

Swiss govt boosts agriculture training

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The government of Switzerland has provided 4.65 million CHF (more than 42 billion kip) through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for the Support to the Reform of the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College project.

A handover ceremony for a new building at the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College was held on Saturday in Luang Prabang province, attended by Swiss Ambassador to Laos Christoph Burgener, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Vilayvanh Phomkhe, and officials from Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

The project will contribute considerably to improving the living, teaching and studying



Mr Christoph Burgener (left) presents a key to Mr Vilayvanh Phomkhe at the handover of a new building at the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College in Luang Prabang province.

conditions at the college for both teachers and students, Mr Vilayvanh said.

The new high-quality

facilities will increase the motivation of students and teachers, leading to better educated and skilled graduates,

he said.

Infrastructure development is part of the overall agricultural education improvement and reform process and is therefore linked with the development of a new skills-based curriculum.

About 80 percent of the Lao population depends on income from agricultural products, but most farmers still use traditional and less efficient production techniques, he said.

Capacity building training and services have not yet reached all farmers, particularly those in remote areas, Mr Vilayvanh said.

The main reason that most Lao farmers are still poor, especially in upland areas, is due to the lack of agricultural

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technical staff.

Moreover, existing technical staff often lack the required knowledge and skills to provide good services tailored to local needs, so improvements to agricultural education are essential, he said.

The new college is in line with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's aim to improve the quality of education in the field.

In the future, the college will look to deliver technicians with the required skills to meet the needs of the public and the private sector

and increase the number of female and ethnic students, Mr Burgener said.

The college will contribute to a fairer and more inclusive education with improved teaching methodologies and skills, he said, adding that one can expect a new generation of Lao upland farmers in a good position to face their challenges and improve their livelihoods.

The project's three-year phase from September 2009 to August 2012 aims to improve student selection and motivation, upgrade

teaching standards and curriculum development, establish partnerships, and improve infrastructure and management.

In doing so, the college hopes to achieve its goal of becoming the leading institute for developing proficiency in upland agriculture in Laos.

The project is being implemented with the support of Helvetas Swiss Inter-cooperation, with assistance in infrastructure development and curriculum development by the Swiss College for Agriculture.