

Statement by the Head of Delegation from Lao PDR

H.E. Mr. Thongphat Vongmany

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to Lao PDR

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Your Excellency, **Dr. Qu Dongyu**, Director General of FAO

Excellencies Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates, Representatives of DPs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor, on behalf of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic of Lao PDR, to participate to this important event of FAO the 42nd session of the FAO conference and to present the statement to share with you the state of food and agriculture in Lao PDR.

At the outset, I would like to thank the FAO, and particularly the Director General, Assistant Director General, the FAO Representative in Lao PDR and the technical teams for their dedicated technical and financial support to the agriculture sector, farmers and especially the rural poor populations of Lao PDR.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please, allow me to point out the theme for this Conference, namely, “**Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: from Strategy to Action**” is very relevant to the State of Agriculture in Lao PDR. As we are aware, food systems could make far greater contributions to people's health and nutrition, to equity and livelihood resilience as well as to sustainable futures. They can have a major impact on the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda challenges countries to eliminate all forms of malnutrition by ensuring that sufficient quantities of safe, nutritious and affordable food are available to all. However, it also requires countries to achieve this while creating the growth and employment opportunities needed to eradicate poverty, sustaining biodiversity and the natural resource environment, and adapting to the growing pressures of climate change.

To put the situation in context, Lao PDR has made impressive progress against rural poverty, increasing agriculture production across the country, and becoming self-sufficient in food. As mandated by the Government, our Agriculture Development Strategies focus on four programs, which are:

- a. Food Security
- b. Agriculture Commercialization
- c. Sustainable Forest and Forest Resources Management
- d. Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

Our main objectives are to achieve adequate food security and good nutrition, modernizing and diversifying agriculture production toward a green and sustainable agricultural ecological

system and resilient livelihoods for the people. With these objectives, we worked constantly over the past years on

- a. Food security, especially self-sufficiency in rice production and major food crops as well as meat production;
- b. Agricultural commercialization in crops and livestock through linking farmers to markets and participation in regional agricultural value chains;
- c. Promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the agricultural value chain development that has helped transform the farming practices toward increased adoption of agricultural technologies in agricultural production;
- d. Agricultural research and extension services that help improve professional and operational skills of agricultural institutions to better serve the farming communities.

In the meantime, our country faces serious challenges in agriculture sector such as frequent floods, drought like situation in some areas, outbreak of plant and animal diseases, and now the need of urgent actions have been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has revealed extreme inequities and alarming fragilities in today's food systems.

Graduation of Lao PDR from LDC status was a long-term objective of our national policy and now that we have been recommended for graduation, we look forward to further strengthening the progress achieved over last few years. Graduation does not mean that no poverty remains, we still have to tackle the incidence of poverty.

Hand-In-Hand Initiative is a transformational opportunity for my country and has come at a very opportune time. It aligns very well with the national priorities as well as our strategic objectives. To continue to address our national needs, the Lao Government in collaboration with FAO intends to use the HIHI approach to achieve:

- Accelerate progress toward ending poverty and hunger;
- Further support the strive to achieve food security and improved nutrition; as well as
- Better promote sustainable agriculture in line with
 - a. SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
 - b. SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; and
 - c. SDG 10: Reduce Inequality within and among countries

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and FAO organized an inception meeting of the Hand in Hand Initiative in Lao PDR in May this year. The event was highly successful with participation from across sectors in the government, development partners, private sector, commercial banks as well as representatives of the farmers and rural communities. The concept received a very high degree of interest from all participants and was very well received.

- Under the Hand-in-Hand we have completed territorial level analysis to identify target areas, value chain analysis, and the launch of a joint task force between FAO and the Government on the Green and Sustainable Economic Corridor along the Lao – China railway that will connect the country with international markets. The HHH initiative in the Lao PDR aims **to transform the infrastructure into an area of sustainable, and resilient socio-economic development** by enhancing the capacity of communities and rural institutions to effectively and sustainably take advantage of the emerging opportunities presented by the railway.
- This “*Green Growth Economic Corridor*” will be an evidence-based flexible mechanism that will adapt to emerging opportunities, promote partnerships and build synergies with on-going and planned programs.
- The inception workshop ensured a holistic approach, matching means and expertise, in order to maximize the impact of the initiative by working together to achieve the Lao Government plans for the *Green Growth Economic Corridor* and realizing the SDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we move forward to the next stages of our economic development, we are committed to ensure that Lao PDR Leave sNo One Behind and that we make this and every other development initiative profitable for everyone.

The environmental, gender and vulnerable group sensitive approach to be used during the implementation of the Lao Investment Plan will be a key factor in ensuring the broad benefit and sustainability of project results, without exclusion of any group.

Lao PDR is thankful for the opportunity to lead in the process of HHHI and work alongside the FAO and all the national and international partners present today to help us achieve these goals.

We remain grateful for our long-standing relationship with FAO and its unwavering support for Lao Farmers. I will take this opportunity to appreciate the hard work and commitment of ministry’s team as well as the FAO team working on this important imitative.

We believe that you have some of the best and brightest ideas about how we can change food systems for the better in Lao PDR.

Finally yet importantly, we are thankful to the continuous support from FAO and we hope that we can count on your continued support to realize our agricultural development strategies and its development plan.

May I wish the 42nd session of FAO conference success and let us together keep food and Agriculture: “**Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: from Strategy to Action**” high on our agendas.

Thank you