



Economic Empowerment



BACKGROUND

Per the Laos Trade Facilitation Roadmap 2017-2022, the country's income from exports is only 54% of GDP, much lower than Thailand (126%), Vietnam (178%), and Cambodia (127%). Local businesses and consumers similarly lag behind Lao PDR's neighbors in utilizing ICT for transactions. While sales frequently happen on social media, payment is still in cash, and poor last-mile logistics impede delivery.

The Asia Foundation works to address these challenges through support to both regulatory and legislative improvements, and immediate solutions for entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The Foundation's Go Digital ASEAN initiative targets underserved youth in the digital economy and society, particularly those in rural and poor areas, along with MSME owners new to the digital economy with the potential to raise their incomes from stronger digital literacy and online safety awareness.



Photograph by Van Hai for Golden Age Handicrafts

E-commerce

The Foundation supports policy to increase e-commerce readiness and ASEAN economic integration by improving the quality and relevance of information supplied to the National Assembly regarding priority concerns for the e-trade and e-commerce sectors. Simultaneously, the Foundation improves e-commerce readiness of MSMEs by identifying, promoting, and demonstrating practical solutions to current bottlenecks faced by MSMEs.

ToolaKit MSME App

Collaborating with STELLA, a vibrant and innovative social enterprise that engages with youth, and the National University of Laos, one of the Foundation's longest partnerships in Lao PDR, the Go Digital ASEAN initiative is developing digital literacy. 8000 youth entrepreneurs and MSMEs are on target to receive training in digital literacy, marketing, online business, resources, personal efficiency, and more. The initiative also seeks to grow and cement a network of growing enterprises for engagement by the Foundation in future work.



ToolaKit is an app developed with support from Google.org. The app targets entrepreneurs and MSMEs to increase access to the digital skills needed to start and improve a business.

Shortly after Lao PDR sheltered in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation convened dozens of MSMEs, developers, and logistics companies online to identify priority gaps to digital trade and design the needed assistance. The Foundation supports MSMEs working in tourism, agriculture, and local crafts to develop their e-commerce capabilities in both the short and long term, for example, through assistance on e-commerce management capacity, customer service, marketing and content, and digital payment solutions. E-commerce is more important than ever to help the Lao economy weather the pandemic-related economic recession.



ToolaKit, reaching

8000

MSMEs and entrepreneurs
via an online business literacy app.

8,000

participants
[4000 women, 4000 men]
on target to be trained in digital literacy for business by 2021, in Vientiane, flowing down to Bolikhamxay and Champassak Province

2020



Online courses in Lao language on e-commerce basics (74 episodes) and content marketing (13 episodes) available free of charge on katalyst-learning.com.



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