

Swiss donate rice to rural communities

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THE United Nations World Food Programme last week welcomed the arrival of rice donated by Switzerland worth US\$378,000, to be distributed to 25,000 needy people in remote areas of Laos.

The arrival of the 770 metric tonnes of rice, which is the first ever Swiss contribution to the food distribution agency's operations in Laos, together with the recent opening of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation office in Vientiane, signal new opportunities for cooperation between the two organisations.

"We are highly appreciative of this generous donation and look forward to further cooperation with the Swiss in the future," programme representative in Laos, Ms Christa Rader, said.

She said that the rice would be delivered to remote communities in the seven provinces of Xieng Khuang, Huaphan, Savannakhet, Attapeu, Saravan, Champassak and Khammuan. Many areas of these provinces are still contaminated with unexploded ordnance and families struggle to produce enough to feed themselves throughout the year.

"All the villages receiving rice have participated in WFP food-for-work activities, creating assets such as paddy land, access roads and fish ponds to improve their longer term food security," Ms Rader



Dr Barbara Boni (left) presents rice to Ms Christa Rader in Vientiane.

said.

The Swiss contribution aims to support the Lao government's efforts in reducing poverty by ensuring the food security of the most vulnerable communities, according to the head of the SDC branch office in Vientiane, Dr Barbara Boni.

She said that the focus of the 'Rural Livelihoods and Governance' programme was on Xieng Khuang province.

"Over the past two years we have developed a stronger partnership with the province through the implementation of three projects. These aim at linking farmers to markets, improving agricultural services for poor areas and contributing to the province's reform efforts," Dr Boni said.

"We are pleased that with

this donation we will be able to reach some of the poorest communities in Xieng Khuang as well as in six provinces," she said.

The WFP's distribution of the rice will be carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. This collaboration was launched in 2004 as a follow up to the programme's emergency assistance in Laos.

This year, the WFP also began collaboration with the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (*Foundation Suisse de Deminage*) which conducts clearance of ordnance in villages targeted by WFP for relief and recovery assistance. As a result, land that was previously impossible to farm is being turned into productive capital.