



SUCCESS STORY

Lao Officials Learn About Transparency

Workshop provides the tools to communicate the benefits of trade agreements to a variety of audiences, preparing Laos to enter the world economy



Officials from the Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce hone their fact sheet writing skills at a USAID-sponsored workshop.

USAID sponsors a workshop that teaches officials how to write fact sheets that will help Laos join the WTO and meet its U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement commitments.

The staff at the Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce faces a huge challenge: Communicating the benefits of an open, dynamic economy to a diverse audience of producers, investors, consumers, non-governmental organizations, and the media.

To get the message across, USAID sponsored workshops that taught members of the Foreign Trade Policy Department to craft fact sheets that translate technical, trade-related jargon into words and concepts the general public can understand.

The fact sheets they created explain the benefits of Laos integrating into the global economy by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), engaging with the United States through the Bilateral Trade Agreement, and becoming a viable member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community. ASEAN member states' GDP is expected to rise by 5.3 percent, or \$69 billion, by 2015, so full integration is vitally important to Laos' developing economy.

Transparency, a tenet of the WTO, ASEAN, and BTA, begins by communicating facts to ensure that government and use of taxpayer funds are understood.

During the workshop, staffers learned about fact sheet design and composition. They produced 13 fact sheets – three more than the goal – on such topics as investing in Laos, the Lao-Viet Preferential Tariff Agreement, and strategies for promoting regional trade. Another leaflet explains how Laotian producers can benefit from protecting intellectual property, which Laos will be obligated to do when it joins the WTO.

“The one-on-one discussion sessions are very helpful,” one participant said. “I experienced the challenges that I face when I'm writing fact sheets and receive direct responses.”

The workshop prepared the Foreign Trade Policy Department to meet economic growth and development goals through greater transparency and economic engagement. The department now is preparing for the next phase of WTO accession, which includes drafting its *WTO Working Party Report* and defining its scope of membership terms and commitments to trading partners.