

Country briefing toward e-Phyto in Lao PDR

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Lao PDR has joined ASEAN community 23 July 1997 and entered WTO officially on 2nd February 2013, as 158th member. Exports of agricultural products from Lao PDR have not yet faced a major ban or suspension for SPS non-compliance, but there are specific concerns for the future, particularly phytosanitary certification.

Lao PDR as a landlocked country has substantial borders with a number of neighboring countries and the borders in many parts are relatively porous with agricultural products crossing the borders without the knowledge of the NPPO. Total land and river border sharing is about 5,083 km. The country has no post-entry quarantine for seed, propagation material and other potentially risky plant products. The Government of Lao PDR has been making effort to build SPS capacities. In this context, the country has border location with long historical border exchange of seeds and planting materials, which poses risk of introduction of pest, it is required a huge investment and management. At present 81 entry - exit points around the country where exchange of agricultural products are operated. NPPO of Lao PDR has capacity able to oversee 15 international check points. Most of plant quarantine inspectors have limitation of specialized technical background.

Almost all of the provincial and local level entry-exit points currently have no phytosanitary systems in place for monitoring movement of agricultural commodities across the borders. The international check points have the capacity to issue phytosanitary certificates through the provincial agriculture section and plant quarantine check points under technical supervision of the Department of Agriculture as NPPO.

The provision of Plant Protection Law, article 16 defines import of plant and plant products must be declared to plant protection border check point with phytosanitary certification documents issued by country of origin. In the regard to export of plant and plant product, article 19 of this law notified that export of plant and plant products shall apply for phytosanitary inspection according to the requirement of destination country. On the other hand, article 21 of this law noted that export of plant and plant products must have obtained the inspection and certification for phytosanitary.

It is practically impossible for NPPO to delegate staffing the inspectors in all numerous 81 border posts. With respect to the SPS-WTO requirements of importing countries while to serve trade facilitation for exporting plant and plant products, NPPO of Lao PDR released Minister Order on phytosanitary certification in 2013. Authorized officer who has duty to certify phytosanitary certification is nominated by Minister Order for international check points only. Since previously certification was done at the province agriculture office following unreasonable formal procedure and time consuming indeed (details can be visited at website: [www: laotradeportal.org](http://www.laotradeportal.org)). NPPO of Lao PDR is well aware of Appendix 1 of ISPM No. 12 of IPPC. From early 1975 to 2000 model phytosanitary certificate set by IPPC was applied manually through the use of typing machine while citing the wording as stipulated in the model. Starting from 2004 with formerly named NZODA assistance programme of the Government of New Zealand to CLMV countries in the field phytosanitary capacity development, a National Phytosanitary Database (NPD) was developed and used for plant pest list and computerized phytosanitary certificate issuance with plain paper print out and pre-printed format. NPD has also a huge engine software for phytosanitary strategic planning. The software was standing as server based and standalone system. Unfortunately, network infrastructure, e.g. optical fiber and satellite uplink-downlink was unfavorable and extremely costly in the country. Plain paper and pre-printed paper format were not able to avoid massive fraudulent and imitation. But the said NPD is quite good promising for further networking development. Consequently, when assistance programme terminated, NPPO could not continue to use, subject to IPR of developer.

Phase II of assistance on phytosanitary capacity building of the Australian Government to the Mekong countries continue to develop similar software, but dedicated for phytosanitary certificate issuance. It is a fancy NPD, because there are national and English languages. Phytosanitary certificate is issued on pre-printed paper with water mark. However, it is still question whether the last NPD could be or not conformed to the requirements of trading partner countries.

Further requirements pertaining the e-Phyto for Lao PDR:

NPPO requests assistance:

- (1) unique internationally harmonized software;
- (2) computerized system installation in main international check points;
- (3) powerful independent server base support;
- (4) training on software maintenance and
- (5) training English language.