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USAID Awards \$9.4 Million Contract to Strengthen the Resilience of Mekong Communities to Climate Change

Bangkok, Thailand, September 30, 2011 – The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) a \$9.4 million, five-year contract to help rural communities in the Lower Mekong River basin address the negative impacts of climate change.

This new regional project will apply cutting-edge science and analysis to help communities in the four Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) countries -- Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam -- build effective ecosystem-based adaptation strategies in response to changing climates. This is part of the U.S. Government's "fast-start" commitments made under the Copenhagen Accords.

An estimated 40 million people in the Lower Mekong basin are engaged in subsistence agriculture and thus highly vulnerable to climate variability. Changes in seasonal temperature and precipitation patterns and increasingly extreme weather conditions have already had an adverse impact on crops and local ecosystems in this important region. These weather-related crop failures add to household food insecurity, increasing poverty and accelerating rural-urban migration. This in turn exposes many rural families to separation and the possibility of exploitation and trafficking.

The new USAID resilience project will apply the latest climate change forecasts, coupled with advanced scientific tools, to identify the most vulnerable crop systems, as well as likely shifts and stresses in the ecosystems on which communities also depend. Community-level pilot programs in each of the LMI countries will use this information, along with their considerable indigenous knowledge, to develop their community and ecosystem-based adaptation strategies. These strategies will improve resilience in communities to climate change by integrating the plans for water, agriculture, livelihoods, ecosystem management, and disaster risk reduction and the strengthening of social institutions into a comprehensive approach. Best practices and lessons learned, including the costs and benefits of the pilot activities, will be shared with all the countries with a view to replicating successful practices in other, similar locations.

The role of women in developing and implementing these strategies will be crucial to the success of these activities. Women play vital roles throughout the region, for example, in managing seed stocks and the household gardens from which most families get much of their nourishment. Consequently, the new contract includes women and women's groups in each component of this new program.

"Global climate change discussions at the international level, when focusing on targets like limiting global temperature rise to two degrees Celsius, can easily lose track of the attendant impacts on the poor and vulnerable," said Michael Yates, Mission Director for USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia. "The scientific study under this project will help clarify those impacts and allow rural communities to become more resilient to climate change, by empowering them to meld the latest scientific information with their traditional indigenous knowledge."

“Conducting scientific study at a regional level also allows USAID to achieve economies of scale and provide practical information to individual communities. The application of consistent methodologies in data collection and analysis for pilot areas in countries that have similar agriculture and ecosystems, will broaden the base for drawing best practices – including indigenous coping mechanisms – and promote south-south cooperation among the Lower Mekong countries,” he added.

About USAID

The United States Agency for International Development has been the principal US agency extending foreign assistance since 1961. In Asia, USAID programs address many problems that cross national boundaries, such as human and wildlife trafficking, HIV/AIDS and infectious diseases, global climate change, natural resources conservation, food security, trade, and political and economic conflict. For more information, visit www.usaid.gov.

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