

News in Brief

More than 40 new operations open in Oudomxay

In the last nine months, more than 40 factories and handicraft workshops have opened in Oudomxay province, bringing the total to more 390, with more than 20 others under construction. According to the Industry and Commerce Department, Oudomxay has exported goods worth more than 490 billion kip, such as building equipment, food products and handicrafts. The province is currently promoting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises as a way to alleviate poverty and produce enough goods for market sale.

Australians to study in Laos

An additional 50 young Australians will travel to Laos next year to undertake short-term studies and research under the Australian government's New Colombo Plan. The New Colombo Plan is a signature initiative of the Australian government which aims to lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific region in Australia by supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region. Over 50 young Australians travelled to Laos in 2015 as part of the first group of students deployed under the plan. The students will gain experience in a broad range of subjects including archeology, nursing, veterinary science and health. Australia has been supporting human resource development in Laos for over 50 years, with over 1,200 Lao citizens receiving Australia Award scholarships. The New Colombo Plan encourages a two-way flow of students with Laos, increasing the understanding of Asia and the Pacific among the next generation of Australian leaders.

Luang Namtha to build new warehouse

A new warehouse will be built at the Pang Hay border checkpoint in Sing district, Luang Namtha province on a 65-hectare site, at a cost of almost 30 billion kip. The project will be funded by a local construction company and will have a 30-year concession period. The warehouse will store goods being transported and stored prior to export.

Champassak clamps down on illegally imported goods

Industry and commerce authorities in Khong district, Champassak province, reported that over the past nine months the district has been attempting to control the pricing of imported products. The district has also cracked down on illegal trade, seizing a large number of illegally imported items. The confiscated items comprised 10 large cartons of cigarettes, 20 boxes of soft drink and 1,200 litres of fuel. The authorities also seized 42 live iguanas from vendors in border areas and released them into the woods.

Meeting boosts science policy engagement



Dr Laurent Goetschel and Dr Bounthong Bouahom co-chairing the workshop on Science-Policy Engagement.

Times Reporters

Various institutional agencies from the government met to learn about ways in which scientists and policymakers can engage with each other most fruitfully.

"The Lao agricultural sector is in transition - and we know we need to ensure the sustainability of the country's socio-economic development," said Director General of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) Dr Bounthong Bouahom.

For this, we need better coordination and cooperation among different research institutes, and reliable research results that can be used to make sound and relevant policies.

He emphasised the need for continuous learning and sharing of

experiences among researchers and policymakers.

Dr Bounthong co-chaired the event together with Dr Laurent Goetschel, President of the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE), who highlighted the importance of tailoring policies to the Lao context.

Scientists like to seek general knowledge but in policymaking it is important to know that context matters. While awareness is growing about the need to improve integration of research and policy, concrete ways of doing so are still being explored.

The two-day "Workshop on Science-Policy Engagement" was held on September 8-9 in Vientiane. It was a follow-up to the country's first ever high-level Science-Policy Exchange

(February 13-14, 2014) and the National Research for Development Forum (December 17-18, 2014), whose purpose was to create a space for dialogue between the various parties.

The workshop kick-started this dialogue with a series of exercises. First, the 25 participants from various ministries including NAFRI, the National Economic Research Institute, the Economic Research Institute for Trade and the Natural Resources and Environment Institute were encouraged to work together in groups and reflect on how they engage with policymakers on a daily basis.

Second, the participants came up with key policy issues affecting rural development - ranging from issues as diverse as food and nutrition security, access to markets, control of pesticides in agriculture, and women's empowerment - and classified these into national, district, provincial, and community-level issues.

In a third step, the participants identified points of contact for each concern, realising that some issues would require the expertise of a number of ministries and highlighting the complexity of rural development.

Finally, the workshop identified potential platforms for science and policy engagement. One of these is NAFRI's Policy Think Tank, which is expected to play a pivotal role in bringing research and policymaking closer together.

The workshop was co-hosted by NAFRI, KFPE and the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Berne, Switzerland.

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