

The Lao PDR in Brief



In many ways the Lao PDR is a unique country in the whole of South East Asia. It is the only landlocked country, sharing borders with Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and China, and it has the highest ethnic diversity in the area with more than 120 different groups distinguished by their languages and customs. At the same time Laos, having roughly the same size as Great Britain 236.000 square km), shows the lowest population density (approx. 25 inhabitants / square km) in South East Asia.

Having seen a multitude of ethnic groups from the North and East settling in the fertile valleys of Laos in prehistoric periods it was for the first time united and became a kingdom in the 14th century, then being called Lane Xang (country of a million elephants). The monarchy strived until the end of the 17th century.

At the end of the 19th century Laos became part of French Indochina and finally independent in 1954.

Although having declared itself a neutral country, Laos was drawn into the Vietnam war, in particular its eastern parts, where the US Air Force dropped more than a million tons of bombs until 1973. By then the Pathet Lao, the national resistance movement, controlled two thirds of the country.



In 1975 the Pathet Lao took over the government and the Revolutionary Peoples Congress decided to abolish monarchy after more than 660 years. Laos became a People's Republic ruled by the Lao Peoples Revolutionary Party (LPRP).

Today the Lao PDR, after many years of seclusion, is opening up to the world and is facing a multitude of challenges in this process. Being among the poorest countries in Asia, the Government has committed itself strongly in the fight against poverty.

As the vast majority of the approx. 7,5 Million Laotians live in rural areas and depend in their livelihoods on agriculture, development of rural areas is one focal point of development activities. For many ethnic communities previously depending entirely on subsistence agriculture to participate in a new, market-oriented economy is a big change which has to be managed gradually. It is precisely here where Deutsche Welthungerhilfe/GAA assists the village farmers in rural Laos.