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Asean, S. Korea discuss  
cooperation programme

Times Reporters

Cooperation between the  
Republic of Korea and  
Asean countries was on the  
agenda as approximately  
40 representatives met last

week at the 4th Asean-ROK

Eminent Persons Group  
(EPG).

The attendees discussed  
reports on activities underway,  
and proposals for increasing  
cooperation measures between  
the ROK and Asean.

The three-day meeting began on September 16 and  
was attended by the Head of  
ROK EPG, Mr Han Tae Kyu,  
and other senior officials.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs, Lao Deputy  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Bounkeut Sangsomsak and  
his delegation also attended  
the event.

“The increase in the  
cooperation programme between the Republic of

Korea and Asean must go forward so as to achieve the  
strategic partnerships that  
will be proposed to Asean and  
Republic of Korea leaders at

the 12th Asean-ROK Summit,

to be held in October in Thailand,” the press release stated.

It said significant progress had been made in the development of cooperation programmes between the Republic of Korea and Asean since 1995.

Environmental protection key to poverty reduction

Panyasith Thammavongsa

The Lao government and international organisations are working towards joint coordination on projects relating to agriculture, and forestry and land management to reduce environmental impacts and reduce poverty.

More than 50 representatives from the Lao government and international organisations yesterday gathered at a coordination workshop for collaboration and linkage through codevelopment of projects in the southern provinces of Laos.

The workshop was held in Vientiane and supported by the Asian Development Bank, UN Development Programme, UN Environment Programme, International Fund for Agriculture Development,

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of Planning and Investment.

The workshop focused on the Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Productivity Enhancement Project (SNMAPEP) and the Poverty Environment and Energy for All Initiative.

“We need to look at how to link projects to the Vientiane Action Programme and various funding sources. We should coordinate to link with the working plans of other similar projects to

facilitate poverty eradication in Laos,” said Director General of the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry’s Planning Department, Dr Puangparisack Pravongviengkham.

He said the SNMAPEP faces challenges in creating land management capacity and raising funding. Development initiatives must be linked to environmental protection and be sustainable.

The workshop would divide into small groups to research and contribute comments to improve the project, which operates in Savannakhet, Saravan, Champassak, Xekong and Attapeu provinces.

“Effective land management is a key factor

in helping Laos to eradicate poverty,” Dr Puangparisack said.

According to project Head Vinoad Vansy, the project will run for five years, ending in 2015.

“The project will address poverty reduction in mountainous areas by ensuring food security and in plateau and plain areas by focusing on productivity, especially in agriculture,” he said.

He said the project would assist the government’s economic growth efforts.

“Providing land concessions may result in negative impacts for local

people. However, we will address national management of the issue to ensure poverty reduction and sustainable development.”

“Our project will focus on linking agricultural related organisations into projects at the provincial, district and village levels,” he said.

Mr Vinoad said the workshop provided an opportunity for domestic and international organisations to understand the history and work plans of the projects, as well as giving participants the chance to provide comments and input.

“Consideration of environmental factors and climate change in poverty reduction activities is very important and necessary because environmental problems directly impact poor and vulnerable people,” said Director General of the Investment Promotion Department, Mr Houmpheng Souralay.

He said the Lao government gives high priority to promoting and attracting investment, particularly foreign investment, as a key to achieving annual GDP growth of 7.5 percent.

Doing so would also create employment opportunities for local people and assist in alleviating poverty in the country, Mr Houmpheng said.

Cracks appear in road construction

Meuangkham Noradeth

A stretch of Road No. 1 in front the Lao Brewery Company in Hadxaifong district is set to receive repairs soon, after damage has increased in recent months.

The road is seen as of great importance because it links Wattay International Airport and the Friendship Bridge, both major points of entry into Laos.

It is used not only by the broader community, but also by important guests and tourists coming to Vientiane.

Vientiane Public Works and Transport Department Deputy Director, Mr Oudone

Nengvannavong, said the repairs were a priority.

“We will repair the damaged section as quickly as possible to stop the cracks from getting any bigger.”

He said repairs would be the responsibility of the department.

Following previous reconstruction, the road had a one year repair guarantee, but this had since elapsed.

Every day many heavy trucks travel along the road, exacerbating the damage.

The rebuilding of Road No. 1 was funded by the government of Japan.

The section that was rebuilt is 29 km long, running

from Sikhai junction in Sikhottabong district to the Thanaleng warehouse in Hadxaifong district.

A resident of Somsanouk village in Hadxaifong district, Mr Bounkham Manysone,

said that each day the road sees a growing amount of heavy traffic.

He saw many heavily laden trucks pass through the area, and noticed that this quickly led to the road surface breaking up.

He urged officials to place greater importance on preventing overloaded trucks from using the road, to prolong its lifespan and help to save government funds.

Dr Bounthong Bouahom (right) and Mr Serge Verniau address a workshop yesterday in Vientiane.

Facts sought on role of women in farming, forestry

Khamphone Syvongxay

Encouraging women to have greater participation in agriculture and rural development is one of the goals of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and its partner organisations. To make this a reality, better data collection is needed.

With this in mind, representatives of the ministry and partners including the Department of Statistics, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Lao Women's Union met yesterday in Vientiane.

Those gathered examined relevant statistics including sex-disaggregated data indicators regarding agri

culture and rural development. The workshop was chaired

by the ministry's Office Head,

Dr Bounthong Bouahom, and  
FAO representative to Laos,  
Mr Serge Verniau.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has strategic plans to promote and increase women's participation in the development of the agriculture and forestry sector at each level from local to central, Dr Bounthong said.

He said that the ministry had continually worked to develop female talent, which had been reflected in an increase in the presence of women in positions of responsibility on a year by year basis.

The workshop aimed to tackle the important goal of collecting statistical information regarding women's participation at each level in the agriculture and forestry sector.

This would help to increase female participation in developing the sector towards 2020, which has been identified as a benchmark year for poverty reduction measures

in Laos.

Gender disaggregated data was also necessary in order for Laos to meet Millennium Development Goal targets by

2015, Mr Verniau said.

“Only if we have good data can we achieve the good planning, evaluations, policies and programmes that take into account the very special needs of women, in a way that makes it possible to achieve food security, better nutrition and improved agriculture practices for all people of the country,” he said.

“It is widely recognised that women’s participation in agriculture and rural development is often of equal or greater importance than that of men, yet the contribution of women to agricultural development is in most cases inaccurately reported and underestimated,” Mr Verniau said.

He said the lack of relevant data on women’s roles in agriculture in remote areas had been identified and recognised as a major constraint to the integration of women in development planning and effective project formulation and implementation.

Mr Verniau said that in its recent concluding comments

on a report prepared by Laos, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women mentioned that it was concerned that the report did not provide

sufficient statistical data on the

situation of women in all areas covered by the convention, including agriculture and rural women and other groups of vulnerable women.

This FAO project hopes to now bridge the gap between the statistical information already available and the lack of analysis and information in this field, he said.

The great importance of generating and disseminating gender-disaggregated data has been recognised internationally through several UN conventions, notably the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action as well as FAO's World Food Summit Plan of Action which recommended "the improvement of the collection, dissemination and use of gender disaggregated data in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development".