



## **Xaypladeth Choulamany**

Dear friends and colleagues!

After 37 years of government services in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) I have finally retired at the age of more than 60!

After my graduation from the Academy of Agriculture of Belorussia, former State of the Soviet Union, I started work as a young agricultural economist at the State Agro-Processing Company in 1982, where I worked as an agriculture extension officer. I was then promoted to manager, in charge of the promotion and procurement of raw materials in the areas surrounding Vientiane Capital/Province, with a particular focus in Vangvieng and Kasi Districts. All the field crops produced by farmers (i.e. maize and cassava) were procured for the Tha Ngon Animal Feed Mill. This was the only modern animal feed mill in Laos at that time, with a capacity of 40,000 tons per year. The main role of the State Company was to produce and provide food to Government shops for all Government employees in the Capital.

In 1989 after “Privatization Policy”, the State Company premises were given out as concessions to the private sector. I therefore rejoined MAF and in 1990, was appointed National Project Director of the Xiengkhouang Highland Integrated Development Programme. This was funded by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the United Nation International Drug Control Program (UNDCP). A project amounting to more than USD 12 million and consisting of various components, including infrastructure development (labor-based road construction and construction of schools, health centers, clean water systems and irrigation); community development & income generation activities; Training Trial and Demonstration Centers (on various commercial crops and large livestock); extension services & small scale credit. The overall aim of the Xiengkhouang project was to alleviate poverty and find alternatives to opium cultivation - a challenge for this province!

After 5 years heading the Programme I applied for post-graduate study and in 1996, was admitted to the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok where I undertook a Master's degree in Rural Development Planning.

After completing my Master's in 1997, I was appointed National Project Director of a DANIDA supported project, to establish the Living Aquatic Resources Research Center (LARReC - under the National Agriculture Research Institute), and became the Center's Director. LARReC received substantial financial and technical support from various international Development Partners and it became a Center of Excellence for inland fisheries in the Mekong region.

In 2003 I was appointed Deputy Permanent Secretary of MAF in charge of International Cooperation. Apart of the duties of a Permanent Secretary Office, one of my tasks was to implement the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. This was a challenging task, especially when working at Ministerial level under the close guidance and supervision of MAF leadership.

I was then appointed Deputy Director-General of the Department of Planning and Cooperation (2007) and in 2009, was seconded to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) as the Fisheries Program Manager. This was the first time a riparian officer led the Fisheries Program of MRC (in the past the Program had only been led by international experts), and it was a challenge dealing with 4 countries. I learned a great deal about the Mekong's fisheries biodiversity and the management systems and style of an international/regional development agency.

In 2012, I was called back to MAF to become the Director-General of the Department of Planning and Cooperation which was subsequently renamed to the Department of Planning and Finance. The Department's main Divisions are Planning, Budgeting, Finances, International Cooperation, Investment, Economic Integration, Project Monitoring, and Agriculture Statistics.

Over all these years I have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience. The support of my friends and colleagues has been critical, and it wouldn't have been possible to achieve such high targets in my professional career without this support. I am very proud and happy to have reached the level of Director-General and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to all those who have supported me, especially my superiors, my colleagues, my friends and of course my family!

I do hope we all could meet again one day, in downtown Vientiane or somewhere in Laos or perhaps somewhere abroad. Meanwhile, may I wish you all good health, success and happiness!

Let's keep in touch!

Cheers!