

## UpLao Coffee Management summary

The mountainous area of the Luang Namtha Province, in the North East of Lao PDR, is covered in forest and home to more than forty different ethnic minorities. This area is part of the Golden Triangle, an area renowned for its opium production. To put an end to this, several schemes were set up to develop the area and to provide the people with an income by farming cash crops. Rubber was introduced as a cash-crop opportunity for these rural economies, but this experiment failed dramatically because of huge price drops. Moreover, the ecological pressure on local ecosystems by this high intensive plantation agriculture is enormous.

Luang Namtha Province is in desperate need of sustainable rural development alternatives. Following the example of neighbouring countries such as Thailand, high quality coffee plantations can be introduced in the area. Luang Namtha province appears to be very appropriate for growing high quality coffee, because of its altitude of up to 1400 meters.

This creates great opportunities for providing hill-tribe communities with a sustainable source of income. Especially when coffee is grown organically, the production costs are very low because there's no need for agro-chemicals and labour can be absorbed by family workers. Although yields are lower, market prices for organically grown coffee are much higher. By creating sustainable livelihoods and improving social wellbeing based on small-scale high quality agricultural production the continued existence of these communities is safeguarded and the cultural diversity of the area will be sustained. Besides, the organic plantations we foresee have a long lifespan of over 35 years providing the farmer with a stable source of income. Hence there's less need for slash and burn practices. Moreover, an inherent advantage is that a relatively large biodiversity can be sustained on the plantations itself by using shade-, fruit and nut-trees simultaneously on the plantation sites. As such the project also makes a positive contribution to the conservation of natural diversity.

In this light the UpLao Coffee Project (UCP) was developed, a project that will transform Luang Namtha Province to a high quality coffee producing area. UCP will start in Ban Namvang, a village of mainly Hmong ethnic people, where 10 farmers will be trained in producing high quality coffee. They are willing to invest their time, labour and will use 1 hectare of their land each for the project. Besides coffee, UCP will integrate other valuable crops, such as fruit and nut trees that will function as the necessary shade trees on the plantation. This diversification will make farmers less vulnerable to possible price fluctuations and further contribute to secure sustainable livelihoods.

After helping the local farmers setting up their plantation, by providing seedlings, expertise and guidance from the technical staff of the Viengphouka district Agricultural Research Centre at Nam Fa, UCP will enable the farmers to access the international coffee market. UCP believes that the diversity in this area, which is unique in the world, makes this coffee very attractive in terms of marketing. The area could become a region where numerous amounts of single estate coffees are produced by a colourful pallet of ethnic communities.

Gradually, the region will be transformed into a high quality coffee producing area, reducing poverty while protecting natural and cultural diversity.

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