

## Rice project helps farmers boost yields

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A Japanese-funded project to increase rice yields using the single seedling method has just completed its first phase, and will aim to increase sustainability going forward.

Pro-net 21, a Japanese non-profit organisation, worked with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Lao government on the project in Xayaboury and Luang Prabang provinces and in Vientiane.

The Livelihood Improvement Project for the Rural Poor in Laos aims to boost production by adopting low-input rice farming technology, known as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), to help improve rice farmers' living conditions in target areas.

In the traditional method, three or four rice seedlings are planted together, but the single seedling method, which is used in many other countries, gives a higher yield. According to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Department of Irrigation and Pro-net signed in December 2007, the project planned to plant only 100 hectares of rice in Tha Ngone in Xaythany district, Vientiane, Houay Noi in Paklai district, Xayaboury province, and Nam Pa irrigation schemes in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province.

However, over the course of five rice-planting seasons, the project has expanded to about 140 hectares.

"The project objective was achieved in terms of target extension area, but sustainability cannot be achieved to some extent, and such a critical issue is to be continuously addressed in the next phase," the report said.

Farmers have used this new method to boost rice yields by 6-8 tonnes per hectare.

Some farming families have been able to grow enough rice to sell at the market as well as for family consumption, Director General of the Department of Irrigation Dr Khamphad Sourinphoumy said at the project closing meeting on Thursday.

Some model farming families in Luang Prabang province increased production by about nine tonnes per hectare and sold the surplus, he said. According to Dr Khamphad, farmers in other provinces around the country are also benefiting from using this technique.

To make this method more accessible, the Northern Communities and Management Irrigation Sector Project was directed by the Irrigation Department to advise local farmers.

The project now helps more than 1,000 households with 3,600 hectares of rice around the country, and plans to grow 5,000 hectares this year, Dr Khamphad said.

The Lao government hopes to boost the nation's food security in the future by expanding the SRI scheme.

Source: Vientiane Times  
By Khamphone Syvongxay  
June 28, 2010

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