



HELVETAS

SPACE Project– Supporting Participatory and Accountable Citizen Engagement

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation is a Swiss NGO that has been promoting fundamental human rights for over 60 years. It has over 1,600 collaborators and operates in over **30 countries**.

LA COLLABORAZIONE CON FAI:

Helvetas and the FAI have been collaborating since **2009**, when the foundation started supporting the association's projects in Benin, Nepal, Mozambique and Laos.

Helvetas has been operating in Laos since 2001, with **food security** projects, fair access to markets and the creation of commercial supply chains, sustainable agriculture and support for farmers' organizations, education and access to information, resources and services. It has also worked on building roads and bridges, drinking water supply systems and health and hygiene projects and has held discussions and raised awareness on broad issues like access to land, social justice, gender equality and equal opportunities and the active participation of citizens in these areas of their life.

After the declaration of independence in 1954, **Laos** went through about 20 years of armed conflicts, which in 1975, led to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) taking control, overcoming the monarchy and establishing a socialist regime.

According to the Constitution of 1991, Laos is formally a parliamentary republic but in fact it is a single party regime. The LPRP has signed treaties and agreements promoting human rights and sustainable development. Nonetheless there is a **severe lack of citizens' active participation in the democratic process**, especially among the poorest and most marginalized populations, for example those from the areas included the project's activities.

Since **2009**, Helvetas has been working on facilitating relations between the civil society and the state authorities at local, regional and national levels. **The results can already be seen**: civil society organizations have improved and they provide more services than before, people no longer consider themselves as "subjects" or customers but as **citizens who can hold and express opinions, claim rights and take on duties**. According to Helvetas, this change must be supported and promoted.

The success achieved in these years has created relationships of trust with the government authorities and with the civil society and the **SPACE** project was set up based on this trust.

The SPACE project focuses on the topic of advocacy and helps the citizens of Laos organize themselves so they can voice their ideas, implement their initiatives and influence government decisions. This way they can contribute to a **sustainable and inclusive development of the country and guarantee good living conditions, development, justice and social cohesion, also to the poorest people in the most remote areas of the country. The role of civil society organizations is vital** since by becoming better organized they can express the population's requests and start a dialogue with the local institutions and the government.