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## Cambodian, Laotian handicraft producers seek export boost at Lifestyle Vietnam

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Geneva – Cambodian and Laotian handicraft industries are set to benefit from increased export and sales opportunities by participating at Lifestyle Vietnam, one of Asia’s main handicraft fairs.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is ensuring the participation of 6 silk companies from Cambodia and 11 handicraft companies from Lao People’s Democratic Republic at the annual Lifestyle Vietnam that will be held in Ho Chi Minh City on 18-21 April. The event, which features more than 500 exhibitors, is one of Asia’s main fairs for home décor and handicrafts and is supported by the Viet Nam One UN initiative, where ITC is lead partner along with five other UN agencies.

Participation in Lifestyle Vietnam is part of a larger ITC effort for the development of the handicraft sectors in Asian LDCs, particularly Cambodia and Lao PDR. Prior to the event, Cambodian and Laotian companies received training and advisory support from ITC experts in product quality and design, marketing, pricing and costing, communication with buyers and trade fair participation. Post-event activities are set to further increase the impact and sustainability of the businesses.

In Cambodia, ITC works to help promote the export of high-value silk and increase competitiveness in the silk sector for job creation and income growth, particularly for women. Women make up the vast majority of the country’s 20,000 silk weavers. Most of them are contract labourers who work for intermediaries such as middlemen, traders or associations, who supply raw materials and collect the finished products.

The Royal Government of Cambodia is targeting the silk industry as a strategic area for rural poverty reduction and job creation. Poor farmers and producers in rural areas make up 85% of the country’s population. ITC has been supporting the Cambodian silk sector since 2005 and the implementation of previous silk projects has resulted in an average increase in weavers’ income by 39% and the sale of silk products has risen by 43%.

In Lao PDR, ITC works to support the economic development of the handicraft sector. Through its programmes, ITC has enabled 1,500 Laotian producers, mostly women from poor rural farming households, to sell their handmade cotton and silk products in Luang Prabang province, one of the country’s main tourism hotspots.

Participation in Lifestyle Vietnam is organized within the framework of the ‘Cambodia Export Diversification and Expansion Program’ and the ‘Lao PDR: Enhancing sustainable tourism, clean production and export capacity’ programme. These programmes are led by the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Government of Lao PDR. The programme in Cambodia is funded by the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), while the programme in Lao PDR is funded by Switzerland’s State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small- and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries become more competitive in global markets, thus contributing to sustainable economic development while contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

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