



Mr Robert von Rimscha, Dr Akhom Tounalom and Ms Ruth Huber attend the presentation at the Lao Plaza Hotel in Vientiane.

First nationwide analysis on land concessions released

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With a predominantly rural population still dependent on the land, issues regarding land use in Laos are of paramount importance for the future, and so the first nationwide analysis of land concessions should be welcomed by all concerned.

The culmination of years of hard work and planning by various departments and international organisations, the report entitled "Concessions and Leases in the Lao PDR" was unveiled at a workshop held in Vientiane on Wednesday.

Given their recent proliferation, land concessions

and leases have become a widely debated topic, and this report represents the most comprehensive land use survey ever undertaken in Laos.

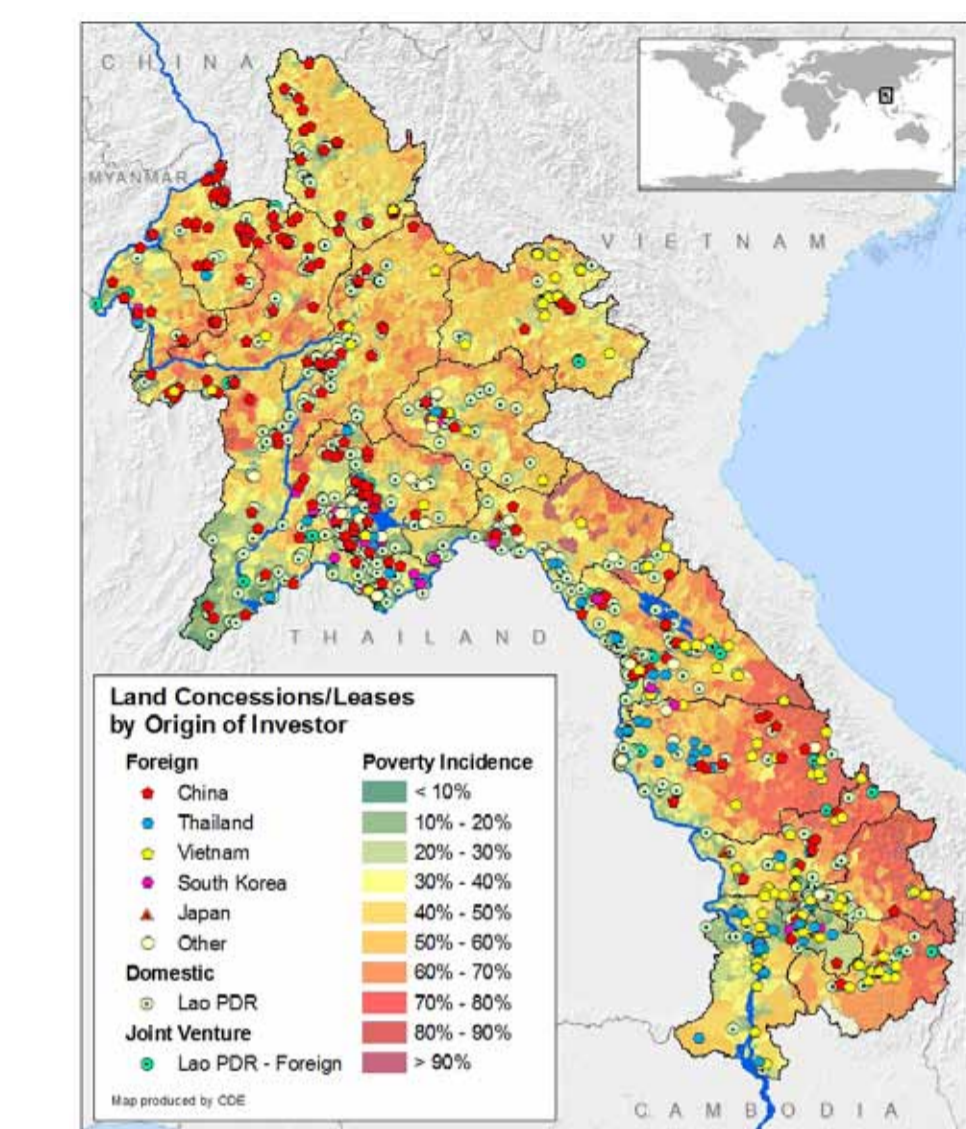
The report details information on a total of 2,624 concessions and leases that cover about 1.1 million hectares, which accounts for some 5 percent of the country's total land area.

It represents the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Berne in Switzerland, and the German International Cooperation (GIZ) agency.

The report aggregates key data from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and other ministries, to provide an overall picture in economic, geographic and social terms.

"We need to monitor the impact of all investments in the land sector," said Deputy Minister Dr Akhom Tounalom in his opening speech at the launch. "This report offers valuable information and a snapshot of land development in the Lao PDR. It can be seen as a mirror of current land policy in particular."

Illustrative tables and maps combine data from different sectors. Not only this, but by incorporating the most recent



One of the maps from the report "Concessions and Leases in the Lao PDR". It shows the location of land investments and the incidence of poverty at the district level.

satellite imagery and geo-spatial data, it can compare and contrast official records of concessions and leases with the reality of what is happening on the ground.

The groundbreaking programme also allows for analysis and interpretations of what the positive and negative impacts of the concessions could be and allows for future projections, and has been described as a globally unique and extremely useful database.

Some of the results are quite staggering. With foreign and domestic investment fuelling rapid economic growth, the number of land deals has skyrocketed in recent years, increasing fifty fold from 2000 to 2009. To put the granted 1.1 million hectares in perspective, this represents a larger area than that dedicated to wet season rice production, rice being the national crop.

It's about the size of the whole of Saravan province. Of the total land area under concession or lease, 72 percent was granted to foreign investors, mostly from Vietnam, Thailand and China. These foreign direct investments are on average three to five times larger than domestic ones. Over 90 percent of the total area is used for agriculture, forestry and mining projects.

The data further shows that concessions granted in agriculture and forestry produce only a very few mono-cultural products. For example, of the some 300,000 hectares granted in the forestry subsector, 73 percent of the land is dedicated exclusively to rubber and eucalyptus, which exposes Laos to potential vulnerabilities due to fluctuations on the world market.

It also highlights that much of the investment is concentrated on low lying land

closer to district and provincial centres, meaning that not much in the way of benefits is flowing to those in the poorest, most remote and mountainous areas. Some of the maps show that investments tend to be located mostly in easily accessible areas.

After the results were released, Dr Akhom, along with Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Phouangparisak Pravongviengkham and Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, were available to take questions from the audience.

Most that took the floor argued that the Lao PDR has in place a pretty good legal framework concerning land investments, but that there is a lack of enforcement and poor communication between the different ministries, departments and levels of government.

"After a concession is granted there is often a breach of law. No monitoring ensues. Local people suffer because we don't comply with the law," said a Lao expert on biodiversity. Another Lao speaker said "Village authorities sometimes come up with good ideas, but they cannot communicate and nobody listens to them."

The three deputy ministers pointed out that these were some of the reasons why large scale land concessions were halted in June 2012 under the Prime Ministerial Decree No. 13 until 2015 and further assessment was undertaken.

"It is already certain that eucalyptus and rubber plantations will be stopped," Dr Bounthavy said later in the panel discussion. Addressing the fact that not many concessions are situated in remote and poor areas, Dr Phouangparisak

observed that the clearance of land in these regions is often very costly due to the presence of unexploded ordnance.

Overall, the report and the database which has enabled it, were well received by the various ministries and departments concerned, as well as the development community. An international expert on land concessions from GIZ congratulated the authorities on doing a good job in regards to land investments compared to many other countries.

The deputy ministers said the publication will be an important tool for the relevant ministries and the data and conclusions will be used when revising policies concerning land concessions and releases in the near future.

Funding to build the database and putting together the report was provided by the Swiss and German development agencies. Director of the Swiss Development Cooperation in the Mekong region, Ruth Huber, and German Ambassador to Laos, Robert von Rimscha, emphasised the inherent value of this freely available, transparent overview of land investments.

"With our contribution we want to make sure that investment in land, and turning land into capital, benefits all the people of Laos."

The publication is available for free on www.decide.la, where the data should be available in the future and will also be updated.

A version in the Lao language will be published in the coming weeks.

It should provide a valuable tool to assess the relative merits of current and future leases and concessions, and help to ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach the entire population.



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JOB OPENING

TITLE: Senior Marketing Officer
DATE: January 2012

PSI is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. that harnesses the vitality of the private sector to address the health problems of low-income and vulnerable populations in more than 60 developing countries. With programs in malaria, reproductive health, child survival and HIV, PSI promotes products, services and healthy behavior that enable low-income and vulnerable people to lead healthier lives.

PSI seeks to hire an individual with strong skills in sales and marketing and a background in public health to join our team as **Senior Marketing Officer**. The position requires experience in private sector sales and marketing. Ideally, the candidate will be familiar with promotion of health products and services in areas such as HIV prevention, family planning, and TB prevention and treatment. The Senior Marketing Officer is responsible for designing marketing activities, including planning, budgeting and implementation. S/he will also monitor sales of PSI health products at participating private sector outlets.

DUTIES include:

- Assist with the management of nationwide sales and distribution of all PSI products;
- Develop marketing plans, market promotions, and brand development;
- Provide capacity building and training for PSI sales and marketing teams;
- Coordinate with internal and external partners to facilitate sales and marketing activities;
- Monitor and evaluate sales and marketing activities in the field.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- BA in Marketing, Business Admin or related field or at least 5 years relevant work experience;
- Minimum 3 years work experience in sales and marketing, preferably in FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods);
- Ability to read and write in English and Lao required;
- Basic computing, word processing, and internet competency (Adobe Design package preferred)
- Must be a Lao national.

The successful candidate will have a high level of honesty and integrity, be results oriented, have excellent communication and writing skills and a strong work ethic, proven ability to work independently with minimal supervision, be a positive team player, and possess strong analytical and problem-solving skills.

Applicants should submit a **letter of interest** and **curriculum vitae** to Pinkham Phalakhone, PSI/Laos Human Resource Coordinator, by **February 6th, 2013**. Submit by email (pinkham@psilaos.org) or deliver a hard copy to PSI/Laos (Donkoi Village, Unit 16, Sisattanak District, Vientiane Capital). Only short listed candidates will be notified.