

# Laos BTA/WTO Project



LAO-09-015

## M E M O R A N D U M

**TO:** Chanyut Nitikitpaiboon  
GDO USAID RDM, Asia (RDM/A)

**FROM:** Matthew Reisman  
Project Director  
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The Assistance to Lao BTA Compliance and WTO Accession (Laos BTA/WTO Project) program is the second task order awarded under the ASEAN Development Vision to Advance National Cooperation for Economic Integration (ADVANCE), a five year indefinite quantity contract of the U.S. State Department and U.S Agency for International Development.

### CURRENT STATUS OF ALL ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

For the first quarter of 2009, the Lao BTA/WTO Project finalized Phase II of the work plan; successfully implemented the National Assembly workshop; made significant strides on the development and design on the Foreign Trade Policy Department (FTPD)'s website; conducted a digital video conference on trading rights issues in Laos; continued translating several Laotian laws into English; received comments and began finalizing the telecommunications report; and accelerated efforts for the follow-on Fact Sheet workshop slated for the end of April 2009.

Project highlights for third quarter, January – March 2009, include:

**Phase II of the work plan finalized and launched.** Project staff finalized the proposed activities for the second year of the project after consultations with Lao counterparts at the FTPD, USAID, and USTR. The work plan was approved at the end of January 2009.

**Successful implementation of the National Assembly Workshop.** On February 3-4, the project sponsored a workshop for 70 members of the Lao National Assembly as well as staff from the Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce on Vietnam and Cambodia's "lessons learned" during their

respective WTO accessions. U.S. Ambassador to Laos Ravic Huso and USAID/RDMA Mission Director Olivier Carduner opened the workshop, stressing the US's commitment to assisting Laos meet trade commitments and the benefits that accompany trade. Several different perspectives were offered at the conference. Siphana Sok of the International Trade Centre, formerly Vice Minister of Commerce of the Kingdom of Cambodia and lead negotiator for Cambodia's WTO accession, discussed Cambodia's experiences as a least developed country during accession. In describing Vietnam's experience with accession and BTA negotiations, Ngo Duc Manh, Vice Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and Steve Parker, former director of USAID's STAR project, noted that USAID's technical assistance proved invaluable. Dawn Shackleford, Director for WTO Affairs at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), described the mechanics of WTO accession for least developed countries and how Laos can use the BTA as a stepping stone to WTO accession. Robert Fisher, who led USTR's market access negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement, discussed various approaches to liberalization and the importance of public-private sector dialogue in making trade reforms.

**Progress on the design and development of FTPD Website.** The website will serve as a central resource for bilateral, multilateral and regional trade information for the department. Website development consultant Peter Miller received approval to continue oversight and implementation of this activity. Mr. Miller is engaged in intensive collaboration with the selected web developer, Cyberia, and the FTPD to finalize the site specification, the site's visual design, the database structure and administrative interface specifications. The project will also provide server administration training as well as Internet Information Server maintenance in order to improve technical capacity and improve the website's reliability. The site is tentatively scheduled to go live in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2009.

**First steps on Trading Rights Activity.** On March 25<sup>th</sup>, a digital video conference was held between several staff members of the MOIC, key counterparts from the USTR, and a Laos BTA/WTO project representative to discuss Laos' trading rights obligations undertaken in the BTA and its present legal regime for trading rights. One participant in the videoconference from USTR described the proceedings as follows:

I think the DVC went very well... We agreed to provide them with some information regarding US system, and we are pulling that together. They were to think through the remaining items on the agenda and put some additional thought into how they want their ultimate system to look. That will take some time, but we thought we'd consider meeting again once we have the US info together and we could explain that as the starting point for the next DVC.

Project staff will consult with USTR and Lao counterparts to decide on the project's next steps in the area of trading rights.

**Translations of Laws (Lao to English).** The draft translation of the Decree on Import Licensing Procedures was submitted to the FTPD. The draft translation of the Law on Plant Quarantine is slated to be completed by the end of April 2009.

**Finalization of the assessment on trade in telecommunications services in Lao PDR.** We received draft comments from the MOIC and other agencies from the Lao government on the trade in telecommunications assessment. The team originally tasked with this activity is currently working on incorporating the comments into the final version of the report. The assessment is slated to be complete by the beginning of May 2009. Upon completion, the TOR deliverables will be officially submitted to both TCBoost and the Laos BTA/WTO Project.

**Preparations for the follow-on Fact Sheet Workshop.** In March, the Laos BTA/WTO Project accelerated preparations for the follow-on fact sheet workshop, which aims to equip the MOIC staff with communication techniques and strategies. The fact sheets aim to keep all stakeholders informed and involved in the domestic reform and liberalization process in Laos. During this period the project identified the technical trainers for the event, and coordinated with EDC and the MOIC on logistical planning and potential workshop venues. In the next week, Laos BTA/WTO Project staff will submit a Terms of Reference proposing that the workshop be held on April 28-29 in Vientiane.

#### **Other Work Plan Activities**

We are discussing with MOIC the possibility of implementing an IPR activity in May 2009. This activity would focus on conducting a rapid needs assessment of the Lao PDR's intellectual property rights regime in order to identify next steps for technical assistance. The activity also serves as an opportunity to liaise on-the-ground with our counterparts on upcoming activities in the Phase II work plan.

#### **OTHER ISSUES**

There are no other issues to report at this time.