H.E Nicola Pontara, World Bank Country Manager took a keynote speech at Lancang Mekong Seminar on Community Driven Development

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From November 22-23, Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry held Lancang Mekong Seminar on Community Driven Development at Landmark Mekong Riverside Hotel and honored opening remarks of H.E Thongphat Vongmany, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and co-chaired by H.E Nichola Pontara, the World Bank Country Manager to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Their Excellency the Ambassador of Cambodia and Thailand with attendance of representatives of the Lancang Mekong cooperation countries, local Government officials, representatives from mass organizations, academia and international organizations over 100 people.

H.E Nicola Pontara, World Bank Country Manager honored gives a keynote speech at the seminar:

Thank you for inviting me to join this important regional gathering of community-driven development specialists. This event offers an excellent opportunity for self-reflection and knowledge sharing among the key Community Driven Development or CDD implementers across the Southeast Asia region.

Lives are most effectively and sustainably improved when the very beneficiaries participate in the identification, design and even implementation of development activities. This is the ethos of CDD approaches and we at the World Bank recognize and support such inclusive methods.

As of last year, the World Bank had 199 active CDD projects in 78 different countries, with total financing of nearly $20 billion, 65% of which comes from the World Bank and the remainder from government financing (as is the case here in Lao PDR), and other development partners such as SDC.
who is currently supporting the Poverty Reduction Fund, or the PRF, ? and many others. I am very pleased to recognize the generous support of the Chinese Government for this important event and for related research activities led by PRF.

The World Bank is proud to be associated with Lao PDR?s primary vehicle for CDD, the Poverty Reduction Fund, since its creation 16 years ago to support

The government to implement the first National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) launched in 2003. As I?m sure you will learn over the next couple of days, PRF has played an important role in helping to decrease the prevalence of poverty in the country, particularly by increasing access to basic services such as improved water supply, primary education, health, access roads, electricity, irrigation and other services.

And while the poverty rate continues to drop from 42% in 1992 to a projected 18% this year, further reductions may be more challenging as we approach the last mile. Villages with high poverty rates are scattered across the country, each facing its own unique challenges that will need to be addressed in ways that are specific to the needs of the area. The need for community-driven approaches will be even greater.

As one of the country?s main instruments for fighting poverty, PRF will need to, and indeed has already begun to, expand its approach to not only focus on village access to infrastructure and services, but to start to support individual poor households to invest in themselves for the production and sale of agricultural and other products. PRF is leveraging the power of social capital, forming groups for mutual support of their members to access finance, skills and information to reach new markets and to generate incomes.

Such collaboration is also needed to identify effective ways to protect communities vulnerable to natural disaster, to prevent the move out of poverty from sliding backwards.

With the recent negotiation of additional World Bank financing, the Government of Lao PDR will be urging PRF forward to use its community-driven development expertise to form groups of mothers to address high levels of child stunting through the production, consumption and preparation of healthy food for their young children. Food security and early childhood development are essential elements of poverty reduction, in ensuring that future generations have greater human potential and the capacity to further develop the country.