

WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP LAO PDR

This project contributes to the strategic planning and training of Lao human resources by favouring the emergence of female entrepreneurship. A two-pronged approach will be used to ensure that the project reaches its goal. The first will target the improvement of the methodological expertise of researchers from the National Economic Research Institute (NERI) so that they may provide better advice to the government with respect to the development of promising sectors. The goal of the second element is to reinforce the entrepreneurial expertise of the trainers from the Lao Women's Union (LWU) of the municipality of Vientiane and thereby help them implement the *National Plan of Action for Promoting Women's Participation in Economic Development*. Links between our two partners, the NERI and the LWU, will create a synergy that will help develop new markets for small businesses.



In 1997, the LWU informed us of its training needs in female entrepreneurship. The NERI also expressed the desire to improve its expertise in socio-economic research methodology so as to be able to better advise the State Planning Committee on strategic development. In January, 2000, the LWU joined forces with the NERI in order to strengthen its expertise in project implementation and management. The Collège François-Xavier-Garneau has been working in Laos since 1992 and is currently participating in an urban-environment project. Its expertise in female entrepreneurship (Benin and Québec) and in research methodology (Burkina Faso and Québec) as well as its knowledge of the country will be reinvested into the project.



Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) has been undergoing the transition from a planned economy to a market economy since 1986. Examples of this transition can be seen in the increase in the per capita annual income (\$296 to \$357US). The 1997 Asian financial crisis brought on slower income growth and a marked increase in inflation. Because women are particularly active in the private sector, their economic responsibilities increased. Numerous young women consequently left school to try their chance in small businesses without having acquired the basic expertise needed to succeed. This project thus aims to support Laos' private sector development strategy, as much through research to determine promising economic activity sectors as through the strengthening of the country's emerging female entrepreneurship.

A ripple-effect training approach will be used so that those trained can then train others. The training program will have several priorities, namely the use of an adult education approach, the development of an entrepreneurial culture and the use of applied field research as a prerequisite to choosing development sectors. NERI researchers will develop their methodology skills in years 1 and 2 and conduct supervised applied field research in year 2. In years 1 to 4, LWU trainers from Vientiane will learn entrepreneurial and management skills and then teach training modules in years 2 to 4. These people will thus become resource people for their own organizations.



The NERI is composed of researchers who master the principles of socio-economic and commercial business research methodology. Five applied field research projects will be conducted. The LWU is setting up a network of entrepreneurial trainers. A Female-Expertise consulting group will be created. A training program and modules will be developed. Training and awareness sessions will be offered to female entrepreneurs. Small companies will be set up, which will contribute to the development of a more entrepreneurial culture among Lao women. A symposium will be organized. Finally, organizational efficiency in the NERI and LWU will be increased through the use of computerized tools and the availability of resource people capable of forming target groups.

