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New Irrigation Systems and Information are Helping Revive Livelihoods in Lao PDR **Projects**



ADB is helping Lao PDR reduce economic losses resulting from floods and droughts. The project will pair upgrades in water management infrastructure with

community-based disaster risk management and enhanced regional forecasting to improve disaster preparedness in the GMS. Photo by ADB.

Orlathai Ferchanthala dreams of turning her family's subsistence farm into a commercial business growing rice and a range of cash crops, raising livestock, and outfitted with a modern irrigation system.

"The soil here is suitable for growing various crops, and the grass is perfect for raising cattle," said Ferchanthala, a 35-year-old mother of three living in a rural community in southern Vientiane. "We need irrigation schemes to bring water into our farming areas in the dry season and proper dikes to protect us from floods in the rainy season."

Ferchanthala lives in the floodplain of the Mak Hiao River, which flows through her neighborhood on its way to the Mekong River. Water levels in the Mekong River fluctuate during the rainy and dry seasons, causing extensive flooding or drought in nearby districts and communities. This threatens agricultural productivity, economic activity, and the livelihoods of the more than 60,000 people living in the area.

Helping farmers cope with flood, drought

With the changes in the season affecting her family's livelihoods, Ferchanthala said they sometimes do not have enough to eat as floods destroy crops and submerge houses, roads, and other agricultural infrastructure.

The government is working to help communities address these challenges through the Greater Mekong Subregion Flood and Drought Risk Management and Mitigation Project, which is partly financed by a \$36.5 million loan and grant from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

ADB's assistance, which was approved in 2012, has supported the design and implementation of measures to help farmers like Ferchanthala better manage floods and droughts in the provinces of Khammouan and Savannakhet, as well as in Vientiane.

"This is a long-awaited project for the people in the southern Vientiane capital region, which brings a set of preparedness measures, along with community participation, to improve flood and drought risk management and reduce their vulnerability to floods," said Soukaseum Dalasene, the Project Director of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport's Department of Waterways.

The project has built a 32.2-kilometer flood embankment-cum-road in the Hatxaifong District and installed seven water control gates. These structures have helped protect 20,000 hectares of agricultural land and surrounding communities from flooding.

Livelihoods revived

More importantly, the project has helped stabilize the farming economy by constructing concrete canal systems as part of pump irrigation schemes. This system now provides more than 2,000 people in Xaythany District, where Ferchanthala lives, with enough water for agricultural production in the dry season while protecting them from floods in the rainy season.

The project also trained farmers on how to manage the entire agriculture process through Water User Groups, demonstration gardens, and techniques on increasing food crop yields.

“Reducing risks and poverty caused by floods and droughts in the Lower Mekong Basin, particularly in the Lao PDR, is about building infrastructure that is resilient to disasters and equipping affected communities with skills to plan, predict, and prepare for climate change,” said Yasushi Negishi, ADB’s Country Director for Lao PDR.

Sysavanh Xorsathit, a villager in Xaythany District, said people in his community are “very proud” to have learned how to plant and grow crops, access markets, and manage water use. Farmers used to grow only one crop a year, but now they can plant two crops a year, including melons and cantaloupes, and sell them at nearby markets.

“There used to be no planting in the dry season, but now planting is done throughout the year,” said Xorsathit.

More than 35% of the project’s beneficiaries are women, who are earning more money and improving the quality of their families’ lives.

“I am enjoying my livelihood now without worrying about the flash floods like in the past, and I can secure food and income for my family and support my kids for their education,” said Ferchanthala.

This article was originally published on the [ADB website](#) [3].

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