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## Laotian children to get healthy meals under UN project that also helps local farmers



School meals provide vital nourishment, act as safety net for poor families and also help keep children in school

23 March 2011 – For the first time in Laos, nearly 1,000 primary school children will receive a healthy, balanced school lunch prepared from food bought at the local market under a joint United Nations-Government pilot project that will also benefit local farmers.

The children will receive a lunch made from rice provided by the UN World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and completed by food which their school buys at local markets.

“The Government of Lao PDR has already made great strides towards a national school meals programme,” WFP country representative Eri Kudo [said](#), using the official title of the South-East Asian country – Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

“The Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) pilot is an important step in this direction, and WFP stands ready to support the Government now and in the future to ensure no child in Lao PDR has to attend school hungry.”

During the past week, 42 officials from the Laotian education ministry have been trained on the principles of HGSF and healthy nutrition. Activities will be piloted in nine villages across Phongsaly and Oudomxay provinces during the 2011-2012 school year, starting in September.

The project will not only ensure children receive a nutritious meal every day they attend classes, but also support local farmers by buying the foods they produce. The lessons learned in the pilot

villages will be used to refine the programme and expand HGSF to more schools in the following school year.

Some 157,000 pre-primary and primary school students children living in remote villages in Laos already benefit from the WFP-assisted school meals programme. Every day at school, they receive a nutritious mid-morning snack that stills short-term hunger and helps them concentrate on their lessons.

At the beginning and end of the school year, take-home rations of rice are given to the students to help them and their families continue on the path of education. In addition to the nutritional benefits, school meals have been shown to be an effective way to encourage parents to send their children, especially girls, to school.

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