

PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES WILL SUPPORT THE PREPARATION OF FORESTRY MASTER'S STUDY PROGRAMMES IN LAOS

Helsinki, 15 October 2017 – The EU has funded a project to support the development of forestry higher education in Laos under the auspices of European universities. The University of Helsinki together with the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague and University of Freiburg will participate in upgrading the forestry higher education curriculum in Laos. Emphasis will be placed on supporting MSc forestry study programmes.

Forestry Higher Education Advancement in Laos. This is the full name of the project, which is presented under the acronym ForHeal. The overall aim of the project is to strengthen the forest-related higher education system in Laos to improve domestic capacity to sustainably manage forests for the benefit of the people and the environment, while at the same time enabling Laos to effectively respond to the demands and opportunities of international processes such as the Agenda 2030 (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Although Laos economy is on a strong growth path, development effects are uneven and poverty remains widespread, especially in rural areas. Forests play an important role for Lao's economy. Export of wood products alone makes up over 10% of Laos' export income. Forest covers more than 40% of Lao's total land area, but has been subject to consistent deforestation, about 0.7% a year since 1982. Continued degradation of forestry resources is not only detrimental to GDP and urgently required cash flow, but may also threaten the progress made in rural poverty reduction and food security. Prof. Markku Kanninen from University of Helsinki adds: "Lao's forestry higher education system is still at an early stage, and inadequately prepared to effectively handle the enormous challenges. There is a strong regional disparity in forestry higher education. Particularly, post-grad courses are only available in the capital city Vientiane. Universities situated nearer to the forest regions offer only BSc degrees."

"The ForHeal project will tackle these critical shortcomings so to strengthen forestry higher education system in Laos", explains prof. Turčáni, dean of the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences from Prague. The project is coordinated by the University of Helsinki and, together with the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague and University of Freiburg, will provide support to three universities in Laos – Savannakhet University (SKU), Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang (SU) and National University of Laos in Vientiane (NUOL).

The ForHeal project will focus on improving and consolidating NUOL's existing Forestry MSc program, by supporting the intensification of exchange and collaboration between NUOL and two regional Universities located in key regions (SU and SKU), as well as by developing new, cutting edge MSc programs in these regional partner Universities. This together will help to create a new generation of much needed, well-trained and qualified forestry personnel to meet the country's need in this field.

The project is funded by the ERASMUS + programme, Key Action No. 2 Capacity Building in Higher Education. For more information, you can visit the project website at: forheal.eu.

