

# Lao ADVANCE Project



LAO-08-003

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

**TO:** Geoff Parish  
GDO USAID RDM, Asia (RDM/A)

**FROM:** Victoria Waite  
Project Director  
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**SUBJECT:** Lao ADVANCE Quarterly Report: January – March 2008

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### SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The Assistance to Lao BTA Compliance and WTO Accession (Lao ADVANCE) 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. The task order was awarded in December 2007; Lao ADVANCE project activities were launched in early January 2008.

The objective of the Lao ADVANCE Project is to support the Government of Laos' (GoL) --- primarily through the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) --- efforts to implement reforms necessary to move Laos towards its goal of accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO); to successfully implement the U.S.-Lao Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA); and to fulfill its commitments, along with the other ASEAN member nations, of achieving an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 as outlined in the Vientiane Action Program and the AEC Blueprint. These three paths—multilateral, bilateral, and regional—have a common core of commitments, giving ADVANCE the opportunity to deliver one technical assistance package to help Laos achieve progress in all three. The program envisions the provision of related, targeted technical assistance and training to relevant line Ministries and the National Assembly.

Victoria Waite, a Managing Associate at Nathan Associates, is the Project Director and Trade Specialist and will manage Lao ADVANCE from headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Her primary counterpart in the MOIC's Foreign Trade Policy Department is Ms. Latthana Douangboupha. Together they will work to ensure that the work plan activities are implemented on behalf of USAID, other USG agencies, and the Government of Laos.

## CURRENT STATUS OF ALL ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

To date, there have been three short term trips to develop a draft work plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), and initiate draft work plan activities. Highlights of Lao ADVANCE activities January – March include:

**Work Plan Development (01/7 - 01/18/2008).** Project Director and Trade Specialist, Victoria Waite together with ADVANCE IQC Deputy Manager, Teri Lojewski, met with MOIC officials and representatives from line Ministries to discuss Laos technical assistance and trade capacity building needs. Meetings were scheduled with the donor community in Vientiane, including AusAID, World Bank, European Union, and the ADB, as well as with consultants working on donor-funded TCB projects. Meetings also took place in Bangkok, Thailand with USAID, US PTO, and the European Union. A draft work plan outlining possible activities in three areas (i.e., services, intellectual property rights, and cross-cutting themes) was presented to MOIC and USAID for review and comment.

**Work Plan Development (continued) (02/06 – 02/08/2008).** ADVANCE IQC Manager, Jim Wallar, was in the region in the early part of February and available to meet with MOIC to reach consensus on the draft work plan. The outcome was a revised (shorter) work plan comprising many of the elements of the first draft submitted in January, but organized in a way that better suited the MOIC. The draft work plan was submitted to USAID on February 20<sup>th</sup> and officially approved on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Both the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane and USTR endorsed the content of the work plan. The approved draft work plan was then sent to Mme. Khemmani to countersign their endorsement of the work program. To date, the draft work plan is going through the Government of Lao PDR's internal approval procedures. A countersignature is expected soon.

**Initiation of Work Plan Activities (03/10 – 03/18/2008).** In March, Project Director Victoria Waite returned to Vientiane to meet with key implementing counterparts within the GOL. The FTPD organized meetings with MOIC's Permanent Secretary's Office (responsible for IT) and Economic Research Institute and Training (play a role in the translations), and the National Authority for Science and Technology (responsible for IPR and TBT), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (SPS), and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (Services). The outcome of the meetings produced a natural prioritization of activities, as well as next steps to achieving the proposed tasks.

Next quarter, the Lao ADVANCE project envisions undertaking (but not limited to) the following work plan activities:

- Trade in Services Workshop for Trade Negotiators and Regulators;
- Translation of Laws, Regulations and Agreements. Initiated translation of the Standards Law (30 pages) and Decrees relevant to the Enterprise Law (7 pages), and will most likely initiate at least three requested more translations;
- Proposal to initiate the development of a FTPD sub-website to the MOIC's website;
- Assessment on Trade in Telecommunication Services in Lao PDR; and
- Draft TOR's for other activities for FTPD review and approval.

Ms. Waite also submitted an updated version of a publication entitled Trade-related Resources on the Web, which was a deliverable in the draft work plan.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

While there are no significant implementation issues to report, the development of the work plan took than expected, which may be attributed to the GOL taking a cautious approach to the program development. However, this has been counter-balanced with a dedication to the project by assigning key counterparts within the MOIC's Foreign Trade Policy Department who will be responsible in the day-to-day communication and management/implementation of project activities. In speaking with the donor community in Laos, they did remark that the Lao ADVANCE project is actually moving along fairly well (when compared to other donor programs) and that the project is well received within MOIC.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

There are no other issues to report at this time.