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## Media release

# Lao Agriculture Atlas to help in decision-making towards SDGs

Vientiane, 21 June 2018

The *Atlas of Agriculture in the Lao PDR. Patterns and trends between 1999 and 2011* was presented today in Vientiane. The new atlas – the first of its kind – contains detailed data on changes in agricultural production in Laos. The atlas is intended to serve in planning, decision-making, policymaking, and implementation of sustainable agriculture and sustainable rural development. The atlas was created jointly by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) in Laos. Funding was provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Agriculture is central to the overall national economy and development of Laos, particularly for the country's rural majority. The changes that have swept this sector since the start of the century are immense: having the data to understand them will be crucial in the Lao PDR's bid to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The new publication, *Atlas of Agriculture in the Lao PDR. Patterns and trends between 1999 and 2011*, was co-developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) of Laos and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern. It combines statistical data from the last two agriculture censuses with detailed geographic information to present a wealth of new sector-specific information on a large set of highly detailed thematic maps.

### A compass to guide efforts to a future-oriented agriculture

Thomas Breu, Director of CDE, compared the atlas to a compass needed to guide efforts to achieve a future-oriented agriculture in an increasingly globalized world that contributes to achieving the 2030 Agenda: "The challenge for the agricultural sector lies not just in increasing productivity to feed a growing population, but in promoting agricultural development such that it supports rural development in an intact environment while contributing global environmental services. In this respect, multifunctional agriculture is a promising way forward."

This means going beyond the provision of food, fodder, fibres, and biofuels. Multifunctional agriculture addresses other agricultural functions as well, such as environmental protection, landscape preservation, employment, and public health – and it also takes into account the important role that agriculture plays in preserving local cultures and traditions.

Xaypladeth Choulamany, Director General of the Department of Planning and Finance of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), pointed to the wealth of important agriculture-related data available at village and household level. "In the past, this type of information was disseminated in the form of reports, tables, and figures – thanks to the cooperation between MAF, CDE, and SDC we are now able to present the information in this atlas in way that is a much more attractive."

The atlas was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Martin Hasler, Deputy Director for SDC in the Mekong Region, highlighted the importance of good access to timely, reliable, and adequate information for responsible development planning: "Sharing and using information from different sectors is necessary for integrated development planning and for responding to today's complex development challenges."

The insights provided by the atlas into important socio-economic and agricultural patterns in the country are made spatially explicit at the local level for the entire country. This will enable decision-makers to design and effectively target development interventions where they are needed most.