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## Insects on the menu

Lao PDR

Rice is the key staple food in Laos, but rice alone is not enough for good nutrition: access to and consumption of adequate quantities of a variety of safe, good quality foods are required to provide nutritional needs. There is an acute need for improving the diet with regard to protein, energy and other nutrients in Lao PDR, where chronic malnourishment has been recognized as a serious problem. The most common type of malnourishment is protein and/or energy malnutrition but people often also suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, such as vitamin A, iron, iodine and vitamin B1. Despite 10 years of robust economic growth, malnutrition rates of Lao children under the age of 5 are among the highest in the South East Asian Region, with 40 percent of the children being chronically undernourished or stunted (according to WFP).

Insects have traditionally played an important role in the South-East Asian diet with, among others, beetles, termites, cicadas, dragonflies, crickets and locusts

being commonly consumed. Insects offer a good source of nutrients with high protein content, as well as many vital vitamins and minerals and are comparable to more conventional animal sources. It is also recognized that some insects can be raised as a human food source the same way as more conventional livestock, such as cattle, pigs and poultry.

Compared to conventional livestock the food conversion efficiency (an animal's efficiency in converting feed mass into increased body mass) is much higher in insects making them a more 'environmentally friendly meat'. Currently in Lao PDR the only species that is farmed is cricket and the only area where farming has been encountered is in the capital Vientiane.

The project focusses on strengthening the existing role of insects as complementary food in the Lao diet and on insect farming, but also on enhancing the

sustainability, safety, and efficiency of collection, preparing, post-harvest processing, sales and consumption of insects, as well as preserving traditional practices. A comprehensive approach, recognizing the role of traditional collecting of insects from the wild, along with the introduction of insect farming, has been assessed as the most appropriate strategy.

### Outputs:

1. Existing knowledge and practices related to edible insects in Lao PDR are documented, gaps identified, and opportunities prioritized to provide a sound foundation for the development and promotion of increased consumption of insects as food.
2. Awareness and appreciation of the opportunities for sustainable insect production, harvesting from natural habitats and consumption is increased and opportunities promoted to support and facilitate the expansion of insect production and consumption in Lao PDR.
3. Viable and profitable insect farming practices introduced and promoted in selected provinces through capacity building and technology transfer.
4. Sustainable practices for edible insect handling, harvesting from natural habitats as well as farms, processing, transport, marketing, etc. are developed to increase income and livelihood opportunities and expand the availability of safe, affordable and culturally relevant food supplies.

FAO's support to this project is an immediate response to several interventions identified in the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) and National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN) adopted in December 2009. Evidently, there is a strong political will from the Government of Lao PDR to tackle malnutrition, however, the funding and technical support to undertake concrete activities will still take time to mobilize. FAO will through technical support, knowledge transfer, and training contribute to several of the core strategic objectives for reducing chronic malnutrition. The project aims to use FAO's specialized technical competencies and established coordinating role amongst stakeholders.

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### LINKS

[http://www.fao.org/world/laos/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/world/laos/index_en.htm)



Insect collecting. © FAO

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