



Media release

New Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR provides an impressive visualization of what has changed in the last decade

Vientiane, 14 December 2018

The new *Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR. Patterns and trends from 2005 to 2015* was presented today in Vientiane. The Atlas reveals the changes that have taken place throughout the country in the past decade and is intended to serve in future planning and decision-making. It was created jointly by the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, Switzerland. The Atlas constitutes a major result of the Lao DECIDE Info project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

“Without reliable statistics there can be no well-informed planning and decision-making,” said Dr. Samaychanh Boupha, Head of the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), pointing to the national Population and Housing Census as one of the most important sources of information on socio-economic developments. “The census data provides a solid basis for developing strategies for the sustainable development of the country,” Dr. Boupha added. Through a long-term Swiss-funded partnership, the statistics have been further enhanced: by adding a layer of geographic information, the data are displayed on highly informative maps that reveal socio-economic characteristics and trends throughout the entire country. The result is the new publication, *Socio-Economic Atlas of the Lao PDR. Patterns and trends from 2005 to 2015*, co-developed by LSB and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, Switzerland.

The new Atlas has a blue cover to distinguish it from the original Atlas published ten years ago, which has a distinctive red cover and is well-known in Lao decision-making circles. While the original Atlas was based on the 3rd national census, conducted in 2005, the new Atlas draws on data from the 4th census, held in 2015, and paints a comparative picture. The resulting maps reveal the many socio-economic changes that have taken place in the Lao PDR in the last decade and enable detection of important patterns and trends. One such pattern is a widening development gap within the country itself. As CDE Director Peter Messerli points out, “The Atlas illustrates, impressively, that while the development gap between the Lao PDR and other countries was reduced, the concern about within-country inequality must continue to drive political agendas”.

This new Socio-Economic Atlas complements the Atlas of Agriculture that was presented six months ago, in June 2018. Together, the two Atlases provide new insights into the dynamics of the many different aspects of development in Laos, and they allow for a local contextualization as well as a comparison of changes over time.

The Atlas was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and developed within the framework of the Lao DECIDE info project. Tim Enderlin, Regional Director of SDC for the Mekong Region, described the Atlas as highly valuable for evidence-based policy-making: “This Atlas shows us where progress has been made and where improvement is still needed. Access to data and information is the key for development planning and informed decision-making.”

In addition to this Socio-Economic Atlas, another key product of Lao DECIDE info includes the online information platform *decide.la*. The platform provides tools for partners from different sectors to share and integrate information of various types and on a range of topics, including social, economic, environmental aspects.