computer installation in order to develop a pilot model of national network connecting MAF and Provincial Offices. The seminar expressed hope that the network would be built in due time and contribute to the food security information in the country.
28. The seminar agreed on the necessity of having a wider range of statistical information in other areas than agricultural production (incl. price, income, food consumption, health and vulnerability data) in response to the new requirement for the policy formulation and program project implementation and monitoring, as well as regional and global data exchange. There was a need to find an appropriate modality for this among the different concerned agencies.
29. The seminar recognized the inadequacy of the existing statistical system in meeting the above-mentioned requirements, caused by existing limitations in human resources, budget, infrastructure, methodology and institutional arrangements. It was noted that although constraints were found at all levels, their effects were particularly felt at district level.
30. In order to realize a greater benefit of statistics and information to the national economy, both national and provincial governments should give higher priority and increased resource allocation for statistics and information activities of the agricultural sector.
31. The seminar agreed that improvement was needed on the existing, statistical system including development of standard format for reporting concepts, definitions, and timing. Reporting forms should be made simple, easy to understand and suited to the need and capability of field staff. It was also agreed

that- introduction to the objective of survey methods would- improve commitment of the staff to get accurate and timeliness of data collected.

CLOSING SESSION

28. The participants agreed and adopted conclusions and recommendations. The seminar was adjourned with closing remarks delivered by Mr. Anonh Khamhung, Director General of Planning Department.