



SUCCESS STORY

Lao Lawmakers Prepare for WTO Accession

Experiences of Vietnam and Cambodia used to explore the benefits of trade reform



Opening the trade workshop (from left) are: U.S. Ambassador to Laos Ravic Huso; Chairman of the Economics, Planning and Finance Committee of the Lao National Assembly Khamsing Sayakone; Lao Minister of Industry and Commerce Dr. Nam Viyaketh; and the Director of USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia Olivier Carduner.

The day before the Lao National Assembly met for their workshop, the Lao ministry of commerce entered the second phase of a USAID project to comply with WTO and U.S.-Lao Bilateral Trade Agreement requirements.

For least-developed countries, such as Laos, World Trade Organization (WTO) accession is a daunting task.

To lessen the burden and help Laos succeed in its commitments to the U.S.-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), USAID sponsored a workshop for the Lao National Assembly. The seminar used the experiences of Vietnam and Cambodia to help Lao parliamentarians understand how to clear the hurdles and benefit from WTO accession and BTA implementation.

Siphana Sok, the lead negotiator for Cambodia's WTO accession, discussed how Cambodia has benefitted from its WTO membership and what it took to meet WTO requirements. Ngo Duc Manh, a member of Vietnam's National Assembly, discussed how USAID's technical assistance proved invaluable in Vietnam's WTO accession and U.S.-Vietnam BTA negotiations.

In the five years since the U.S.-Vietnam BTA was signed, labor-intensive Vietnamese exports to the U.S. have grown eight-fold and U.S. exports to Vietnam have doubled. American direct foreign investment has boomed. And the implementation of the U.S.-Vietnam BTA completed many of the legal, regulatory and administrative reforms required for WTO accession.

Citing the successes of Vietnam, Dawn Shackleford, of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), described how Laos can use the BTA as a stepping stone to WTO accession. The USTR's Robert Fisher discussed liberalization and public-private sector dialogue when making trade reforms.

U.S. Ambassador Ravic Huso stressed the U.S.'s commitment to helping Laos benefit from trade. The Lao Minister of Industry and Commerce, Dr. Nam Viyaketh, emphasized the importance of trade to foster his country's growth and development.

The 70 parliamentarians and government officials participating in the workshop praised it as a rare opportunity to explore the mechanics of trade reform and meet with international experts.

The workshop was part of USAID's Laos WTO/BTA Project to meet WTO accession requirements, comply with U.S.-Laos BTA obligations, and fulfill its commitments to the ASEAN Economic Community.