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| For immediate release15 December 2021 |
| **The recovery and sustainability of the Lao tourism industry is a priority for Plan International Laos and its partners.** |

**Vientiane Capital, 15 December 2021:** The Department of Trade Promotion, Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) and Plan International have signed a Memorandum of Understand to support Micro, Small, and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Lao tourism industry. This will be implemented through the “SUSTOUR Laos” project which is funded by the European Union. The project aims to improve the sustainability of the Lao tourism industry by integrating MSMEs into tourism industry supply chains through promotion and certification of sustainable consumption and production practices of local MSMEs.

“This is an important initiative in supporting the long-term recovery of a sustainable tourism sector and contribute to Laos National Green Growth Strategy, 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan, and the National Tourism Strategy which will focus on capacity building and promoting entrepreneurs to adopt sustainable consumption and production practices, efficient use of natural resources, and become a socially responsible business,” said Mr. Xaysomphet Norlasing, Director General, Department of Trade Promotion, MoIC.

The SUSTOUR Laosprojectis implemented by Plan International and key partners, the Department of Trade Promotion of MoIC, and the European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism (ECEAT).

Plan International Laos, with funding from the European Union and Plan International Germany, has committed to implement the SUSTOUR Laos project in 11 districts across Luang Prabang Province, Vientiane Province, and Vientiane Capital. Running until mid-2024, the project will include the roll-out of the Travelife sustainability programme among local tourism industry MSMEs.

“The MoU for this project is very timely as Laos prepares for reopening to tourism in the coming months. The project will play an essential role in supporting economic recovery of the country from the unprecedented global pandemic that has an adverse effect on the global and domestic tourism sector, and contribute to the green transition of the sector”, expressed the EU Ambassador, Ina Marčiulionytė

The project will develop and implement sustainability initiatives within the Lao tourism supply chain and improve conditions for tourist-host communities by adopting sustainable consumption and production practices among Lao tourism MSMEs, including travel agencies, tour operators, accommodations and their suppliers. The project also aims to improve their operations, services, and products to become more socially, economically, and environmentally friendly and attract the growing demand of sustainable tourism among international and domestic tourists. Adoption of sustainable practices will be certified and awarded by the Travelife certification standard developed by ECEAT and recognized internationally as the leading sustainability certification system in the tourism industry.

“Plan International is both honoured and appreciative of the opportunity to be a lead organization in the SUSTOUR Laos project with the Department of Trade Promotion; the European Union and project partners. This project will create opportunities with our government partners and MSMEs and support the sustainable recovery of the tourism industry which has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will help to develop our pathway to a greener economy and improve sustainable community based tourism practices by working closely with community members and MSMEs to reduce the social and environmental impacts of tourism. This is an important contribution in building back better and stronger,” remarked Mr. Sengsantisith Sanasisane, The Interim Country Director and Deputy Director of Operations, Plan International in Laos.

The project will generate market demand for sustainable business practices by raising awareness of sustainable MSMEs among consumers, specifically tourists (domestic and international) and international travel agents. This will ultimately benefit Lao businesses in the tourism industry that are adopting sustainable practices with a competitive advantage resulting in increased income and employment opportunities.

“We at the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) express our commitment and vision to create a conducive and highly competitive business environment that contributes significantly to the sustainable business growth of Lao PDR especially support MSMEs access to finance, Lao product marketing development, international economic integration, and sustainable investments to achieve their goals, skill development for quality which can make a huge contribution to the sustainable economic growth of the Lao PDR.” said Mr. Oudet SOUVANNAVONG, President of LNCCI.

In cooperation with government partners and representatives from the private sector, the project will seek to advocate for sustainable consumption and production practices in public and private institutions and will work closely with public and private sector representatives to address challenges and improve opportunities for sustainable tourism practices, including supporting the sustainable recovery of the tourism industry as the country begins to reopen for international tourism.

“We want to see more businesses adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perspectives into their business operations to enhance the image and increase the competitiveness in Lao tourism industry. In this effort, international development partners can support the development of CSR criteria into the national tourism standard. EXO Travel Laos believes in responsible tourism businesses that benefit local communities, protect the environment, and respect local cultures and animal rights. These values are reflected in tourism products of the company and we ensure that CSR is integrated into our core business value, and translated into the company’s working culture,” said Ms. Duangmala Phommavong, Managing Director of EXO Travel Laos.

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**About Plan International Laos**

Since 2007, Plan International Laos has been implementing health, education, and youth economic empowerment activities in target areas of Bokeo, Oudomxay, Saravane, Vientiane, and Luang Prabang Provinces to increase children’s, in particular girls and young women’s, voices, capacity, and leadership in social planning and decision making. Plan International also promotes rights and gender equality with village leaders, parents, and teachers as girls’ allies to support their participation and leadership.

Plan International has worked with the national and local task force against COVID-19 to ensure children, young people, and villagers, especially ethnic and people with hearing impairment access COVID-19 prevention messages and disinfection and sanitation kits since April 2020.

<http://plan-international.org/laos>

<https://www.facebook.com/planinlaos>

**European Union:**

European Union is a partnership of 27 European countries and a friend of the Lao Government and people working together to end poverty. For more information about us, visit <https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lao-pdr_en>

To learn about European Union's work in Laos, please follow [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/EUinlaos), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/euinlaos/?hl=en), and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/euinlaos).

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