



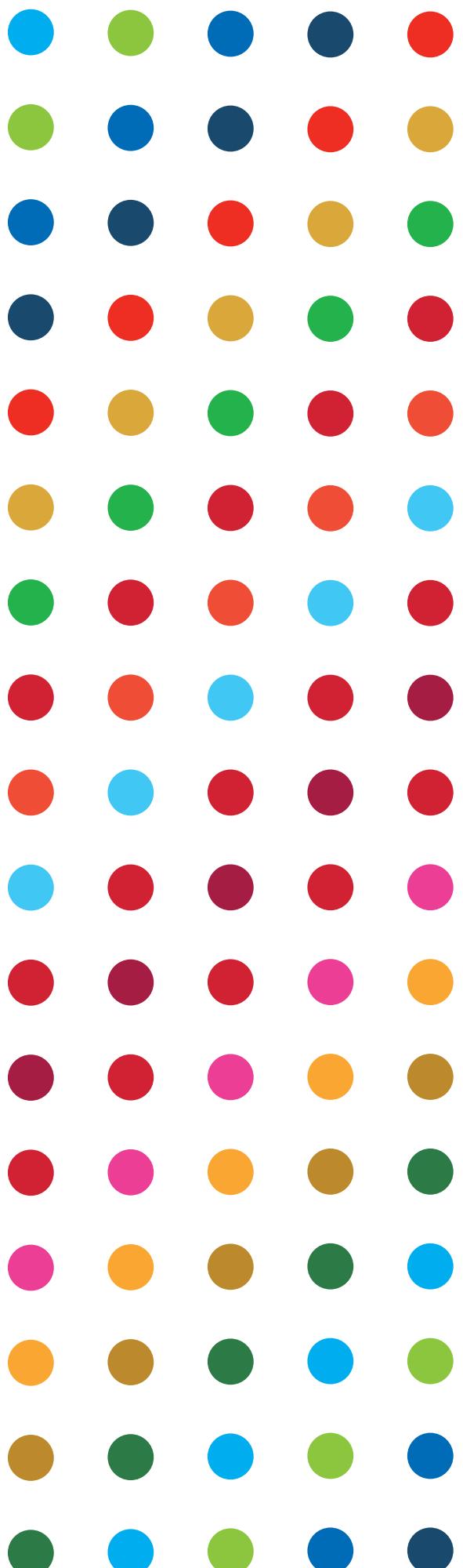
UNITED NATIONS  
LAO PDR



# 2019 PROGRESS REPORT

Lao PDR – United Nations  
Partnership Framework 2017-2021  
A Partnership for Sustainable Development

The United Nations in Lao PDR, 2020



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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
IMAM	Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ISO	International Standards Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
LDC	Least Developed Country
PCB	Polychlorinated Biphenyl
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
REDD	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
RMNCH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## UN SYSTEM IN LAO PDR

DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
ILO	International Labor Organization
ITC	International Trade Center
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank also have a presence in Lao PDR.

# INTRODUCTION



As this report documenting results and progress achieved through the UN Partnership Framework (UNPF) in 2019 was under preparation, the COVID-19 global pandemic was underway, with the first cases in Lao PDR detected in March 2020. Beyond the immediate public health crisis, COVID-19's ultimate socio-economic impact may lead to reversals in the progress and results achieved to date. These findings and details will be presented in the year to come since the full magnitude and implications of the pandemic are not yet fully understood noting in addition, that COVID-19 is also beyond the scope of 2019 results reporting.

The year 2019, brought a number of challenges but also great cause for optimism to Lao PDR, as the country moved closer to attaining its national ambition of graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, potentially becoming only the third landlocked developing country to do so, while at the same time, grappling with persistent development challenges including for example, ongoing efforts to build resilience while mitigating the impact of weather and climate-change induced shocks. In addition, no sooner had the country begun its slow but steady recovery from floods in north, central, and southern Laos in 2018, than new floods wreaked havoc in several southern provinces August-September 2019. Compounding the flood-related challenges, in 2019, outbreaks of Dengue Fever posed a severe threat to public health while the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF) and Fall Army Worm (FAW) infestations of vital crops, threatened the livelihoods and food security of communities in affected areas. Against this backdrop, Lao PDR's economic growth contracted to just under 6 per cent in 2019, down from 6.3 per cent in 2018,<sup>1</sup> and 6.8 per cent in 2017,<sup>2</sup> with both agricultural and industrial production declining due to the 2019 floods. With the continued current account deficit, low levels of foreign reserves, a high level of debt, managed exchange rate, and a dollarized banking system, Lao PDR is vulnerable to macroeconomic uncertainties.<sup>3</sup> Inflation continued to rise after falling to a low of 0.8 per cent in 2017, reaching 2 per cent in 2018 and 3.3 per cent in 2019, reflecting higher fuel and food prices and the depreciation of the Lao Kip against the Thai Baht and US Dollar in 2019 by 7.6 per cent and 3.6 per cent, respectively.<sup>4</sup> On a brighter note, over the past few years, Lao PDR achieved remarkable economic growth rates, with headline GDP growth rates averaging close to 8 per cent over the past decade, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia-Pacific region. This has been attributed in part to strong and sustained social progress, for example, with life expectancy at birth increasing from 64 in 2009 to 65 in 2017 and 66 in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Key drivers of economic growth have included exports of natural resources and heavy investment in major hydroelectric and infrastructure projects.

1 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/overview>

2 [https://www.bol.gov.la/en/fileupload/20-05-2019\\_1558320515.pdf](https://www.bol.gov.la/en/fileupload/20-05-2019_1558320515.pdf)

3 Lao People's Democratic Republic: 2019 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; Statement by the Executive Director for Lao People's Democratic Republic

4 <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/818841549314902040/pdf/134324-REPLACEMENT-PUBLIC-LEM-2019-January.pdf>

5 Population and Housing Census 2015, LSB, MPI

At sub-national level, decision makers also showed increasing initiative in taking forward provincial development efforts. However, funding long-term capital investments, combined with decentralization of decision making, has stretched Government's immediate financing capacity, leading to growing economic risks. Consistent fiscal deficits have been recorded, resulting in general Government debt reaching 59.9 per cent of GDP in 2019,<sup>1</sup> in addition to increasing levels of contingent liabilities accrued amongst State-owned Enterprises (SoEs). As a result, Government has taken measures to tighten controls concerning expenditure and limiting the public sector wage bill.<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister issued a Decree in October 2019, on the management and use of Official Development Assistance (ODA),<sup>3</sup> covering both grants and concessional loans. The new Decree states that ODA must be used to finance development projects that are in line with the 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP, transparent and auditable as well as compliant with agreements drawn up between Government and development partners. Moreover, it helps to streamline coordination of official support in authorized state agencies such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), thus allowing macroeconomic considerations to be better reflected in investment decisions. Notably, the need for restraint in Government commitments has made it challenging for both the UN System and Government to move towards more sustainable and programmatic modes of support with increased levels of Government financing as originally envisaged. For the UN System's partnership with Lao PDR, this has been associated with a continued need for ODA-sourced development projects to support the implementation of the 8<sup>th</sup> National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), particularly in the health and education sectors.

As a key high point in 2019, Government continued to demonstrate its solid ownership of, and commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through its endorsement of both the SDG Roadmap and a comprehensive set of 238 SDG indicators (SDGI) in June 2019 under the purview of the National SDG Steering Committee, including the distribution/allocation of indicators across line ministries to ensure their effective ownership, monitoring and reporting. Since 2019 also marked the penultimate year of implementation of the 8<sup>th</sup> five-year NSEDP (2016-2020), in preparation for the 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP (2021-2025), the Prime Minister appointed ministers who were tasked with taking initial steps toward the formulation of the next five-year plan that among other priorities, will localize indicators that have not yet been incorporated. A Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM), Lao PDR's annual high-level platform for development dialogue, was subsequently convened in November 2019, focused on the acceleration of the 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP implementation and preparations for the 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP.

1 <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/962271591369090988/Lao-Economic-Monitor-June-2020-final.pdf>

2 [https://www.mof.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LAO-PDR-PEFA-Final-for-publication-12\\_09\\_2019.pdf](https://www.mof.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LAO-PDR-PEFA-Final-for-publication-12_09_2019.pdf)

3 [https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Decree-357-on-the-Management-and-Utilization-of-Official-Development-Assistance\\_9-Oct-2019-English-Unofficial-Translation.pdf](https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Decree-357-on-the-Management-and-Utilization-of-Official-Development-Assistance_9-Oct-2019-English-Unofficial-Translation.pdf)

These priorities include strengthening the private sector by promoting export-oriented industries, diversifying drivers of the economy, including a shift from climate and environment degrading industries such as hydropower and the extraction of natural resources to greater investment in human resources, and an improved business environment. The RTIM 2019 resulted in constructive and inclusive discussions that contributed to facilitating effective development cooperation and partnerships to support the achievement of Lao PDR's national development goals and priorities, in line with the Agenda 2030's goal of sustainable development for all Lao PDR citizens, leaving no one behind.

At global level, Government renewed its commitments to advancing the Rights of the Child at the Convention on the Rights of the Child Forum (CRC30) in November 2019 and to ending all maternal deaths. Sexual and reproductive health have been key Government priorities. In addition, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25), Government also confirmed its commitment to meeting the unmet needs for family planning and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030. Following the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review's (UPR) second cycle, Government made positive progress in a number of areas with the adoption of 116 of 196 recommendations. Looking forward, a clear national mechanism should be established to monitor implementation of the accepted recommendations. At national level, a number of important new laws and regulations were passed in 2019. For example, the Lao Penal Code adopted in September 2019, serving as critical legal reference material for the country's judicial authorities. Significant progress was also noted in public financial management, including the promulgation of the new Public Debt Management Law, Procurement Law, and a number of tax laws. To support and protect Lao PDR's workers, in February 2019, a new decree on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) was promulgated, along with an amendment to the Prime Ministers Decree No. 68 on migrant workers abroad, in an effort to reduce workers' vulnerability to labour exploitation and human trafficking. In January 2019, Lao PDR adopted the National Green Growth Strategy to ensure that economic growth and development are balanced with environmentally sensitive and sustainable business practices. Similarly, in October 2019, a Climate Change Decree was issued to reduce the impact of climate change threats, while at the same time, increasing the country's capacity to respond to the threat of climate change. The passing of a new Land Law and Forestry Law in 2019 represented positive progress. In June 2019, the Disaster Management Law was endorsed to provide a national legal framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

The **UNPF's Outcomes 1 and 2** reflect both Government and the UN System's continued commitment to promote opportunities for Lao PDR's women and men to obtain **decent and productive work**, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, while benefiting from **social protection**, which has been recognized as a key



strategy for reducing poverty and vulnerability, while strengthening resilience. The UN System's support to ensure that decent work opportunities are available and accessible by Lao PDR's citizens took many forms in 2019. It included for example, strengthening Government's access to the latest, accurate data on labour and statistics (ILO) to support evidence-based decision-making. To generate employment opportunities for Lao women, the UN System leveraged Government's One District, One Product (ODOP) initiative focused on the promotion of Lao products and handicrafts (UNDP). Given the large number of Lao PDR migrants seeking employment outside of the country, IOM and UN Women worked together to provide support to Technical, Vocational and Education Training (TVET) institutions, to strengthen their capacity to address the specific needs of women migrant workers. The UN System also supported initiatives aimed at ensuring that Lao migrants received practical information on recruitment processes, basic rights, and work/living conditions in destination conditions prior to their departure, to ensure safer migration and reduced risk of exploitation. Decent livelihoods and social protection may be seen as two sides of the same coin as both are fundamental to people's well-being and security. However, most of Lao PDR's labour force, still do not benefit from social protection coverage. The finalization of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) in 2019 through support provided by ILO, was therefore, a particularly notable milestone that promises to expand the scope of social protection towards leaving no one

behind, including the disabled or elderly, who are among the most vulnerable. Given Lao PDR's vast size, rugged topography, and the diversity of its ethnic groups, many of whom live in isolated and difficult to reach communities, additional national resources should be urgently mobilized and allocated to ensure that livelihood opportunities and national social protection programmes are extended to all corners of the country and available to all Lao PDR citizens.

While climate change has affected nearly all countries, climate-related natural disasters have had a particularly strong impact on developing countries that typically have low levels of resilience to shocks. The **UNPF's Outcome 3** is therefore, anchored around Government and UN System efforts aimed at ensuring that Lao PDR's citizens are less vulnerable and more resilient to **climate-related disasters** and that forests, rivers and other **critical ecosystems, are protected**, given their link to livelihoods and reducing vulnerability to climate-related disasters. In Lao PDR, floods in 2019, in addition to posing a threat to human lives, also heavily impacted multiple sub-sectors, most acutely, agriculture and transport, emphasizing the need for strong national disaster risk reduction systems to save lives and reduce economic losses. The Disaster Management Law passed by Government in June 2019 with support from UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the IFRC, was a step in the right direction as it provided a solid framework for a coordinated national response by all sectors to respond to disasters and minimize losses to lives and property. Other important initiatives aimed at reducing Lao citizens' climate and disaster vulnerability in 2019 included UNDP and WHO support to Government's establishment of a climate resilient health care system through the identification of priority health sector areas to be targeted for climate adaptation. Disasters and other emergencies result in significant impacts on people's health, including the loss of many lives. They also underscore the inherent challenges related to managing health risks during emergencies and disasters. In response to such challenges, WHO worked closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure national and provincial trainers were able to effectively make use of the WASH Facility Improvement Tool (WASH FIT) at facilities in the 2019 flood affected provinces of southern Laos including Attapue, Savannakhet and Xekong. To protect farmers' livelihoods as they faced weather and climate related threats such as flood and drought, the UN System provided critical support to two key areas. First, in May 2019, LaCSA (Laos Climate Services for Agriculture), an agro-meteorological information system accessible online and through a mobile phone app, was made available to farmers through FAO support. The multilingual system provided information on rainfall and weather conditions, helping farmers with the rapid identification of the most suitable crops for planting based on the latest national data and statistics. Second, in the area of disease and pest control, to help farmers respond to African Swine Fever (ASF), FAO convened experts who helped to shed light not only on the prevention and control of ASF, but also its socio-economic impact. In response to Fall Army Worm (FAW)

infestations, FAO was also instrumental in Lao PDR's formulation of a National Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for eradication of the pest and strengthening the Ministry of Agriculture's (MAF) FAW monitoring capacity.

Lao PDR's remaining tropical forest coverage is among the highest in the Southeast Asian region. Towards preserving the country's forests and rich biodiversity, the FAO-supported the revision of the new Forestry Law and Land Law in 2019, which prevents commercial exploitation of natural forest areas, while allowing degraded areas to be converted to sustainable, livelihoods-generating plantations. Through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP strengthened national efforts to preserve important wildlife habitats through sustainable forest management. Given its strategic geographical location however, the country's unique and varied flora and fauna have come under increasing threat from the thriving black-market trade in wildlife. In recognition of Lao PDR's role as a wildlife source country and transportation hub, Government worked with UNODC in 2019 to map and identify critical gaps in wildlife and law enforcement legislation to prevent organized criminal groups' exploitation of gaps and discrepancies in national legislation and criminal justice systems, to commit wildlife crimes.

In order to maintain the positive national momentum to address persistent challenges related to climate change and environment and to further strengthen Government's disaster management capacities, improved coordination across sectors such as forestry, agriculture and increased engagement of the private sector will be required to for example, guide disaster planning and the sequencing of assistance (e.g. water, sanitation and health facilities). The availability of accurate, updated climate, environment, and disaster data along with capacity building efforts around data collection and management, are also key priorities going forward. While the promulgation of the new Forestry Law and Land Law is a positive achievement, the customary rights of local communities may need to be further ensured.

In the area of **education** covered under **Outcome 4**, as indicated in the Mid-term Review of the 8th NSEDP, Lao PDR citizens have benefited from the increased number of schools at all levels including early childhood education, primary, secondary, tertiary, and vocational studies. Critical challenges persist however in reducing drop-out rates and ensuring education quality and efficiency, as poor learning outcomes and low skills-acquisition have been documented, especially among the most vulnerable groups, thus slowing progress towards meeting SDG4 targets. It is encouraging to note the Governments commitment to prioritising budgetary allocations for education and improving access to quality education at all levels, especially for girls and other vulnerable groups, and reduce school drop-out rates<sup>1</sup>. Key highlights of UN-supported 2019 progress and achievements include over 800 children from pre-primary and primary schools in three provinces (Phongsaly, Savannakhet

<sup>1</sup> See recommendations 121.44, 121.160, 121.179, 121.180, 121.183, 121.184, and 121.186 in A/HRC/29/7.

and Salavan) who received Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) education through UNICEF support. The school meals programme supported by WFP has also been a notable success, contributing to Lao PDR's nearly universal primary school enrolment. In 2019, 515 meal programmes were officially handed over to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), in line with the shift from implementing to supporting Government's capacity to continue the programme. Capacity development of government officials at different levels, school administrators, teachers and communities continued to be a key pillar of UN support in 2019. Joint UN interventions in this area contributed to enhanced knowledge and skills of key stakeholders in delivering quality education services, particularly for disadvantaged learners. In 2019, UN agencies continued to support Government in enhancing more equitable access to quality education and skills development opportunities, for example, through UNICEF support to a community-based school readiness (CBSR) programme, providing Early Childhood Education (ECE), in areas without pre-schools or kindergartens. While solid progress has been achieved in the area of education in 2019 and in previous years, more needs to be done to reach the 8th Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (ESDP) and 8th NSEDP targets. For example, extending quality education to those from disadvantaged background, ensuring children in rural areas acquire 21st century skills to prepare them for bright futures and that Lao youth complete secondary and/or vocational-technical education. In addition, Government's limited capacity should be considered by the UN system when planning interventions and programmes to prevent multiple, parallel interventions that may overwhelm existing Government capacities.

Under **Outcome 5**, covering **health, water, and sanitation**, as an encouraging sign, Government has committed to increasing health resources and spending in the health sector, ensuring steps toward Universal Health Care (UHC) and the expansion of healthcare infrastructure to remote areas of the country<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the Constitution holds that "The State and society attend to building and improving disease prevention systems and providing health care to all people, creating conditions to ensure that all people have access to health care, especially women and children, poor people and people in remote areas, to ensure people's good health"<sup>2</sup>. A number of important health-related laws were passed in 2019, with support from the UN System. These include the adoption of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Law, a major piece of legislation that moves Lao PDR closer to the achievement of UHC. Most importantly, NHI helps Lao PDR's citizens, particularly poor families in rural areas, overcome the high cost of accessing health care. To ensure people are aware of their rights under the NHI, in 2019, WHO continued to work with the MoH to raise awareness. As one of the key pillars for reducing maternal and newborn mortality rates and improving the health and wellbeing of women and their children, Family Planning (FP) is critical. In 2019, through UNFPA support,

FP in Lao PDR increased, resulting in 257,000 unintended pregnancies averted, 61,000 unsafe abortions prevented and 230 maternal deaths avoided<sup>1</sup>. To strengthen Lao PDR's capacity to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies, in 2019, WHO supported the preparation of the National Emerging Infectious Disease, Public Health Emergencies and Health Security Workplan. In response to a large dengue outbreak, WHO also provided much needed technical support including risk communication, vector control and clinical management.

Looking towards the future, it is worth noting that the country's plans for graduation from LDC status will likely be accompanied by a decline in external funding for public health and will need to rely on increased domestic financing. In addition, the phase-out of Gavi (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation) support will also reduce health investments in Lao PDR's health system despite the fact that health service mechanisms remain insufficient. Managing these simultaneous transitions, while also strengthening service delivery, is a key task for the coming years.

The **UNPF's Outcome 6 on food security and nutrition** focus on how our relationship to the world around us, including our ways of growing, distributing, and consuming food is increasingly challenged by pressures like climate change and environmental degradation. In Lao PDR, good progress has been made over the past twenty years in reducing poverty and hunger, but malnutrition continues to be one of the main SDG challenges affecting children across socio-economic status. Stunting affects around one-third of children under five; though in some provinces and specific ethnic groups, more than half of children under five are stunted. Improving access to healthy, diversified diets and ensuring children receive appropriate care is therefore, vital to improving nutrition. In 2019, UNICEF provided both financial and technical support to mainstreaming nutrition into the national Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) strategy, through a "whole child" approach that considers a child's full lifecycle. In the context of emergency response to the 2019 floods, UNICEF partnered with the MoH to deliver emergency nutrition interventions to displaced populations, including 154 children with Moderate Acute Malnutrition and 21 children with Severe Acute Malnutrition. To improve food safety in Lao PDR, in 2019, ITC provided support to strengthening regulatory frameworks related to the use of pesticides in fruits and vegetables.

Going forward, lessons from 2019 highlight the multisectoral nature of nutrition showing that nutrition interventions are most successful when mainstreamed through all sectors including the health sector and programmes. In addition, nutrition interventions with the greatest impact should be prioritized. Continued challenges in Government capacity across sectors, to respond to emergencies will also require ongoing UN system support for the foreseeable future and should be prioritized.

<sup>1</sup> See recommendations 121.161, 121.173, and 121.175 in A/HRC/29/7  
<sup>2</sup> Article 25 of the 2015 revised Constitution.

<sup>1</sup> <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/tracking-progress-family-planning-programme>

An efficient and effective public sector that is transparent, accountable, and trusted by its citizens is built on **strong institutions** and solid public sector management. The **UNPF's Outcome 7**, therefore, aims to ensure that Lao PDR's institutions and policies both at national and local levels, contribute to the delivery of quality services that correspond to the needs of Lao PDR's citizens. To strengthen their capacity to engage Lao PDR's citizens, in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalized and ability to undertake effective law-making based on citizens' needs, in 2019, UNDP continued to provide support to the National Assembly (NA) and Provincial People's Assemblies (PPAs), in particular, the development of legislative agendas of the 7th and 8th National Assembly Ordinary Sessions in 2019.

Other contributions provided by the UN system towards strengthening institutions included capacity building of the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) and line ministries to develop the SDG indicators. Led by UN DESA's Statistics Division, Government, policymakers, academia, civil society, and user groups joined a national workshop in June 2019, to discuss common data challenges and drafted a strategy for continued user engagement for SDG monitoring. This was followed by capacity building training for the analysis of SDG indicator metadata with participants from LSB and 20 line ministries. In Lao PDR, Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) contamination continues to have a negative impact on livelihoods in rural areas. In 2019, UNDP strengthened its support to the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in the Lao PDR and the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao), with the goal of improving the coordination and implementation of UXO clearance efforts to open up otherwise productive land in rural areas. Given the share of the population involved in agriculture, UN-Habitat partnered with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) on issues related to the fair and efficient administration of land, including inclusive land rights enumerations undertaken at household level. Lao PDR's location at the crossroads of the Indochinese peninsula, places it at the center of a regional network for the movement of people and goods. To support physical border management, UNODC worked in partnership with Ministry of Public Security (MoPS) to strengthen the capacities of Government's network of 15 Border Liaison Offices (BLOs). Through trainings, the BLOs benefited from capacity building on cross-border communication and coordination, data and intelligence gathering and information sharing. To tackle the issue of human trafficking, IOM worked closely with the Counselling and Protection Centre of Lao Women's Union (LWU), completed research on Community-Level Responses to Trafficking in Persons in Vientiane Province to better understand social responses, reporting patterns, and barriers to reporting. The research aimed to support better understanding of community-level attitudes towards existing legal mechanisms and anti-trafficking information campaigns.

While capacity development continued to be a key focus in 2019, going forward specific needs should be identified

in order to tailor capacity development approaches to strengthen national institutions. More specifically, strengthened national data systems, improved availability of key data and disaggregation and strengthened capacity of the national statistics system are needed to effectively monitor progress towards the SDGs.

Under the **UNPF's Outcome 8**, the UN System works in partnership with all branches of Government and organizations such as the LWU and the Lao Youth Union (LYU), to improve **access to justice** and maintain progress towards the realization of human rights. The promotion of good governance and rule of law lies at the heart of Lao PDR's ambitious plans to achieve the SDG 16 goal of just, peaceful, and inclusive societies. As a major achievement, Lao PDR's first Penal Code was finalized and enacted in September 2019, with support from UNDP. The Code subsumes legal provisions and laws related to critical issues for the protection of human rights, including violence against women, children's rights, and environmental protection and is expected to improve access and referencing of laws by legal authorities. To support broader improvements to access to justice, a notable result in 2019 centred on the expansion of the use of evidence-based processes for legislative development. This was achieved through UNDP support to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and other legal institutions. These improvements contributed to strengthened access to justice and justice services, improved national capacity to harmonize and support the integration of international obligations and standards into domestic law and practice, and increased public awareness of legal rights and responsibilities.

Towards advancing gender equality and ending violence against women and girls, UNFPA worked closely with the LWU, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother and Child (NCAWMC), and Lao civil society organizations to raise awareness under a 16-day public campaign centered around International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, reaching an estimated 500,000 people. Other notable achievements included efforts to support the protection of children's rights. Lao PDR's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), the National University of Lao PDR, and UNICEF, finalized a comprehensive training manual for the social welfare workforce, including sub-national Labour and Social Welfare staff and the Child Protection Network (CPN), which continues to serve as Government's main strategy for bringing child protection services closer to communities to strengthen identification, reporting and referrals of cases. By the end of 2019, the CPN was established in a total of 1,248 villages nationwide.

While Government made significant progress in law-making and capacity building for justice professionals under the Legal Sector Master Plan in 2019, further strengthening of access to justice will entail improved understanding of legal issues within the legal sector and administration. In addition, Lao PDR's citizens would benefit from advocacy work focused on improving their

understanding of the significance of rule of law. Improved data collection and access to sufficiently disaggregated data will also be needed to strengthen evidence-based policymaking. Capacity building efforts focused on ensuring international global governance principles are sufficiently integrated to bring Lao PDR's system on a par with international norms and standards, also remains a key priority.

# LAO GENERATION 2030: A PLEDGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

On 11 November at the Lao Generation 2030 High-level Forum held in Vientiane, under the auspices of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, the Government along with UNICEF and multiple stakeholders pledged their support to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and develop Lao human capital by reducing the percentage of children who are multidimensionally deprived, and making investments in children, adolescents and young people a key priority in the 9th and 10th NSEDP.

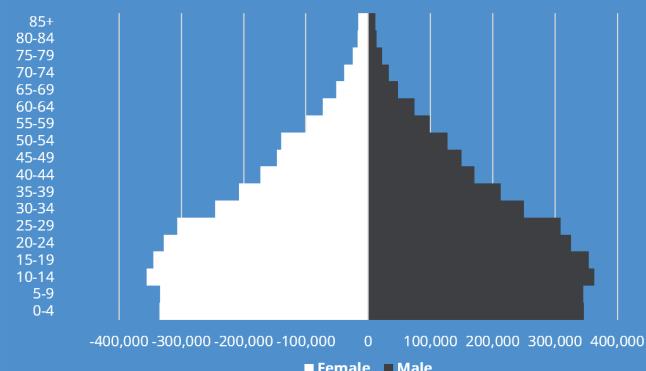
"Children will be tomorrow's leaders and the drivers of the Lao PDR's future prosperity," said Thongloun Sisoulith, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, at the opening of the event. "By upholding the rights of every child, and investing in children today, we will ensure a bright future not only for that child, but for the country as a whole."

Government and partners also agreed to pay special attention to strengthening national systems to provide quality health, education and protection services for women and children.

Following the Forum, on 20 November 2019, the Lao Generation 2030 vision was presented at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the 30th anniversary of CRC in New York. To assess the progress in the implementation of this national commitment, partners commit to meet annually in conjunction with the World Children's Day celebration on 20 November to review progress towards Lao Generation 2030.

According to the most recent census in 2015, Lao PDR is a low-income country with a population of about 7 million people. Continuous population growth has been experienced over the past six decades although the rate has

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE LAO PDR POPULATION



fluctuated over time due to historical factors with a peak in the late 1980s at 2.9 per cent annually, which since then has declined to around 1.3-1.5 per cent recorded in 2015<sup>1</sup>. In absolute numbers, annual population growth declined from a peak of 122,290 in 1992 to about 87,600 in 2015.

Still in the early stage of demographic transition (declining fertility and mortality) with a young and faster-growing population, with 32 per cent of the population less than 15 years old, the country sees a rising labor force participation rate<sup>2</sup>. With 50 recognised distinct ethnic groups, the majority Lao Tai group makes up 62 per cent of the population — albeit decreasing by -7.6 over the past two decades with minimal gender difference, followed by Mon-Khmer at 24 per cent, with a slight increase of 0.7 per cent over the same period, and Hmong-mien at 10 per cent with an increase of 2.7 per cent while the Chinese-Tibetan has shown a 0.1 per cent decrease.

The average number of children per woman in Lao PDR has fallen from 3.2 in 2011 to 2.7 in 2017<sup>3</sup>. The average adolescent birth rate has also decreased from 94 to 83 per 1,000 between 2011 and 2017 but with clear disparities between ethnic groups. Adolescent birth rate is four times higher among Hmong-mien's (192) follow by Chinese-Tibetan's (113) compared with Lao-Tai (54)<sup>4</sup>. A possible reason could be linked to unmet needs of contraceptives in the Chinese-Tibetan and the Hmong ethnic groups. The total fertility rate is also lower in the Lao-Tai compared to the Hmong and Chinese-Tibetans, at 2.4 and 4.6 respectively, with the reason believed to be the higher number of Lao-Tai women engaged in employment and thus having fewer children compared to other ethnic groups.

Indeed, population trends and dynamics in Lao PDR vary substantially between ethnic groups in almost all dimensions. Demographic transition has proceeded at different speed across groups and some ethnic groups are more advanced than others. In terms of the under-5 mortality rate, for example, Lao-Tai's rate (35 per 1,000 live births)

1 Lao Census 2015; UNDEAA, 2017.

2 United Nations 2017, 383.

3 Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017

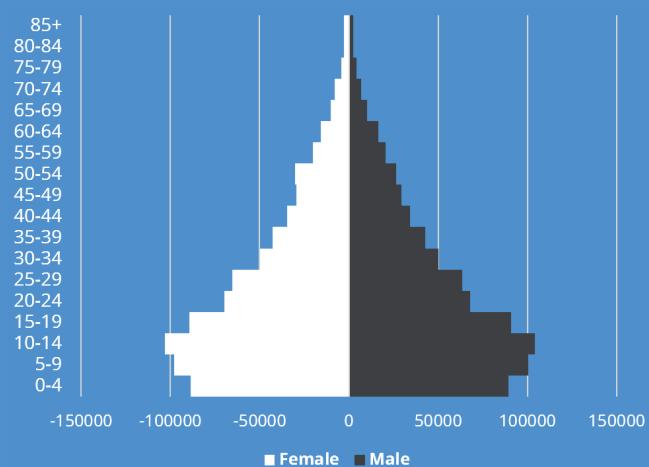
4 ibid.

is two times lower than that of the Chinese-Tibetan's (72) and Mon-Khmer's (63)<sup>1</sup>.

Youth aged 20 - 34 have declined across all ethnic groups except for the Lao-Tai where the youth population is the largest. These patterns have implications for the demographic transition in the country. The Lao-Tai's are likely to hit transition faster than other ethnic groups who together hold more of the population aged 0-14. Within the next 10 years leading up to 2030, the composition of young people entering the working age population is roughly 700,000 Lao-Tai, 400,000 Mon-Khmer, 200,000 Hmong-mien, and 50,000 Chinese-Tibetan young entrants.

Youth from different ethnic groups have different needs, depending on their geographic location (provinces and rural/urban), local employment opportunities available and their education attained. If sufficient and productive employment opportunities (for pay or profit) could be generated for the young entrants, regardless of their ethnic background, the economy of Lao PDR could benefit from a young and productive population. It means

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE MON-KHMER

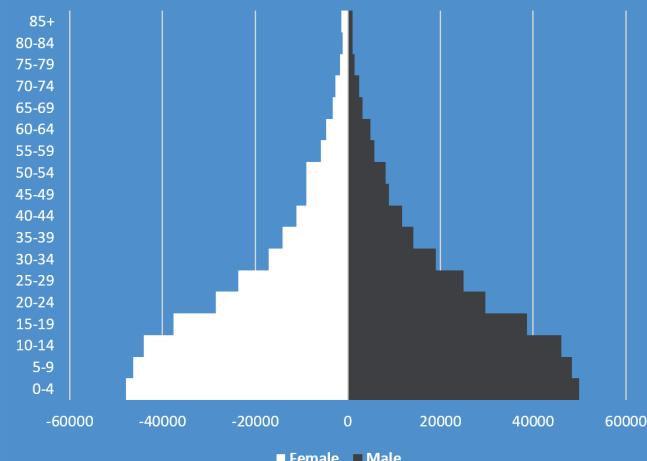


as high as in Lao-Tai which stands at 75%, compared with Chinese-Tibetan (35.4%), Mon-Khmer (38%) and Hmong-mien (40%).

The variations are large, and more attention is needed to understand the diversified needs for sexual and reproductive health including family planning, education and employment opportunities. In-depth analysis is needed on the reasons for adolescent birth among different ethnic groups in Laos to get further understanding of key factors. Contraceptive use can be a key factor with direct impact on the birth rate among ethnic groups especially adolescent births. Also, investments in and increased opportunities for education and family planning among dissonance ethnic groups can help keep young girls in higher levels of school.

The demographic profiles can present windows of opportunity. For example, increased investment in access and quality education, especially for girls in the most deprived ethnic groups, would likely reduce rates of child marriage, adolescent birth-rates, and total fertility rates in these groups. The savings from the drop in the number of deliveries can be invested in employment generation, preventive medicine, and boosting the economy.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE HMONG-MIEN



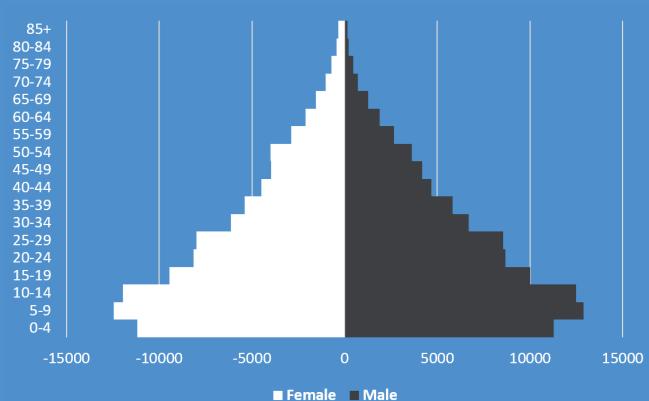
that investing in the skills and capabilities of the young cohorts, now between the ages of 5 and 14, is ever more important.

The Lao-Tai indeed perform better than other ethnic groups in health, education, adolescent birth rates, and nutrition social indicators except for exclusive breastfeeding where a child from Lao-Tai is half as likely to be breastfed compared to a child from the Chinese-Tibetans (34%, and 68.2% respectively). With the exception among the Hmong, there is a decline in the number of children aged 0-4 across all ethnic groups.

The prevalence rate of modern contraception use among married women aged 15-49 has increased nationally and among some ethnic groups, however among Hmong-mien it is half that of other groups, at only 25% while at 53% among Lao-Tai, at 51% in Chinese-Tibetan and 48% in Mon-Khmer<sup>1</sup>. Among other factors, this generally demonstrates that families and young adolescents, especially within the Lao-Tai group, are more aware of family planning and concerned about quality child raising. Among women of non Lao-Tai ethnic groups, the literacy rate is twice

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CHINESE-TIBETAN



# 1. DECENT LIVELIHOODS

All women and men have increased opportunities for decent livelihoods and jobs

# 2. SOCIAL PROTECTION

More people have access to social protection benefits, in particular vulnerable groups and the poor



## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

SDG 8 promotes “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. It reaffirms the mutually supportive relationship between economic, social, and environmental policies, full employment, and decent work. Social protection corresponds to a number of SDG targets including target 1.3 (national SDG indicator 1.3.1), which calls for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, and extending social protection coverage to Lao PDR’s poor and vulnerable populations by 2030. SDG target 3.8 (national SDG indicators 3.8.1 and 3.8.2), aims to achieve UHC, financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and safe, high quality, and affordable medicines and vaccines for all.

In Lao PDR, it was estimated that economic growth decreased to 4.8 per cent in 2019 from 6.3 per cent in 2018. Government committed to a policy of fiscal consolidation, reflecting in part, mounting fiscal pressure following the 2018 floods. The high level of debt and low level of international reserves increases the economy’s vulnerability to shocks. Since 2017, the IMF has classified Lao PDR’s risk of external debt distress as moderate to high. According to a recent report from the World Bank<sup>1</sup>, the share of debt to GDP increased from 57 per cent in 2018 to nearly 60 per cent in 2019 and was forecasted to rise by two to three percentage points per year for the period 2020 - 2022.

Tourism continued to be an important sector in Lao PDR, with strong growth in tourist arrivals and spending over the past decade. Government declared 2019, the “Visit Laos-China Year” and set the objective of welcoming one million Chinese tourists to Lao PDR. The number of visitors to the country is expected to reach 2.5 million by 2025, benefiting from the completion of the Lao PDR-China railway from Vientiane to Kunming, planned for December 2021. With this rapid expansion in tourism and transportation links, Government has prioritized efforts to ensure that Lao PDR citizens, particularly those in rural areas, benefit from the growth in tourism. The competitiveness and strength of the tourism sector is, therefore, critical.

Against the backdrop of economic advancement, the development of labour market institutions is ongoing, but remains fragile. Significant decent work challenges remain, particularly those related to high levels of vulnerability and informality, as well as the frequently limited transferable skills linked to an economy that is still dominated by a low-productivity agricultural sector, despite the recent expansion of the industrial and service sectors. In addition, the economy suffers from complex regulatory procedures as reflected in its Doing Business Ranking. Lao PDR’s 2019 ranking on the Ease of Doing Business Index in 2019, has remained unchanged since

2018, at 154 out of 190 after falling from 134 in 2016 (possibly due to changes in the methodology), despite key measures undertaken to improve the business environment and support Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) development, and notably, the endorsement of the amended Law on Investment Promotion, establishment of a One-Stop-Service Office, and initiatives to promote access to finance and streamlining business start-up procedures.

A number of labour-related achievements were noted by the UN system in its contribution to the UPR 35th session. For example, Government accepted recommendations to align domestic laws with international labour standards and is committed to tackling child labour<sup>1</sup>. However, under the current 2014 Labour Law, the definition of forced labour does not yet meet the definition set out in ILO Convention No. 29 which has been ratified by Lao PDR. In addition, the domestic legal framework has yet to provide a comprehensive definition of discrimination. On a more positive note, the Labour Law explicitly prohibits discrimination in the recruitment and dismissal of women due to pregnancy or maternity status, providing some measure of protection from discrimination and unequal pay, representing a positive step towards meeting SDG8.5<sup>2</sup>. The proportion of women in wage employment, however, remains low in all sectors, standing at 35 per cent, with 65 per cent of all unpaid family workers being women. It was also recognized that in Lao PDR, a large proportion of the working age population work in subsistence-level activities in the agricultural and informal sectors, often characterised by low income, poor working conditions, and inadequate access to social protection and workplace representation<sup>3</sup>.

In August to September 2019, the country experienced a severe flooding, with five central and southern provinces severely affected. The floods caused widespread damage, destroying livelihoods, and disrupting economic activity and social conditions. As a result, the fiscal space in 2019 was impacted both by expenditures related to the previous year’s flood response and 2019 expenditures linked to reconstruction efforts.

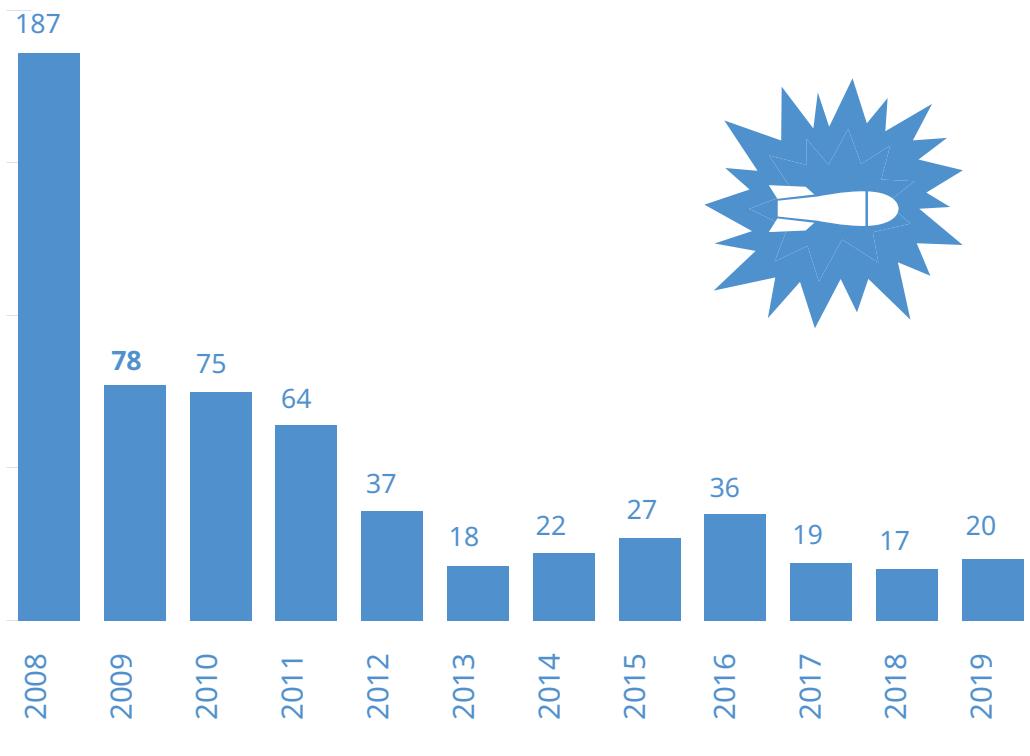
<sup>1</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33477/211565-pt3.pdf?sequence=24&isAllowed=y>

<sup>2</sup> See recommendations 121.2, 121.40, 121.111, 121.158, and 121.159 in A/HRC/29/7.

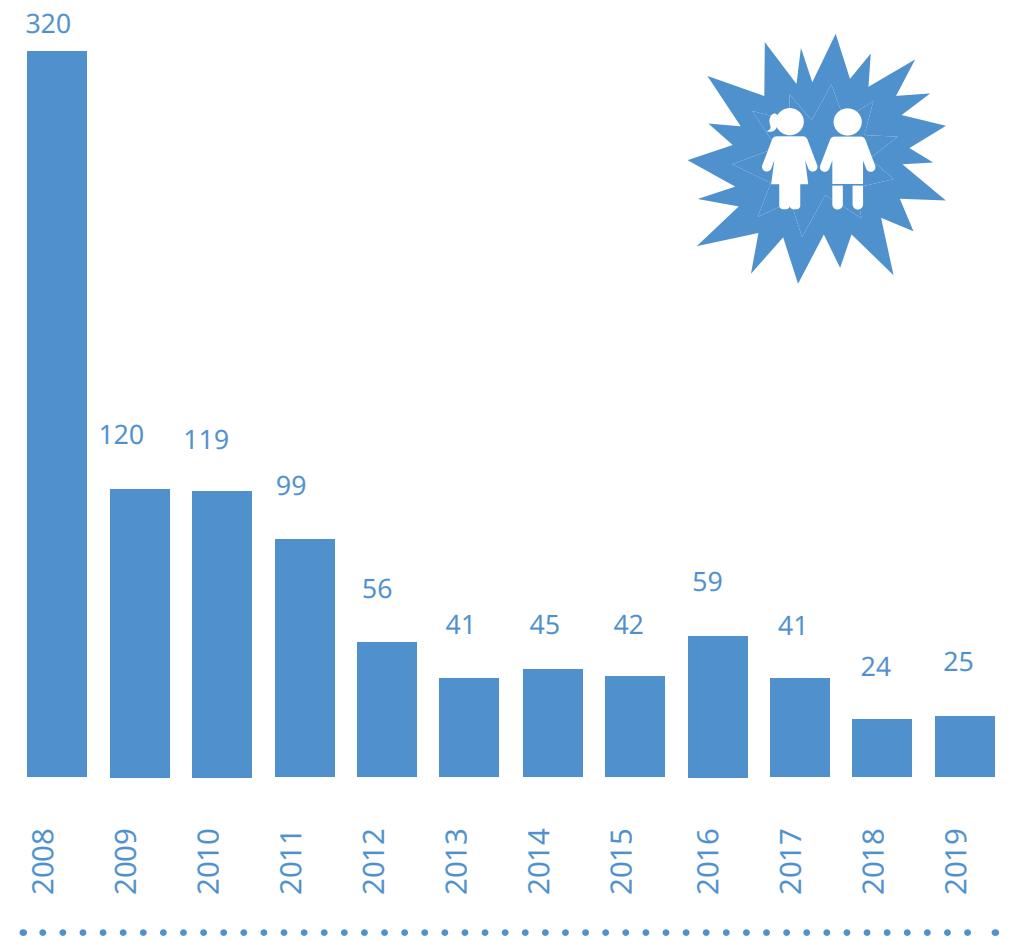
<sup>3</sup> UNCT submission to CEDAW.

<sup>3</sup> Lao PDR VNR on the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, 2018.

The number of UXO accidents has been **DECREASING**<sup>1</sup>:



Casualty numbers have reached a **STABLE LOW**<sup>2</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, report #2870, November 2020

<sup>2</sup> Lao National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) Report 2019.

## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>1. DECENT LIVELIHOODS AND JOBS</b>			
1.1 Percentage of total population living below the national poverty line (National SDG Indicator 1.2.1)	23.2% (2012-2013)	16.2% (2020)	Data to be updated by the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2017-2018 (not yet published)
1.2. Gini coefficient	36.2% (2012-2013)	Gini coefficients improved for Lao PDR, urban and rural over coefficients estimated in 2013 (MoV: 8 <sup>th</sup> NSEDP) (2020)	Data to be updated by the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2017-2018 (not yet published)
1.3. Percentage of labour force in formal sector as a share of total employment rate, female/male	15.6% (female: 15%; male: 75%) (2010)	30% (female: 30%; male: 70%) (2021)	27.1% (2017 Labour Force Survey) No data available for 2019
<b>2. SOCIAL PROTECTION</b>			
2.1. Number of formally employed workers enrolled in Social Security Fund (excluding army officials)	230,000 (2015)	300,000 (2021)	306,210 formally employed workers enrolled in National Social Security Fund (female – 143,709) in 2019  10,306 Self-employed people voluntarily enrolled in NSSF (4,254 females) <sup>1</sup>
2.2. Percentage of poor covered by social protection schemes	80% (2015)	95% (2021)	On track: 94% of the total population (2019)

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, report #2870, November 2020

## 2. RESULTS

### DECENT LIVELIHOODS AND JOBS

In 2019, the UN system continued to focus on expanding livelihood opportunities to Lao PDR's citizens. This included support to initiatives that increased citizens' access to work opportunities that provided a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. More broadly, the UN system's promotion of decent livelihoods is aimed at supporting workers' freedom to organize and participate in decisions that affect their lives and ensuring equal opportunities are extended to all women and men.

To strengthen Government's data collection and labour statistics, ILO provided capacity development to the MoLSW and the LSB on labour market statistics and analysis, including financial support that allowed key Government officials to participate in ILO's academy focused on labour market statistics analysis and SDG indicators for measuring decent work, using micro-data from the labour force survey. In 2019, MoLSW initiated national efforts to develop a strategy and decree on a labour market information system. Additional sector specific tools for improved productivity and operations were also developed in the area of tourism, marketing, retail, agri-business, and Lao business regulations.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC), UNIDO provided technical support to the review and launch of an Industry Manufacturing Establishment Survey, setting up a database, and training MoIC staff to carry out their own surveys in the future. The annual survey report was published and used by policymakers as well as to update the Global Manufacturing Statistics and the Industrial Analytic Platform. The country statistics and data for industry and manufacturing provided useful, updated information on Lao PDR's current status along with areas for future development, including green growth and industry modernisation.

Towards ensuring that employment opportunities extend to all corners of the country, the MoLSW through a highly consultative multi-stakeholder process, with support from ILO, finalized the National Rural Employment Strategy (NRES), with formal endorsement expected in 2020. The strategy aims to increase decent employment opportunities for women and men in rural areas through public and private sector interventions. The NRES benefited from ILO's support to rural employment promotion, implemented in Xekong and Savannakhet provinces, that yielded valuable lessons on NRES formulation based on realities on the ground. In addition, it also provided lessons on how the strategy may be implemented by government officials and the private sector.



### CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

To ensure that Lao PDR benefits from regional integration, trade opportunities, and improved participation in global value chains, the International Trade Centre (ITC) supported the MoIC and other line Ministries and key counterparts such as MAF and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce (LNCCI) with a series of workshops and trainings in 2019. ITC in collaboration with LNCCI, also provided a series of trainings on Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) to strengthen SMEs' competitiveness through the implementation of green business practices. These trainings helped to capacitate Lao PDR's SMEs on issues related to standards required by international buyers (e.g. Organic, Fairtrade etc.), addressing gaps and obtaining relevant certificates of compliance. In 2019, ITC also provided support to SMEs to facilitate their access to global markets, through the participation of Lao companies at the China International Import Expo (CIIE) in 2019.

Following a request from MoIC, a capacity building initiative for SMEs, "Laos in Business", was developed, tested, and launched in 2019, with support from ILO, that benefited more than 600 enterprises throughout the country. The core training modules focused on business and financial planning and cash-based accounting for SMEs, are in line with commercial bank requirements for micro and SME loans in Lao PDR. The materials developed will serve as a common set of templates used by Business

Development Services (BDS) companies as a standard for SMEs. In the future, the modules may be further reviewed, revised, and adjusted by BDS providers and/or relevant Government authorities/organization as necessary to ensure they respond to the changing condition and the business environment. To further enhance Lao PDR's ability to reap the benefits of regional integration and international trade, in 2019, ITC worked with Government to develop a Foreign Trade Negotiation Roadmap. The Roadmap is focused on the promotion of Lao PDR's economic interests in the ASEAN economic integration process. Towards strengthening data collection and assessment capacities, ITC's technical team reviewed the availability and quality of statistical trade data in country. To strengthen data collection and statistical capacities in the country, a training was organised in November 2019 with participation from key government representatives.

In Xekong province, agricultural extension officials, who provide technical advisory services on coffee promotion at provincial level, benefited from ILO training in 2019, that focused on business models, supply chain management and market structure. Drawing on the training they received, workers were able to introduce coffee farmers to zero-waste methodologies for producing animal feed and fertilizer aimed at reducing costs and increasing income streams in response to the seasonal fluctuation and price volatility of coffee. As a result, approximately 100 coffee-producing households in target villages from the poorest areas of Dak Cheung district in Xekong province, were able to increase their income five-fold. In Savannakhet province, a skill needs assessment tool was developed in 2019 and piloted in target districts, villages and select companies to inform skills development interventions. The tool is expected to be implemented annually by the Savannakhet Chamber of Commerce to identify the skills and needs required by companies along with the amount of electricity and types of machines required for the establishment of industrialized towns. Through ILO support, the provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare together with the local skills development centres are now able to conduct assessments related to the recruitment of rural workers and offer improved employment services and skills training.

To provide alternative livelihoods, through its Alternative Development Programme linked to the MoPS, in 2019, UNODC helped farmers shift from the cultivation of opium to cash crops such as coffee. As part of the effort, UNODC financial support allowed a group of new coffee farmers from northern Lao PDR to participate in a week-long study visit to an established community of coffee growers in southern Lao PDR. The new coffee farmers were members of a community of 331 families from 12 villages in the Northern province of Houaphanh, where they faced challenges related to opium, poverty, addiction and UXO.

Government's One-District-One-Product (ODOP) initiative focused on poverty reduction, skills training and job creation through the promotion of Lao PDR products

benefited from UNDP support to a LWU's training in 2019, of 250 women in seven districts of Salavan, Houaphanh and Saysomboun provinces. As a result of the training, the women were able to strengthen their business management skills while receiving support for product development and access to markets. New products from women's business groups were subsequently developed and are in the process of being certified under the ODOP initiative. Livestock and funds for farming were also provided to vulnerable communities in the form of an initial investment to generate income from higher-value organic farming activities. The communities also benefited from improved knowledge on food preparation, food hygiene and nutrition, contributing not only to food security, but also improved health, sustainable livelihoods, and a strengthened tourism sector.

To boost local business and commerce, UNCDF conducted customer journey mapping research in Lao PDR in partnership with Columbia University to gain customer insights for digital finance product development and delivery. The research yielded insights that have helped identify business cases for mobile wallet and banking delivery on digital and agent banking services for garment workers and persons with disabilities.

## LABOUR AND MIGRATION

In response to complex issues related to labour migration and to address the challenges and vulnerability that Lao migrants face, in 2019, the UN System in Lao PDR continued to provide critical support to the prevention of labour abuse, helping to ensure that migrants receive adequate protection from exploitation.

At the national level, a consultation in preparation for the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) was organized by the MoLSW with support from ILO, which brought together representatives from the Government, workers and employers, UN agencies, NGOs and CSOs to discuss and agree on proposed recommendations that the Lao delegation brought to the 12th annual regional AFML in Thailand. Lao PDR successfully led regional research to focus on rural employment under the Vientiane Declaration's commitment on "Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN". A technical workshop was organized in June 2019 and shaped the agreed ILO-ASEAN study on "Decent Work Promotion in Rural Economy through Productivity Growth, Local Employment Promotion, and Transition from Informal to Formal Employment". The report will be finalized and launched in 2020 at the ASEAN Senior Labour Official Meeting.

To strengthen legislation aimed at protecting migrant workers, through IOM and ILO joint support, the MoLSW, revised and finalized Decree No. 68 on the placement of Lao Labour to Work Abroad, last reviewed in 2002. The revision is aligned to the Social Economic and Labour Law from 2013, reflecting the significant increase in inbound and outbound labour movements since 2002. IOM

provided technical inputs closely coordinated with ILO. The final Decree was subsequently sent to the Prime Minister's Office for endorsement in 2020. It should be noted however, that the final draft decree does not yet meet the standards set out in ILO conventions. The ILO noted its concern and suggested that Government should consider some modifications to the Decree based on a review of relevant elements of the labour migration framework.

To reduce the risk of Lao workers' exploitation during their search for jobs and livelihoods, in coordination with the MoLSW's Department of Skills Development and Employment, IOM initiated the promotion of ethical recruitment practices in Lao PDR through a standardized capacity building program, using IOM's International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS), targeting 24 of the 26 licensed recruitment agencies in Lao PDR. All participants rated the training as particularly relevant to their company and indicated high interest in pursuing the integration of ethical recruitment practices within their business model. As a result of the workshop, two recruitment agencies formally requested IOM's support to work towards the IRIS certification, which will be included in the tiered capacity-building approach for labour recruiters in 2020.

In view of the growing number of women entering into labour migration in the region, IOM partnered with UN Women to ensure gender-responsive messaging and training was provided to the Technical, Vocational and Education Training (TVET) institutions and women migrant workers. A total of 33 teachers from TVET institutions and Skills Development Centres from Vientiane, Khammouan, Savannakhet, Salavan, Attapue and Oudomxay provinces were trained on safe migration in preparation for the rollout of trainings in their institutions. Key topics of safe migration training include the benefits and challenges of migration, working and living conditions in Thailand, including labour rights, access to health, the recruitment process, and regular migration channels. This intervention will complement technical skills training and ensure that aspiring migrants have access to accurate information on safe migration and protective measures before deciding to migrate. Working with job centres in the provincial Departments of Labour and Social Welfare, in 2019, ILO continued to provide support and capacity building to all Lao PDR Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), to raise awareness and provide services to potential migrant workers, through telephone and through outreach activities in communities. In Vientiane, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU) conducted awareness training on safe migration and human trafficking risks exercises that benefited more than 2,000 workers (1,784 were females) in 21 garment factories. As part of their gender strategy implementation, ILO also supported capacity building of representatives from MoLSW, LFTU, the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, LWU and LYU, focusing on gender awareness and gender responsiveness. In 2019, IOM working with the Department of Skills Development and Employment Department, MoLSW, in partnership with

the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH), implemented the first cross-border training and employment placement models between skills providers and employers in Thailand of which, 23 migrants completed a one-month training on Food and Beverage Service and/or Housekeeping. Out of the 23 selected, 18 participants successfully conducted interviews with employers in Thailand and were accepted to undertake internships in various hotels in Thailand, resulting in five participants being offered fulltime employment at the end of their internship. IOM supported participants in their pre-departure orientation, including drafting their Curriculum Vitae in English, preparing them for phone interviews with employers, preparation of the necessary travel documents, including passport and work visas and provided safe migration induction training. IOM invited the UNFPA to provide an additional module on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence, considering the high number of young females among the participants.

In response to the absence of trained professionals and systematic training, IOM developed a Psychosocial Awareness Training Curriculum to increase the knowledge among first responder participants on the mental and physical impacts of trafficking, and how to provide appropriate support to both staff and victims of human trafficking (VOT) for psychosocial reintegration. The training focused on mapping and establishing service networks, which was helpful to cement future multi-agency coordination. A total of 356 provincial and district level line ministries and civil society organizations (CSOs), working in service provision to VOTs received the training in Vientiane Capital, Luang Namtha, Savannakhet, Champasak, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces. The post-test evaluation results indicated that overall, there was an increase in knowledge of approximately 90 per cent across all six rollout trainings.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION

In 2019, significant progress was achieved towards improving social protection measures for Lao PDR citizens, including the development of the National Social Protection Strategy, that followed the revision of the Social Security Law, a new decree on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), the endorsement of the Health Insurance Law, and the new Decree No. 385 on education, scholarship and allowance for compulsory education.

The MoLSW, with technical assistance from ILO and development partners in 2019, finalised the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), including an implementation plan. The strategy aims to serve as guidance for implementing, improving, and strengthening three social protection systems comprised of the Health Insurance system, Social Security system, and the Social Welfare system in Lao PDR until 2025.

# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

## ESTABLISHING THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS IN LAO PDR

In October 2019, the UN Joint Programme (UNJP) "Leaving No One Behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR" was approved by the Joint SDG Fund. The primary objective of the UNJP is to support Government with implementation of the new National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), through an approach focused on systems development with implementation through the Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG).

The UNJP will contribute to the SDG 1.3 (Social Protection Systems for all, including and Floors, Key to Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity), SDG 2.2 (end all forms of malnutrition, including targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5, address nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons), SDG 16.9 (legal identity for all including free birth registrations), and SDG 17.3 (mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources).

Implementation of the UNJP will be led by the MoLSW in partnerships with relevant ministries, the provincial authority of Savannakhet as the targeted pilot province, and the UN system (led by ILO, UNCDF, and UNICEF) from January 2020 until December 2021. The key results expected from the UNJP are:

1. Enhanced Government capacity for planning, implementation and management (including leadership and co-ordination) of the National Social Protection Strategy
2. At least 1,400 children under 12 months benefit from a new integrated package of welfare services, including the new MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration.



Technical support by UN agencies (ILO and WHO) and development partners was provided to MoH and MoLSW, to merge the institutional, technical, financial, and operational features of five health insurance schemes into one National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme made headway. In 2019, through support from the ILO regional social protection facility involving Lao PDR, Vietnam and Myanmar, technical assistance was provided to MoH and MoLSW on merging statutory health insurance schemes under the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and National Health Insurance (NHI). ILO, in partnership with the Swiss Red Cross, provided monthly supervisory support to two pilot provinces of Vientiane and Xekong, to ensure the successful merger of the schemes. This support also included costing of the health benefit package and health facilities. The continued expansion of the NHI Fund now covers all 17 provinces and has brought the overall health coverage total for all schemes, including NSSF, NHI, military and police schemes to 94 per cent nationwide.

In 2019, nearly 300,000 people, of whom, approximately 140,000 were female, found employment in the formal sector. More than 10,000 people from the informal, self-employed sector, of whom, approximately 4,300 were female, were enrolled in the NSSF<sup>1</sup>. In support of national efforts to expand social security coverage to workers, ILO supported an analysis of Lao PDR's Social Security Scheme's OSH risk compensation and benefit claim mechanism to identify constraints and develop recommendations on how to make claim procedures more effective and user-friendly, including ways to ensure that compensation benefits are more valued by social security members.

The MPI, through the Centre for Development Policy Research (CDR) benefited from financial and technical support provided by UNFPA in 2019, to conduct a Lao 2030 study focused on social sector needs (health, education, and employment) by 2030. The initial part of the study was completed through a series of consultations with development partners and key government sectors including health, education, labour and social welfares, the National University of Laos, LWU and the MPI. UNESCO has been working with Proud to Be Us Laos for the last three years to promote evidence-based policy involving youth in all stages. Proud to Be Us Laos and UNESCO have undertaken research on the experiences of young LGBTIQ people in some areas of the country.

### 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

A number of challenges related to 2019 floods in Lao PDR were noted. The widespread damage heavily impacted remote communities such as those in Vapy district, where in 2019, the population was relocated to the market due to severe flooding. While some items such as sewing machines, linked to UNDP's Strategic Support to Achieve

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, report #2870, November 2020

SDG5 project were recovered, many buildings were damaged and farm animals lost, impacting local livelihoods. An additional challenge experienced in 2019, was the difficulty in reaching isolated and remote communities supported by the above UNDP project, during the rainy season. It should also be noted that in 2019, the project also experienced challenges related to villagers' participation in production groups, given their preference for working independently and rules related to joint production and shared profits. Looking forward, continued coaching should be prioritized to support and strengthen the on-going work of production groups.

Interventions by ILO in rural areas noted difficulties in creating synergies and partnerships with development agencies given the limited number operating in rural areas. The local authority's technical departments are keen to engage but usually need both technical and financial support to deliver their technical mandates. The adoption of market-based approaches for the implementation of interventions related to rural employment, will increase sustainability beyond the short lifespan of ILO's development cooperation support. A key challenge highlighted by UNDP's livelihood programmes revolves around the need to ensure that project benefits are equally accessible in areas with multiple ethnic groups and to understand their perception of the support provided through the livelihood programmes. Successful results in one province might not have the same positive effect in other locations. Therefore, close monitoring both from UNDP and from the project implementation team is required to ensure smooth project rollout. Moreover, as businesses' commercial activities develop, it will be necessary to more closely monitor businesses' viability/sustainability to ensure that the project is effective and will contribute to target populations' livelihoods.

### 4. MIDTERM REFLECTIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Rural job creation requires ongoing dialogue among departments, ministries and companies involved in investment, employment, industry, and commerce. The UN system's support may be leveraged to test modalities; however, these interventions can only be sustained if there are public budgets to ensure continued service delivery. Where budgets are available, Government officials have the opportunity to exercise their mandates to test methods, build on mistakes and continuously improve.

Government is in the process of finalizing its first national rural employment strategy, which will enhance collaboration and synergy among national and provincial authorities towards increasing rural incomes and employment, as well as strength labour and social protection in rural areas. It will be important to document good practices related to the creation of decent rural employment. Collecting and reporting employment statistics in rural

areas plays important role for improved policy formulation. Establishing policies that promote value change in rural areas and strengthening the links between large firms and local SMEs/producers are important.

Promoting social dialogue (dialogue between workers and employers) mechanisms in rural areas, contributes to improved working conditions.

Ensuring that the benefits of projects are accessible to target populations given Lao PDR's diverse ethnic communities remains a challenge. Therefore, close monitoring from project implementation teams is needed to ensure smooth project rollout as success in one province might not have the same positive effect in others. A significant number of Lao PDR citizens lack access to adequate social protection from social and economic risks, which negatively affects their resilience. This is particularly true for people working in informal and rural economies. The most impacted groups are children, women, people with disabilities and the elderly. Expanding social protection to rural areas through the implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy is, therefore, an important step towards reducing vulnerabilities. However, a general lack of national resources for longer term commitments of the government budget to social protection has been noted.

The UN system must be mindful of the understandable changes and rotation of counterparts in different agencies, ministries and departments and plan accordingly to reduce delays and disruptions.

# UXO CLEARANCE REMOVES BARRIERS FOR IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS

## A STORY OF PHET FROM XIENG KHOUANG PROVINCE

Kham district located in the northeastern part of Xieng Khouang province, just off Highway 7, features flat and fertile land ideally suited for agricultural production. Most of the population earn their living through rearing livestock such as pigs and cows and growing crops that include rice, garlic, long beans, and sweet corn. When the opportunity exists, people sell their produce at local markets and in neighboring provinces.

A team comprised of UXO Lao's Programme and Public Information Unit (PO/PI) and UNDP, met with Phet, a 35-year-old female UXO land clearance beneficiary during a recent monitoring visit to Kham district, Xieng Khouang province. Phet, her husband, and three children come from Barn village. After the rainy season, Phet harvests rice and long beans from her 3,000m<sup>2</sup> of land, where they have been growing crops since 2013. Although they were constantly worried about UXOs, Phet's family has fortunately, never encountered any on their land. They are right however, to be worried since the owner of a nearby rice paddy discovered two cluster bomblets also known as 'bombies', on his property.

In March/April 2019, UXO Lao, with support from UNDP and the Government of New Zealand, undertook clearance of 69,164m<sup>2</sup> of land that included Phet's family property. The clearance ultimately benefited five families and a total of 27 beneficiaries through the removal of 200 UXO items (103 bombs, 96 artillery munitions and 1 large bomb) on 6.9 hectares of land. On Phet's property alone, the team eventually discovered three hidden bomblets.

In 2019, Phet's family increased their income by selling LAK 30 million (approximately USD 3,000) by selling four tons of sticky rice and 840 kilograms of long beans compared to the LAK 20 million the family previously earned growing rice and garlic on UXO-contaminated land in 2018. Looking forward to a brighter future, in 2020, Phet plans to build a new house and is eager to double her income to LAK 40 million. "I am so happy my land was cleared! Now, I don't have to worry about UXOs anymore and I can dig to grow anything I want" said Phet. To the clearance team, she said "I really appreciate what UXO Lao and UNDP have done in Barn village which has improved our community's living condition. I would like to request that the UXO Lao teams in Xieng Khouang province, continue clearing land that still remains contaminated. There are many areas in our village that still need to be cleared for agriculture".



### **3. CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Forests and other ecosystems are protected and enhanced and people are less vulnerable to climate-related events and disasters**



# 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

## CLIMATE CHANGE

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly calls for the reduction of risks posed by climate change induced disasters. Over the past few years, climate change and global warming have contributed to extreme, often unpredictable weather, drought, and floods in Lao PDR. In recognition of these threats, Government has taken commendable actions to address climate change. It is for example, actively participating in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including through the mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. In terms of legislation, in 2019, Lao PDR adopted the National Green Growth Strategy and issued the Climate Change decree.

In addition, a revised Land law was tabled and the Forestry Law calling for the 70 per cent forest cover, was passed in 2019 that provides for the protection of forests. Further clarifications are needed on issues of compensation in the context of expropriation in the course of development activities and in providing recognition of villages inside designated forest categories. It was encouraging to note however, that in the context of the third cycle of the UPR not yet formally accepted, the Government spoke to the efforts to ensure full respect for all human rights in the formulation and implementation of land laws and policies, ensure adequate compensation for expropriation, recognise and protect customary rights, and reform management of land leases and concessions<sup>1</sup>.

In Lao PDR, significant flooding in 2018 following in the wake of tropical storms Son-Tinh and Bebinca, continued to impact Lao citizens and the economy in 2019. In addition, heavy rains in 2019, in the southern part of the country coupled with drought in northern provinces that hampered recovery efforts, lend some credence to the idea that unusual weather events triggered by climate change, could now be expected to occur with greater frequency. Despite these challenges, 2019 also marked a year of transition to post-flood recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction in Lao PDR, with key results captured in subsequent sections of the report.

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

In June 2019, the Disaster Management Law was endorsed to provide a national legal framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The national DRR Strategy was developed with contributions from the MoLSW and the MoNRE with support from partners following the unprecedented floods in 2018. The Disaster Prevention and Control Committee was established and strengthened in 17 provinces, 128 districts and 466 villages. Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response

<sup>1</sup> See recommendations 121.170, 121.171, and 121.172 in A/HRC/29/7.

Plans have been developed for 9 provinces (Sayaboury, Vientiane, Savannakhet, Khammouan, Xieng Khouang, Xekong, Salavan, Houaphanh and Oudomxay). However, in August 2019, the six provinces of Khammouan, Savannakhet, Champasak, Salavan, Xekong and Attapeu were affected by floods at the same time. As a result, 1,525 villages, with 153,799 families, and a population of 764,937 people (of which 51,970 women) were affected. The most affected sectors were again infrastructure, agriculture, followed by health, education, mining, and labour. While the recovery work for the 2018 floods are still on-going, challenges are multiplied with the new damages and losses of the August 2019 floods. Public sector losses were mainly in the on-going reparation work of the public infrastructure, while private sector losses mainly came from the loss of income for farmers and SMEs. Losses were also recorded in the tourism sector and housing sector. Vulnerability to natural hazards and disasters caused by climate change therefore continues to affect economic development and reduce potential gains in poverty reduction. The continued floods in 2019 required the Government to better prioritize their needs, given the fiscal space constraints.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Building on the trend towards a growing recognition that the many benefits of economic development must not come at the price of Lao PDR's rich natural environment, MoNRE ratified a Decree on Environmental Impact Assessments in December 2019, defining the "principles, regulations, and procedures on management, monitoring, and inspection of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)" to ensure that EIA processes implemented are undertaken transparently and at a high standard. The decree aims to reduce and mitigate the potential negative environmental impacts of new investments ensuring that communities affected by the new developments are fairly protected and compensated. In addition, efforts to develop and strengthen quality waste management systems also help to advance the implementation of the Green, Clean and Beautiful Strategy for towns and cities in Lao PDR.

Given its central and strategic geographic location bordering multiple countries in the region, Lao PDR is unfortunately a key transit country for illegal African wildlife products, including ivory, rhino horns and pangolins. In addition, native wildlife including tigers, bears, monkeys, and Asian species of pangolin are also extensively trafficked throughout the country. In response to increasing public awareness of wildlife crimes and Government's commitment to protecting Lao PDR's unique natural heritage, in 2019, the Government initiated an assessment with UNODC that will result in a roadmap designed to identify gaps in wildlife legislation and law enforcement. UNODC continued a mentorship programme for wildlife law enforcement authorities. Throughout 2019, in order to fulfil its obligations under the International Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Lao PDR has focused on developing a CITES decree, aimed at stronger regulation of the

international trade in wildlife and flora.

## FOREST RESOURCES AND BIODIVERSITY

The Government implemented a new forest cover assessment in 2019, updating its forest coverage figure to 58 per cent of the land area of Lao PDR. The forest cover rate is mostly unchanged since the last assessment of 2015. This result will be used for Lao PDR's REDD+ reporting to the UNFCCC, presenting a positive result compared to the past trends of forest loss and resulting Green House Gas emissions. FAO supports the Department of Forestry (DOF) alongside other partners, namely JICA and the World Bank in Lao PDR's efforts on REDD+.

In June 2019, the revisions of two important laws, the Forestry Law and the Land Law were tabled at the National Assembly. The National Assembly approved the amended Forestry Law, while the Land Law is still pending further revisions. The revision of both laws was supported by FAO in coordination with other partners. FAO played a pivotal role in securing alignment of the two laws that have significant interplay particularly with regards the rights of local communities over land and forest resources. The laws, including the draft Land Law introduced are more progressive in their recognition of rights and roles of local communities over land and in the achievement of forest land covering 70 per cent of the country by 2020.

In line with global, regional, and national efforts to preserve fragile wildlife habitats, the Department of Forestry (DoF), MAF, continued its vital partnership with UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Savannakhet province<sup>1</sup>. This partnership aims to support the Government's facilitation of a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in Savannakhet, helping to secure critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services that include, for example, the provision of quality water and flood prevention efforts, implemented from May 2016 to May 2022 by the DoF under the MAF. District and village managed nurseries helped restore approximately 1,100 hectares of degraded forest land in targeted districts in Savannakhet, with the potential for nationwide replication. The restored forest contributed to the Government's national goal of increasing the forest cover.

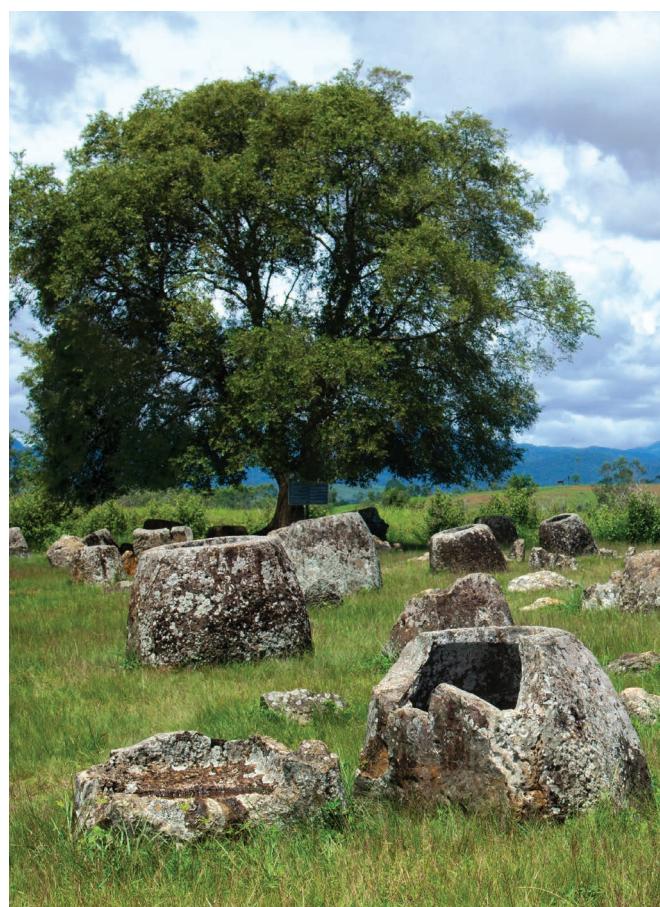
The MoNRE has submitted Lao PDR's Sixth National Report (6NR) to the UN Convention for Biological Diversity<sup>2</sup> with support from the UNDP and the GEF, providing an analysis of the current status of relevant national policies, plans, programmes, and project implementation contributing to both national and international Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

1 See: "Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR" <https://www.thegef.org/project/sustainable-forest-and-land-management-dry-dipterocarp-forest-ecosystems-southern-lao-pdr>

2 See: 2019-Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Lao PDR - Sixth National Report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/nr/nr-06/la-nr-06-en.pdf>

In discussions with the UNESCO National Commission at the MoES and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT), the UNESCO's Natural Sciences Sector suggested in 2019 that Lao PDR's participation at relevant conventions and international networks could be enhanced to promote the UNESCO sites connected to tourism and ecotourism planning and development, such as the Global Network of Biosphere Reserves, World Natural Heritage Sites, and Global Geoparks, all of which are set up to foster the SDGs and sustainable human living in coalition with nature. With the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), the need to support achievement of SDGs based on science and statistics with a focus on ecology, earth science, hydrology, eco-hydrology, and fostering the basic sciences was also discussed to mobilize scientific research in order to reduce the global plastic pollution, by conducting scientific research and developing more recyclable and biodegradable types of plastics.

The potential to retrofit one existing school in Vientiane as a demonstration site for replication elsewhere (UNESCO Green Academies) was also suggested. The MAF also met with UNESCO, and the five types of UN accredited site systems were discussed, such as Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites, Ramsar Convention Wetlands, the FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Sites, and Global Geoparks. All these sites potentially have a beneficial impact on 'shock resilience' biodiversity, climate, environment, and pollution in Lao PDR. However, these systems are currently not being fully used.



## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>3. FORESTS AND OTHER ECOSYSTEMS ARE PROTECTED AND ENHANCED, AND PEOPLE ARE LESS VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE-RELATED EVENTS AND DISASTERS</b>			
3.1. Proportion of land area covered by forest (National SDG Indicator 15.1.1)	58% (2015)	70% (2025 <sup>1</sup> )	58%
3.2. Number of persons per 100,000 directly affected by natural disasters (National SDG Indicator 1.5.1)	Being established by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	Being established by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	UNDRR provided training to the GoL and partners in 2019 to report number of persons per 100,000 directly affected by disasters into the online Sendai Framework Monitor. Once entered this can assist in tracking progress.
3.3. Agricultural value affected by natural disasters and climate change	Being established by Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Being established by Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	<p>Prolonged drought conditions in the north May to Dec. and severe floods in the south and parts of the centre Aug. to Sep., severely affected 2019 main cropping season. It is estimated<sup>2</sup> that nearly nine in ten households, which reported planting later than normal in 2019 said their harvest was lower compared to 2018 (a smaller, but still substantial, proportion of the households planting on time reported a reduced harvest as well (73%).</p> <p>In addition, the agricultural sector continued to be impacted by extensive floods in 2018 with agricultural value lost estimated to be Lao kip 1,227.3 billion (USD 136 millions)<sup>3</sup>. The areas affected by floods have likely seen decreased production in 2019 too.</p>
3.4. (a) Level of hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption; and  (b) signature and ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury	(a) Hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption of 2.3 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes (2010);  (b) Minamata Convention on Mercury not signed (2010)	(a) Hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption of 1.5 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes (2020);  (b) Minamata Convention on Mercury signed and ratified (2021)	<p>Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, a focal point to the Montreal Protocol of Lao PDR, successfully controlled consumption of hydrochlorofluorocarbon through the country licensing system.</p> <p>Consumption of hydrochlorofluorocarbon in 2019 was 1.29 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes, well below country's 2019 obligation of 2.07 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes.</p> <p>Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has set up the maximum import quota of hydrochlorofluorocarbon not to be more than 1.5 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes in 2020 in line with the target.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Vision 2030 and 10 year Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2016-2025

<sup>2</sup> FAO. 2020. Special Report - 2019 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Rome.

<sup>3</sup> Post Disaster Needs Assessment 2018 Floods, Lao PDR



## HEALTHY LIVING AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS FREE FROM HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

A second GEF project on Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)<sup>1</sup> Management and Disposal supported the Regulation on Controlling PCB contamination of products. A number of consultation workshops pertaining to the technical guidelines on PCB Management were conducted in Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Attapeu provinces, with the participation of 81 senior officers, of which, one third were female. An inventory of PCB contaminated transformers was completed in the last quarter of 2019. In total, 738 samples or nearly 1,400,000 litres of oil from across the country were collected, of which, 660 samples came from Vientiane. 107,637 litres were found to be PCB contaminated with over 50 ppm. A report on the negative impacts of PCBs to health and environment was prepared and there is now evidence that directly contacted PCB risk groups have shown an increased level of awareness on the dangers associated with PCBs.

In 2019, Lao PDR steadily moved towards green growth and sustainable development with the private sector encouraged to roll-out clean and green technology while reducing carbon emissions and exposure to hazardous chemicals. In close cooperation with the MoST, the MoIC and the Cleaner Production Centre of Laos, the GEF project on Reduction of Green House Gas emissions in the Industrial Sector through the Biomass Technology, Information and Learning Centre was launched in 2018. The Centre benefited from UNIDO support to the preparation of its first business plan in mid-2019. Staff also participated in two energy audits with Lao Cleaner Production Centre, as hands on capacity building, joining biomass resource assessments of 12 selected provinces (Borlikhamxay, Champasak, Khammouan, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, Salavan, Savannakhet, Xekong, Attapeu, Vientiane Capital, Vientiane province, Sayaboury) throughout 2019.

In 2019, UNEP provided support to Government efforts to curb Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS), contributing to the assessment that Lao PDR is currently on track with the phase-out of ODS and has been recognized for its work to confiscate the smuggling of refrigerants. Notably, in 2019, a UNEP/Interpol Asia Environmental Enforcement Award was awarded to the Lao PDR Joint Inspection Team on Inspection of Refrigerants in Domestic Market (MoNRE, MoIC, MoPS) for confiscating 706 kg of smuggled refrigerants. UNEP also supported the development of regulations on ozone depleting substance trade control and enforcement aimed at addressing challenges related to the availability and unauthorized import of mis-labelled substances. In addition, policy and technical support was provided to a joint inspection team's inspection of controlled substances in the market along with the management of confiscated

<sup>1</sup> Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a class of chlorinated organic chemicals that are used for a variety of industrial and commercial purposes.

## 2. RESULTS

### REDUCING PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTION

To reduce high levels of Persistent Organic Pollution (POPs), working closely with MoNRE, UNIDO provided technical assistance through the GEF projects linked to the Stockholm Convention for reducing POPs. A GEF regional project demonstrating the Best Available Technique (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) in open burning activities, established a demo unit of a full production line of plastic recycling. A selected landfill site for waste separation in Thakek district, Khammouan Province was prepared for waste separation machinery applying BAT/BEP. In addition to campaigns for students, focused on raising awareness of Reusing, Recycling and Reducing waste, and mitigating the risk of Unintentionally produced Persistent Organic Pollutants (U-POPs), seminars on the effects of U-POPs on human, animal and the environmental health were conducted alongside the distribution of brochures, posters and video advertisements on the impacts of open burning. A textbook on Municipal Solid Waste and Organic Pollutants Management was published and introduced to university students and the related National Implementation Plan was established by Government.

substances. Experiences and lessons learned from this initiative were widely shared with other countries.

Providing technical advice and support to member States, the WHO piloted and then published the guide, "Strategic Planning for Implementation of the Health-related articles of the Minamata Convention on Mercury"<sup>1</sup> in June 2019, to help national health authorities understand the Convention's potential implications on national health programs and planning for implementation of the Mercury risk assessment and control measures, as required by the Convention. The MoH in collaboration with the WHO, convened a workshop for Strategic Planning for the implementation of health-related articles of the Minamata Convention. A ministerial decision to stop purchasing medical devices and products containing mercury was approved in November 2019.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH ADAPTATION

Lao PDR remains highly vulnerable to climate change. The health sector is recognized by the National Climate Change Strategy and Adaptation Plan<sup>2</sup>, as one of Lao PDR's most vulnerable sectors requiring urgent adaptation capacity. To reduce the country's vulnerability, a multi-country project funded by the GEF, UNDP and WHO supported efforts to incorporate climate change into existing health policies and programmes. For example, in 2019, the Health National Adaptation Plan for long term capacity building for a climate resilient health system, was drafted with support from the UN system. A workshop to strengthen national capacities, was held in Vientiane in August 2019, bringing together multisectoral participants from MoNRE, the Public Works and Transport Institute, the Meteorological Agency and various technical units of MoH. The workshop defined priority areas of the national health adaptation options and a road map of the implementation strategy.

Moreover, with support from WHO, in 2019, national and provincial trainers received training on the use of WASH Facility Improvement Tool (WASH FIT) for implementation of WASH FIT at selected health facilities in flood affected areas in Attapeu, Savannakhet and Xekong, coordinated with MoH, Namsaat, SNV Netherlands Development Organization and the Swiss Red Cross.

## ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

2019, through support provided by the UN System, Government embarked on multiple initiatives aimed at strengthening Lao PDR citizens' climate and disaster resilience. With support from UN-Habitat, the MoPWT and MoNRE successfully improved the resilience of 189 vulnerable rural and emerging urban settlements in southern Lao PDR. Vulnerability assessments throughout the provinces of Attapeu, Xekong and Salavan were

<sup>1</sup> "Strategic planning for implementation of the health-related articles of the Minamata Convention on Mercury", WHO, June 2019. <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/strategic-planning-for-implementation-of-the-health-related-articles-of-the-minamata-convention-on-mercury>

<sup>2</sup> National Climate Change Strategy and Adaptation Plan, MONRE, 2009.

successfully completed and shared with local counterparts. Moreover, action plans were developed through participatory approaches at the village level, enhancing knowledge and local capacities towards climate resilience. Another key result involved the launch of a joint UNEP-UNDP project on Improving the Quality of Investments for Achieving SDGs in partnership with the Investment Promotion Department of MPI. Initial work included an evaluation of Oudomxay's Provincial Investment Strategy and the development of green growth indicators that were subsequently submitted to MPI. A new USD10 million Green Climate Fund (GCF) project managed by UNEP on nature-based solutions to help Lao PDR adapt to climate change was developed in partnership with MoNRE and approved at the end of 2019. The project is focused on ensuring that 10 per cent of Lao PDR's population benefit from using nature-based solutions to reduce urban flooding.

Through support provided by UN-Habitat, in 2019, the MoPWT and MoNRE successfully strengthened the climate and disaster resilience of 189 vulnerable rural and emerging urban settlements in southern Lao PDR. This support enhanced the institutional capacities of national government and local authorities to increase the resilience of human settlements and infrastructure systems. Vulnerability assessments analysing a set of indicators related to climate trends, demography, economic activities, ethnicity, and gender, among others, were developed throughout the provinces of Attapeu, Xekong and Salavan. Results were shared with local counterparts. Moreover, action plans were developed through participatory approaches at village level, enhancing knowledge and local capacities towards climate resilience. Based on the action plan results, small-scale climate and disaster resilient infrastructure systems were provided accordingly.

Building on collaborative efforts from 2018, the MoPWT and UN Habitat, in partnership with Nordic Climate Facility and the Stockholm International Water Institute, completed 40 vulnerability assessments and developed feasibility studies for 23 small-scale climate resilient water supply systems in Attapeu, Xekong and Salavan. In an effort to boost private sector engagement through Public-Private Partnerships, the stakeholders and public institutions were identified to receive training on the selection, engagement and training of private sector actors for water supply maintenance.

FAO provided support to strengthen agro-climatic monitoring and information systems, with a view to improving adaptation to climate change and food security in Lao PDR. In 2019, this included training farmers and more than 200 experts in meteorology, climate modelling, seasonal forecasting and agro-meteorology services. Over 100 trainees, from both the central level and decentralized offices in the MAF and the MoNRE, received training on the use of advanced GIS tools, including land cover mapping, machine learning algorithms, participatory mapping at a national scale, cloud computing modelling, global circulation model downscaling and climate

scenario modelling. As a result, experts from the two ministries have become recognized both locally and increasingly internationally, as high-level technical experts and knowledge management professionals.

In 2019, with FAO support Lao farmers also played an increasingly important and active role in the analysis and dissemination of climate information through the Lao Climate Services for Agriculture<sup>1</sup>. The numbers of beneficiaries reached through the public announcement system is now estimated to be approximately 25,300 in Luang Namtha, Savannakhet, Salavan, Champasak and Vientiane provinces with roughly 67.3 per cent of target farmers supporting the initiative. The Division of the Climatology and Agro-meteorology of the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology at MoNRE and the Department of Agricultural Land Management at MAF, participated in Climate Week in Bangkok, Thailand, organized by FAO in July 2019, with participation from multiple Asian countries and was coordinated by FAO's SAMIS Project in Lao PDR<sup>2</sup>.

In partnership with MAF, and through technical assistance from IFAD, WFP established 42 community assets in 35 villages in southern Lao PDR in 2019. Types of assets include Agri-shops, storage and drying facilities for agricultural-products, water supply systems and small-scale irrigation, community fishponds and the rehabilitation of 9.35km of roads for seven villages to improve market accessibility. Additionally, MAF and WFP established 40 community rice banks in southern Lao PDR. Community rice banks act as social safety nets aiming to enhance food security and resilience of vulnerable communities particularly through the lean season months.

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Natural hazards and disasters render impact and a high toll of casualties in developing countries less resilient to shocks. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls not only for greater investment in disaster risk reduction but also to reduce the risk of climate-related hazards and disasters more specifically. Lao PDR has endorsed both the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework for DRR, which emphasise the need for countries to adapt to the changing climate and build resilient communities through reducing disaster risk and strengthening preparedness and response. This will help to ensure precious development gains will not be lost and sustainable development goals are more likely to be achieved.

In 2019, a consultation meeting was held to discuss National Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) and SOPs were developed to define critical actions and procedures during various phases of an emergency (preparedness, during emergency, and post-emergency). The meeting agreed to establish a National EMT, taskforces for EMT

<sup>1</sup> Lao Climate Service for Agriculture, FAO 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca3773en/ca3773en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Strengthening Agro-climatic Monitoring and Information System (SAMIS) – Regional Climate Workshop", FAO 2019. [http://www.fao.org/in-action/samis/en/](http://www.fao.org/in-action/samis/resources/news/detail/en/c/1201907/)

and EMT coordination.

Following a request by the MoH, WHO participated in a joint UN/MoH rapid health assessment in response to severe flooding in Lao PDR's southern provinces in late August and September 2019. A subsequent workshop to revise rapid health assessment forms was held by MoH in December 2019, to have more standardized forms, which was highlighted during the last two major disasters in Attapeu 2018 and flooding in southern Lao PDR in 2019.

Following wide-spread flooding in 2018, the MoLSW and WFP continued to provide immediate food assistance in the form of unconditional cash-based transfers to a total of 6,388 flood affected households with 32,889 beneficiaries in Khammouan Province. In 2019, the Department of Social Welfare Offices and WFP distributed US\$853,000 to flood affected households to meet immediate food needs. Together with MoLSW and the Lao Red Cross, WFP continued to distribute food assistance to households in seven villages in Sanamxai District affected but not displaced from the floods in 2018. In total 368 metric tonnes of rice were provided to 1,085 households over three distribution cycles in 2019. In addition, 10.54 metric tonnes of supplementary nutritious foods were provided to 460 pregnant and lactating women and 1,689 children under the age of five.

In partnership with MAF, WFP is implementing the Disaster Reduction and Management in Agriculture Project which aims to build capacity for Government staff at both national and local level, including farmers, in planning and integrating disaster reduction and management actions into agricultural sector development plans. The project delivered two national and two provincial consultation workshops in 2019 and drafted guidelines for integrating disaster risk management in agriculture for technical review in 2020.

The year 2019 also witnessed a number of successful capacity development and training efforts. In December 2019, a meeting was held to develop training materials and SOPs for enhanced surveillance and response to communicable diseases in public health emergencies, including flooding, earthquakes, landslides, and major diseases. Throughout the year, public health emergency operations were strengthened through building capacity for identified core staff and MoH departments. A workshop took place on Institutional Arrangement for Policy and Recovery Strategies, organized by MoLSW and UNDP to strengthen national policy, institutional and financial frameworks, and mechanisms, to plan and implement sustainable recovery processes, and on SOPs for disaster response and recovery. The workshop generated innovative ideas in line with real experiences from the ground.

In September 2019, the Lao MoH's Centre for Communication and Education on Health organized a series of workshops to teach risk communication skills. With the support of risk communicators from WHO, nearly a hundred provincial and district level staff benefited from the training. The workshops took place in the

provinces of Bokeo, Luang Namtha and Oudomxay targeting provinces and districts as part of a program funded by USAID to strengthen Lao PDR's preparedness for Avian Influenza outbreaks and human Influenza pandemics<sup>1</sup>. The multisectoral training equipped participants from the provinces and districts with risk communication skills during emergencies, including pandemic scenarios which was a good precursor for the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Supported by WFP's Global Logistics Cluster, which provides coordination and information management to support operational decision-making, in partnership with the MoLSW, WFP began implementation of the Logistics Preparedness Project to support national emergency preparedness and response operations. During 2019, WFP supported the preparation of a logistics preparedness roadmap and action plan jointly developed by Government and partners.

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The Disaster Management Law formulated in April 2019 by the MoLSW, with support from UNDP and UNDRR in partnership with ADB and IFRC was approved by the Parliament and was promulgated into law in October 2019. In parallel, the MoLSW requested assistance to develop a new national strategy for DRR that was aligned to the global Sendai Framework for DRR. A workshop was held in August 2019 with over 55 participants from various government agencies, UN partners, international and local NGOs and the ADB. Identifying priority areas for the strategy, the workshop proved valuable to officials who now have a solid basis from which to start a large interagency and inclusive effort to develop the national DRR strategy. In addition, the workshop helped building the capacity of MoLSW in understanding DRR, develop a DRR matrix mapping partner activities on DRR, and advance the discussion on risk-informed development in the country.

Led by UNDRR the workshop identified the data needed for reporting against Sendai and provided capacity building training to the MoLSW and development partners on the use of the online Sendai Framework Monitor to record national implementation progress against the Framework. This will also increase SDG reporting, as data reported through the Monitor is linked to disaster-related SDG indicators, e.g. number of people affected, and automatically shared with UN DESA for SDG global reporting reducing the burden on country reporting.

The MoLSW requested the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) partnership to undertake a national DRR capacity assessment of Lao PDR. In late 2019, co-led by UNDRR, FAO and UNDP, a CADRI scoping mission was undertaken. The scoping mission has paved the way for the capacity assessment due in 2020 and established a preliminary understanding of the key issues

<sup>1</sup> "Local capacity building: training health staff to communicate with communities" WHO, October 2019. <https://www.who.int/laos/news/feature-stories/detail/local-capacity-building-training-health-staff-to-communicate-with-communities>

and needs to increase the resilience and DRR capacity in-country.

## CAPACITIES IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY STRENGTHENED

An Agreement of Cooperation was signed with the Provincial Department of Public Works and Transport. After technical reviews, housing designs and structural analysis were finalized bidding processes are now ongoing.

With strengthened local capacities to develop district/community recovery plans and supporting target communities' implementation of the projects outlined in the plans, a capacity building initiative for the resilient recovery of victims from the 2018 and 2019 floods in Bolikhamxay Province, was facilitated by UNDP in partnership with the MoLSW. The projects led to cash-for-work initiatives and incentivised resilient recovery activities, focused on prioritized flood mitigation projects that encouraged community participation. The 45 participants who benefited from training on community-based Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilient Recovery in Bolikhamxay and Salavan Provinces in Lao PDR, included women, youth and persons with disability from two villages that were severely impacted by the floods. These Livelihood Skills Acquisition Trainings for Recovery delivered directly transferable skills that included organic/modern farming and fisheries methods, garment design and weaving. Following the trainings, participants were able to conduct Training of Trainers (TOTs), passing on modern farming methods to community members.

Lao PDR continues to prioritize the strengthening of its health system to be able to detect, assess and respond to outbreaks and public health emergencies. Through implementation of the National Work Plan for Emerging Infectious Diseases, Public Health Emergencies and Health Security guided by the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Infectious Diseases and Public Health Emergencies, Lao PDR is committed to strengthen its capacity for health security. Lao PDR has been using the Monitoring and Evaluation focus area of the National Work Plan, to identify room for improvement through an annual review of progress made, identification of gaps by relevant stakeholders, multi-sectors and partners keeping them engaged to ensure a common understanding on country needs. After Action Reviews were also conducted for major public health events for instance flooding and influenza outbreaks. Recommendations from the after-action review are incorporated into the National Work Plan.

In 2019, with support from the UN system, Lao PDR updated its national pandemic preparedness and response plan with relevant sectors and partners. Working with WHO and partners, the MoH hosted multi-sectoral meetings to review and improve the plan which was subsequently tested in December using scenarios to model various functions including coordination,

risk communication, surveillance and laboratory, non-pharmaceutical intervention, and essential health services. The group discussions identified gaps in the plan and findings have been incorporated into a revised version.

Given the drought and flood conditions experienced across the country in 2019, the Government and WFP carried out several emergency food security assessments to assess the immediate food need of affected populations. Additionally, a Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) was jointly undertaken by the MAF, FAO and WFP with results to be released in early 2020. A key element in carrying out these food security assessments was training central, provincial and district Government staff in emergency food security assessment methodologies and data collection.

## DATA MANAGEMENT FOR FARMERS RESILIENCE

In 2019, the new national level agro-meteorological information system called LaCSA (Laos Climate Services for Agriculture), was jointly developed by the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology (DHM), of the MoNRE and various Departments in the MAF with FAO support. LaCSA, a multi-lingual and multi-service information system managed by the Climate and Agro-meteorology Division, is one of the most advanced systems in the Mekong sub-region. The system is available online through a test version<sup>1</sup>, providing two innovative products for crop early warning: a provincial seasonal bulletin covering the entire country updated on a monthly basis and a weekly bulletin with recommendations pertaining to rice productivity and pest/disease for pilot locations.

In collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Land Management<sup>2</sup>, FAO developed a national Land Resources Information Management System (LRIMS). The LRIMS<sup>3</sup> will go online in 2020<sup>4</sup> and feed into the preparation of the National Agro-Ecological Zone, a modelling framework for the identification of crop yield potentials under different input levels and climate scenarios. The data system will allow the design of natural resources policies and plans based on concrete nationally collected data. The policy could span from national level economic planning to local, village or district level plans.

## PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST AND ECOSYSTEMS STRENGTHENED

In 2019 important progress was also achieved in the steps towards forest and ecosystem protection and development as an important contribution to the country's climate change agenda and Nationally Determined

<sup>1</sup> <http://147.46.250.219:8081/>

<sup>2</sup> DALAM publishes the following nationally produced data: reservoirs (watersheds); population total, growth, poverty and migration; province and district boundaries; build-up areas; the road network system; rivers; national biodiversity areas; forestry protection and production areas; irrigated areas and the statistic year book.

<sup>3</sup> "Strengthening Agro-climatic Monitoring and Information Systems (SAMIS) Land Resource Information Management System (LRIMS)", FAO 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5554en/ca5554en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A draft website can be found here: <http://52.77.158.217/index.php>

Contributions. The Forestry Law No. 64 passed in 2019 provides a constructive framework for the implementation of the Forestry Strategy. In the new Law, "degraded forest lands" have been legally defined, reflecting the Government's renewed interest in the regeneration of these areas as forest plantations, while safeguarding other important natural forests from being converted into plantations. In addition, an important Decree was issued by the Prime Minister promoting tree planting for commercial purposes<sup>1</sup>. Under the UN administered REDD+, the most notable progress achieved in 2019, was the acceptance of a project proposal for implementing Lao PDR's Emissions Reduction, under the GCF. FAO supported the project formulation and is considered a partner in its implementation. The project is scheduled to commence in 2020, under GIZ, the German corporation of International Cooperation, as accredited entity to the GCF. The draft results of the forest cover assessment for the country indicates that while deforestation has increased since 2015 mainly due to infrastructure development, forest degradation, the main source of emissions from forest and land use change, has reduced considerably<sup>2</sup>.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was completed in February 2019, for the five target districts in Savannakhet province, covering an area of 1,016,531 ha. The SEA led to improved national policies and regulations governing sustainable land and forests in the respective districts. Protected Area Management Plans for Dong Phou Vieng and the Phou Xang He National Protected Areas, the Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak National Protection Forest, and the proposed Ong Mang Protected Area in Savannakhet Province were completed. Sustainable land and forest management within the targeted districts covered 617,223 ha from agricultural, mixed system, range land and most significant activities on a protected sanctuary. A total of 4,503 beneficiaries were reached through natural resources management and ecotourism initiatives, of which 1,453 recorded an increased annual income. A provincial consultative meeting on upgrading Ong-Mang sanctuary to a national biodiversity conservation area was held on 21 June 2019, organised by the project. The participants agreed on the upgrade of 130,745 ha. The documentation required for upgrading the sanctuary has been submitted by the MAF and now rests with the Prime Ministers' Office for approval.

## 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

Carefully monitoring the drought situation in Lao PDR, FAO produced a Global Information and Early Warning System country brief in 2019, which includes information on the shortage of rain. The latest remote-sensing, rainfall and vegetation data and information indicate that insufficient rains primarily affected the mainly rain-fed areas in the northern parts of the country. Precipitation in these areas have consistently been very low, with the most severe rainfall deficits recorded in eastern areas,

<sup>1</sup> Decree 247, 2019

<sup>2</sup> JICA F-REDD National Forest Inventory 2018-2019.

where, despite abundant rains received in August 2019, cumulative seasonal rains were below average and vegetation conditions were equally poor. In addition, the lack of accurate monitoring and forecasting capacities makes it difficult for early action and response. Difficulties in reporting losses and damages through government channels and multiple shocks were also noted as challenges.

Climate change, extreme abiotic factors such as fluctuating temperatures, droughts, salinity, osmotic stress, heavy rains, floods, and frost pose serious threats to rice production and are detrimental to farmers whose livelihoods depend on it. There is an urgent need to frame strategies against these stresses, to allow effective and sustainable solutions such as crop improvement to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.

Approximately 6.2 million pigs in Southeast Asia were killed or culled due to the spread of African Swine Fever (ASF), a contagious viral disease that affects domestic and wild pigs, first detected in Asia in 2018. While not dangerous to humans, the disease causes up to 100 per cent fatality in pigs, leading to severe economic losses to the sector. Since the MAF confirmed the first ASF outbreak in Salavan Province on 20 June 2019, a total of 51 ASF outbreaks were reported, in all 18 Provinces; 40,685 pigs have been killed or culled due to the ASF. New outbreaks have been reported in 2020, signalling a difficulty in bringing the disease under control<sup>1</sup>.

Fall Army Worm (FAW) is a significant threat to crop productivity. In Lao PDR, FAW presence has been officially confirmed by the MAF in early 2019 in Sendin Village, Naxaithong District<sup>2</sup>. FAW infestation while serious, is not a cause for panic. Awareness, monitoring, surveillance, and capacity building for the integrated management of FAW are important pillars for an informed response. A panic response with immediate and excessive use of broad-spectrum chemical pesticides can delay the build-up of natural biological control agents that help to reduce FAW populations. Building on lessons learned elsewhere, responses need to be adapted locally. Uncontrolled, immediate response also has the potential not only to cause toxicity in humans and other species but will also damage the long-term sustainability of the soil and local ecology.

## DISASTER RESILIENCE

Floods in Lao PDR's southern provinces in 2019, were a reminder of the continued need for improved disaster resilience and the threats from natural disasters that the country faces. Responses and actions developed in 2019 demonstrated that inter-sectoral coordination is the key for successful delivery. The joint efforts undertaken by UN-Habitat and its government counterparts have lead to fruitful exchanges and the achievement of meaningful

targets. However, in the context of recovery efforts underway in the southern provinces, lack of coordination, and delays in response have increased the vulnerability of affected communities. Coordination efforts that can help with planning, risk identification and sequencing of interrelated support activities such as ensuring water, sanitation, electricity and road access for housing projects, securing livelihoods and other public services including schooling and health facilities, should be improved to enhance efficiency and improved preparation and response to future disasters. WASH facilities are also currently vulnerable to climate change. The lack of climate resilient WASH facilities in health facilities and in vulnerable communities that can address the impacts of floods and storms is a serious gap holding back progress.

Similar lessons have been learned in the forestry sector where FAO has engaged with the DoF of the MAF, namely on REDD+ and plantation development. Strong coordination with agencies and sectors beyond forestry, including agriculture, investment, and environment as well as with the population in affected areas is necessary to make meaningful, sustainable progress. In this regard, an important initiative is being implemented by FAO to bring together sub-sectors within the MAF for sharing and synergizing existing datasets that may present a new angle to data analysis. Forest change data overlaid with agriculture production data, for example may illustrate better what specific crops and investment types are driving forest loss.

## DATA COLLECTION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

UN-Habitat and FAO's work in support of improved capacity development on data collection and analysis at multiple scales, through enumerator trainings and workshops with national and sub-national officials has resulted in web enabled real time information systems, geographical databases, and approved assessments and plans and data sharing agreements that will provide strong foundations for further actions. In addition, the use of technology and specialized software such as Kobo Toolbox has improved efficiency, reducing data collection time and communication issues. However, some challenge related to data collection and sharing remain to be resolved. The availability of updated and accurate data nationwide on relevant topics such as perception of hazard trends and infrastructure needs/status for the development of maps on exposure and sensitivity, for example, is critical for providing an appropriate and effective localized response. An important lesson from 2019, involves the need to ensure the continued prioritization of capacity building on data collection and management.

## 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

Teaching materials on green boiler technology, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) management, solid waste management, and bio-mass resource mapping and

<sup>1</sup> "ASF situation in Asia update" 05 March 2020, FAO 2020. [http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/empres/ASF/situation\\_update.html](http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/empres/ASF/situation_update.html)

<sup>2</sup> MAF Order No 2786, MAF June 2019. <http://www.laofab.org/document/download/3949>

investment have been prepared and are used by relevant ministries. Concepts and technologies for energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions were introduced to the industrial sector and are operational with satisfying results. Those models are knowledge transferable and scalable, providing an opportunity towards the country's green growth and cleaner production.

The efforts to establish a National EMT rapidly deployable for critical emergencies in Lao PDR and the drafting of related SOPs, are significant successes. The National EMT will have the capability to provide outpatient initial emergency care of injuries and other significant health needs. Further work is required to establish the National EMT, adapt training materials with the support of multiple Government ministries and a variety of partners and donors to support trainings.

MoH successfully consolidated its leadership role to improve regulation related to environmental and occupational health through strong multi-sectoral coordination and engagement. The multi-sectoral strategy and action plans including the Occupational Safety and Health Decree, National Climate Change and Health Strategy with its main goal of building a climate resilient health system and National Action Plan for the Elimination of Asbestos-related Diseases to ban all types of asbestos in the country by the end of 2020, and halting the use of medical devices and products containing Mercury, has been developed and approved over the last three years.

An approach to land use planning and management that integrates perspectives of agriculture production, forestry development and ecosystem conservation, with climate change resilience and mitigation potential is being discussed. The SAMIS project to improve adaptation to climate change and food security in Lao PDR, aims to enhance capacities to gather, process, analyse, and share climatic and geospatial information so that these may be applied to planning and decision-making.

In addition, the UN System can incrementally make use of the renewed availability of public information to reinforce climate change planning, institute advanced information management processes and foster decision making at multiple government level and in a variety of intervention scales. In 2019, a significant number of farmers could access weather data tailored for field level decision making through the LaCSA system. The momentum created by this system and other ongoing information management processes should be leveraged to facilitate high-level awareness of existing information systems, to further improve the provision transparent data and to increase availability of open information channels.

The progress made by UN-Habitat towards the implementation and systematization of climate change vulnerability assessments is the first step towards successfully reducing the number of Lao citizens affected

by disasters and significantly contributes to the achievement of SDG Goal 13. The Government has requested UN-Habitat to provide support for scaling-up this tool for use throughout the country, mainstreaming climate change awareness in policy making and planning.

# A FRESH START OF THE NEW NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR) IN LAO PDR

Following devastating floods in 2018 and the aftermath of the July 2018 dam collapse, the Government of Lao PDR embarked on an ambitious effort to improve its disaster risk management approach to reduce the risk and impact of future disasters. A new Law on Disaster Management took effect in June 2019 and a national Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategy was required to put the law into practice. The development of a national strategy aligned to the global Sendai Framework for DRR is critical for ensuring that development activities in Lao PDR are risk-informed and able to prevent valuable development gains from being eroded by hazards and disasters.

The MoLSW, as the Government lead for DRR and Disaster Management, co-organised with the UNDRR, a national multi-sectoral workshop 5th to 8th August 2019 in Vientiane. The workshop hosted 55 participants who represented various government ministries at local and national levels, domestic and international stakeholders, and eight UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes.

The workshop led to the establishment of a solid foundation for the country's new national disaster risk reduction strategy. It also ensured that the strategy adopted an inclusive approach, which took into account, the views of multiple sectors. In addition, it also led to the mapping of projects and agencies in Lao PDR, actively engaged in DRR, which proved valuable to supporting development coordination. The MoLSW also gained valuable insights into new potential partnerships to assist with the strategy's implementation.

# 4. EDUCATION

**Children and youth enjoy better access to inclusive and equitable quality basic education and vocational skills**



## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

While Lao PDR has made good strides in progress towards its education goals, a number of challenges remain to be addressed. For example, one out of ten primary-age children remain out-of-school. One in five adolescent girls drop out of school<sup>1</sup>. Enrolment statistics from elementary school show that the average drop-out rate of grade 1-5 decreased from 5.2 per cent in 2014/15 to 4.4 per cent in 2016/17. In the same period, the average repetition rate improved from 5.8 per cent to 4.1 per cent. Conversely, the average drop-out rate of Grade 6-8 increased from 7.7 per cent to 8.3 per cent in tandem with that for upper secondary which increased from 4.9 per cent to 5.8 per cent<sup>2</sup>. In higher education, young men continue to outnumber young women<sup>3</sup>. There are 66 girls attending secondary school for every 100 boys within the poorest quintile of the population<sup>4</sup>.

The impact of the 2018 natural disasters and the Government's fiscal challenges continued through to 2019, which affected budget allocations for social sectors, including for education. As a result, the education budget of 12.32 per cent of total public expenditures excluding debt service again fell short of the SDG 4 recommended level at 15-20 per cent and the required 18 per cent under the Lao PDR Education Law, down from 14.04 per cent in 2018. Approximately 80 per cent of the education budget is comprised of salary allocations leaving little for investments into the quality of education. Against this backdrop, the MoES initiated the development of the 9th Education and Sport Sector Development Plan (ESSDP) 2021-2025, aligned to the overarching development of the 9th NSEDP calling upon partners to prioritize and increase public spending on education as a critical investment to accelerate human capital development and support Lao PDR's smooth transition from LDC status.

According to the Lao PDR Human Capital Index, a child born in the country today will only reach 45 per cent of his/her full health and education potential. In education, while a child in Lao PDR on average is expected to receive 10.8 years of formal schooling, they learn only the equivalent of 6.4 years. Recommendations from the IMF Article IV Consultation with Lao PDR in August 2019 also highlighted the need for consistent investment in human capital, including improving education attainment and skills training.

Flooding in late September 2019 affected six southern provinces (Champasak, Salavan, Xekong, Savannakhet, Khammouan and Attapeu), four of which were also affected in 2018. The floods occurred just after the start of the 2019-2020 school year, disrupting schooling, and damaging 747 schools. The recurring floods in Lao PDR highlight the need to strengthen emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction, including climate

<sup>1</sup> LSIS-I

<sup>2</sup> ESWG progress report.

<sup>3</sup> UNCT submission to CEDAW.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, "Lao PDR: Gender Equality", [http://www.la.undp.org/content/lao\\_pdr/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality.html](http://www.la.undp.org/content/lao_pdr/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality.html), (accessed 11 July 2019).

change resilience in all programmes - a need that MoES has acknowledged and is planning to take action on in 2020 with the support of UNICEF and other partners.



## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>4. CHILDREN AND YOUTH ENJOY BETTER ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS<sup>1</sup></b>			
4.1. Percentage of Grade 1 enrolment of primary education with pre-school experience (National SDG indicator 4.2.3)	51% (girls: 52% / boys: 50%) (2015)	75% (girls: 75% / boys: 75%) (2021)	64.6% (girls: 65.5%; boys: 63.7%) <sup>2</sup>
4.2. Survival rate in primary education (girls / boys)	78% (girls: 80% / boys: 77%) (2015)	93% (girls: 93% / boys: 93%) (2021)	82% (girls: 83.8% / boys: 80.3.9%) <sup>3</sup>
4.3. Proportion of youth (female/male) employed as a result of participation in vocational training programmes (National SDG Indicator 4.3.1)	30% (2015)	70% (2021)	Proxy indicators: Youth employment: 17% (2017 LFS) <sup>4</sup> 18.6% women 15.5% men  34% of male youth; and 43% female youth who report that their highest education completed is TVET are in employment

<sup>1</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>2</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>3</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>4</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

## 2. RESULTS

Data for the 2018-19 school year show that the Government is on track to meet outcome indicators under the 8th ESDP, which is aligned to the 8th NSEDP and VISION 2030. According to the MoES, 5-year-old enrolment expanded from 66 per cent in 2015 to 79.4 per cent in 2019, on track to achieve the 80 per cent ESDP 2020 target; more children are reaching Grade 5, up from 78.3 per cent in 2015 to 82 per cent in 2019, with survival rates of girls at 83.8 per cent, slightly higher than boys; Grade 1 repetition has decreased from 13.5 per cent in 2015 to 8.4 per cent in 2019 (girls 7.4 per cent); lower secondary gross enrolment rate (GER) of 82.8 per cent in 2019 is on track to meet the 85 per cent ESDP target; while upper secondary GER (2019: 54.8 per cent) may meet the 60 per cent 2020 target with accelerated gains<sup>1</sup>.

### ENHANCED HEALTH, WATER, SANITATION, HYGIENE, AND NUTRITION IN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

UN agencies continued to collectively promote school health; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in 2019 involving engagement at both school and community level, as well as policy and system level support.

With UNICEF's support, more than 800 children from pre-primary and primary schools benefitted from WASH services in Phongsaly, Savannakhet and Salavan provinces. Work is ongoing in Xieng Khouang, Salavan and Attapeu to deliver WASH in school package consisting of gender segregated and accessible latrines for all, group handwashing stations, and improved source of water and water filters to an additional 3,500 children. UNICEF also supported capacity building of provincial and district trainers to train teachers, school principals and representatives of the village education development committees on promoting daily routine hygiene behaviours through the "Hygiene Action Led by Pupils" intervention<sup>2</sup>. The WASH in Schools Standards developed with UNICEF support has been finalized by MoES. The standards include guidelines to improve the quality and sustainability of water and sanitation facilities, hygiene education and adoption of hygiene practices by children.

The provision of school meals has also been a crucial factor in achieving almost universal enrolment in primary education. Following the adoption of the Government's National Policy on Promoting School Lunch in May 2014, WFP started to shift its focus from implementing the school-feeding programme to build the capacity of the Government and communities. The first set of 515 WFP-

supported meal programmes in schools were officially handed over to MoES in 2019<sup>3</sup>. In order to ensure sustainability of the school meals programme, WFP continued to provide additional assistance to most in-need primary schools with support for access to water by connecting village water points to 206 primary schools, constructing 91 greenhouses to increase production of nutritious foods, planting fruit trees and provided fingerlings to the 190 fishponds established in 2018. The development of the "Green Box," an educational tool with materials for teachers and students on nutrition, WASH, and agriculture/climate change, is expected to be finalized in 2020. Daily lunches in 1,439 schools, including two special schools for students with hearing and visual impairments continued to be supported by WFP benefiting 137,567 pre-primary and primary students, of which 49 per cent were girls<sup>4</sup>.

WFP also began preparations for the handover of the remaining 924 schools, scheduled to be managed by MoES in mid-2021. Since the adoption of the National Policy on Promoting School Meals in 2014<sup>5</sup>, WFP has been engaging closely with the Government to build institutional frameworks and capacities, develop an evidence base for school meals, and ensure that the communities as well as the Government are prepared for a phased handover. In 2019, several pieces of legislation were passed including a Ministerial Directive on Promoting School Agriculture<sup>4</sup>; a Ministerial Circular to appoint a handover committee for the remaining provinces and districts; and a Ministerial Circular on ownership and regular cooking in the remaining 21 districts<sup>5</sup>.

### STRENGTHENED TEACHER EDUCATION AND OTHER CAPACITY BUILDING

UNICEF, in partnership with the European Union, contributed to strengthening the planning, budgeting, monitoring and evidence-based decision-making capacity of the MoES at all levels in 2019. This included technical assistance to the Lao Education and Sports Management Information System (LESMIS), including the review of various MoES management information systems and databases, the use of innovative approaches to streamline data collection and promote better use of data and development of an M&E framework for the 9th ESSDP. An M&E situation analysis has been initiated to address the fragmented monitoring functions in the sector. To address imbalances in teacher allocation, UNICEF supported consultations and implementation review of the teacher allocation guidelines. This complements ongoing support to improve the management information system of MoES for personnel - MIS, a tool for the rational

<sup>1</sup> School Year 2018-19 data is from the MoES Education Management Information System (EMIS) while data from 2015 is from the ESDP 2016-2020 mid-term review report.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/laos/stories/handwashing>  
[https://www.unicef.org/laos/sites/unicef.org.laos/files/2018-08/RAISING\\_CLEAN\\_HANDS\\_IN LAO\\_PDR\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/laos/sites/unicef.org.laos/files/2018-08/RAISING_CLEAN_HANDS_IN LAO_PDR_WEB.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_Tech.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Tech.php)  
<https://annx.asianews.network/content/lao-government-take-over-school-meals-programme-wfp-96793>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/news/recipe-success-wfp-starts-handover-school-feeding-government-laos>

<sup>5</sup> [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000115508/download/?\\_ga=2.67535765.586489312.1597208956-374849151.1580888460](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000115508/download/?_ga=2.67535765.586489312.1597208956-374849151.1580888460)

<sup>3</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000113898/download/>

[http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_Tech.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Tech.php)

<sup>4</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000104271/download/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000113898/download/>

distribution of teachers. In addition, UNESCO supported the development of data collection tools on teacher-related data to be used to inform policies, plans and programmes of both pre- and in-service teacher education with a view to improving the Teacher Management Information System (TEMIS) aligned with the LESMIS.

To improve teaching and learning in schools, UNICEF supported the development of an institutional pedagogical adviser training programme, designed to provide on-the-job support to pedagogical advisers who serve as mentors for teachers, schools principals and Teacher Training College staffs across the country, approved by MoES. Nationwide rollout started in November covering half of the country with 312 persons trained across nine provinces.

With support from UNFPA, a pool of 20 master trainers from the relevant departments of MoES at central and provincial level was trained on the revised teachers' guidebook and teaching aid for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for lower and upper secondary education. Following a Training of Trainers (ToT), 110 teachers from five districts in Bokeo province received training from the master trainers. This resulted in over 25,000 students in 45 lower and upper secondary schools in Bokeo province receiving CSE covering topics of gender, life skills, relationship, child rights and sexual reproductive health. Additionally, 24 teachers from 8 teacher training colleges, 30 teachers from Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) and 20 teachers from Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI) college in Bokeo province received training equipping them for the delivery of CSE to over 7,000 future teachers and 900 TVET students in 2019. A further 500 VEDI students are expected to be appraised next year by MoES.

UNESCO's Capacity Development for Education (CapED) Programme has contributed to the enhancement of institutional capacities of teacher training colleges (TTCs) in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Following the revision of the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) curriculum in 2018, UNESCO supported 100 teachers on the revised ECE curriculum implementation in 8 TTCs. The revised curriculum coupled with the enhanced capacities of teacher educators help improve the quality of early childhood teacher education programmes to prepare prospective preschool teachers to help young learners build strong foundations of learning skills and holistic development. The revised curriculum has been adopted by Dongkhamxang, Salavan, Luang Namtha and Savannakhet TTCs and will expand to the remaining TTCs in the following years.

## IMPROVED SCHOOL AND TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA

Rewrites of the pre-primary, primary and secondary education curricula continued in 2019 supported by various development partners. Efforts are also underway to improve pre- and in-service teacher training across all levels, contributing to improving the quality, relevance,

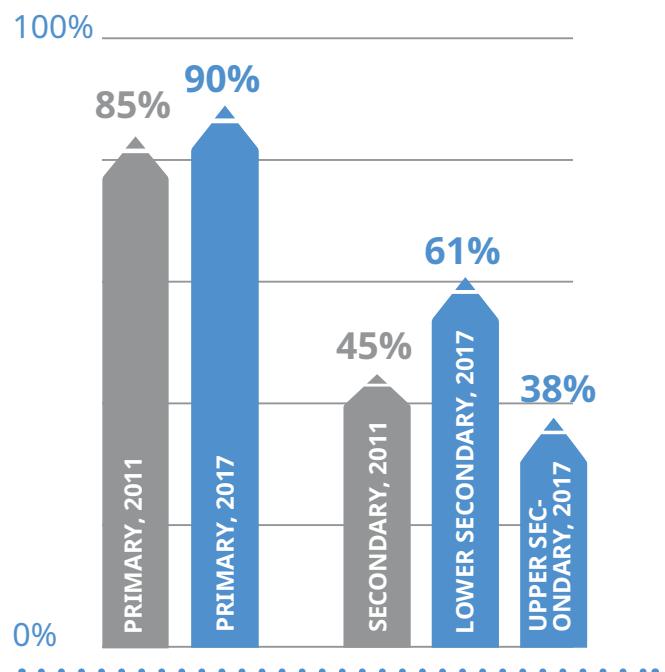
and inclusiveness of the education system.

UNESCO supported capacity development for a cohort of 22 national and 36 provincial trainers to develop a gender-responsive pedagogy training manual of Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics related subjects, ensuring that teaching and learning processes pay attention to specific learning needs of boys and girls. The trainers conduct in-service teacher training nationwide, using a cascade model that provided 1,180 lower secondary school teachers the skills to respond to the relatively low participation and achievements of girls in those subjects.

## INCREASED ACCESS, PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

In support of MoES priorities for reducing disparities in education and training, UNICEF supports a community-based school readiness (CBSR) programme, that provides community-based ECE, where there are no existing pre-schools or kindergartens and direct support to pre-school CBSR centres. The program provides ECE kits, teacher training, mentoring, and monitoring visits from district and provincial levels to the CBSR and pre-primary schools. These interventions have contributed to providing early learning opportunities to 7,017 young children in 11 districts across five provinces in 2019.

<sup>1</sup>  NET ATTENDANCE RATIO has INCREASED for primary school:



<sup>1</sup> Lao Social Indicator Survey I (LSIS I) (2011) and II (LSIS II) (2017).

Following the floods in 2019, UNICEF as Education Cluster co-lead, played a pivotal role in supporting the rapid assessment and mobilizing a response. As a result, textbooks have been re-printed for 28,971 pre-school, primary and lower secondary students for distribution in January 2020 ensuring minimal disruption to children's schooling in flood affected areas.

With ILO support, Lao PDR is implementing the mutual recognition of skills (MRS) programme together with other ASEAN countries. The MRS program was developed based on principles and good practices in competency-based curriculum development and assessment to competency standards. The MRS benchmarking process will contribute to more mobility of Lao skilled workers in the ASEAN region. A south-south and triangular cooperation with China on strengthening skills development was also launched in 2019. These can include building on and/or improving skill qualifications, training packages, and delivery modalities of selected priority areas. The intervention will also strengthen Public Employment Services.

The first phase of UNESCO support to strengthening the education system in Lao PDR for out of school children (OOSC) ended in 2019. This supported ASEAN states to create a first time regional partnership to promote education for OOSC through an ASEAN Declaration<sup>1</sup>. In Lao PDR, the project delivered 14,808 OOSC with learning opportunities equivalent to formal primary education. MoES has started to replicate the Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE) for OOSC in non-project provinces with the national budget. With the buy-in and ownership among partners, the impacts, and benefits of phase 2 will help children in a more sustainable manner. The initiative's design is based on the Government's commitment to provide OOSC, its outcomes will rely on this assumption and strategic partnerships among key stakeholders for OOSC continuation.

### STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR EVIDENCE-BASED ANALYSIS, POLICY DIALOGUE AND ADVOCACY

UN efforts to provide more evidence, support high-level advocacy and facilitate participatory policy dialogue contributed to strengthening result-based sector planning and development of education.

The LYU developed a National Youth and Adolescent Policy, with UNFPA and UNESCO support. It has been submitted to the Office of Prime Minister for final endorsement by the Government expected in 2020. The implementation plan of the National Adolescent and Youth Policy will be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including young people at central and provincial level to address the issues of health, education, employment, protection, and participation. The LYU also organized the International Youth Day and youth parliamentarian dialogue as the platform to promote youth

<sup>1</sup> <https://educateachild.org/our-partners-projects/projects/strengthening-education-system-out-school-children>

participation in policy discussions, supported by UNFPA in August 2019<sup>1</sup>. Over 200 young people actively participated in the youth day celebrations and around 100 young people with a majority of them women held a dialogue with Members of the National Assembly. Volunteerism, inclusion, disability, LGBTIQ and youth were among the key topics of discussion as UN Volunteers (UNV) celebrated International Volunteer Day with partners at the Faculty of Engineering campus of the National University of Laos in December 2019<sup>2</sup>.

With UNESCO support, the development of a comprehensive teacher policy to improve recruitment, management, training, remuneration, continuous professional development and working conditions of teachers was initiated. A series of consultations with multi-sectoral government counterparts and development partners took place to take stock of teacher-related issues that need to be considered in the elaboration of a comprehensive teacher policy.

Bilateral and multilateral conversations were held throughout the year to accelerate the ICPD agenda and increase investments in adolescent girls and boys, including the International Day of the Girl Child chaired by the Minister of Health in October 2019 at which around 500 people participated. A new campaign 'Me, My Body, My Planet, My Future' was initiated by UNFPA (unveiled at the International Youth Day<sup>3</sup>) to encourage adolescent and young people to take action on advancing the sustainable development goals regarding their own health and well-being, climate change and protection of the environment, and promoting gender equality. Over 9,000 adolescents and young people have been engaged through this campaign to date, adding to the above mentioned 74 teachers who received CSE TOT training to enhance CSE with future teachers and students.

## 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

Tight fiscal space, under-resourced institutional and human capacities along with the constrained budget allocated to the social sector, including education, remain the key bottlenecks to the system. While efforts are underway to strengthen public financial management across the Government, including in education, these need to be accelerated. MoES capacity for strategic and multi-year planning is variable, with weak capacities in some departments, provinces, and districts. High-level policy discussions need to be accelerated, as well as strengthening of MoES capacity for evidence-based sector analysis and planning, and generation of studies that examine cost-effectiveness of interventions in education.

<sup>1</sup> "International Youth Day - Transforming Education", Lao UNFPA press release, August 2019. <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/international-youth-day-transforming-education>

<sup>2</sup> "Volunteer for an Inclusive Future: Celebrating International Volunteer Day in Lao PDR", UNV, December 2019. <https://www.unv.org/News/Volunteer-Inclusive-Future-Celebrating-International-Volunteer-Day-Lao-PDR>

<sup>3</sup> See: "International Youth Day - Transforming Education", Lao UNFPA press release, August 2019. <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/international-youth-day-transforming-education>

Operational efficiency in budget utilization as well as allocative efficiency continued to be a challenge hindering, more results-based, equity-focused interventions for the sector.

Coordination among different MoES departments, which are implementing fragmented interventions and projects, also remains a challenge. Improved coordination and collaboration within MoES and across other line ministries and encouraging the provinces and districts to participate in the planning stages are likely to positively impact the quality, alignment and effective use of limited human and financial resources in the sector.

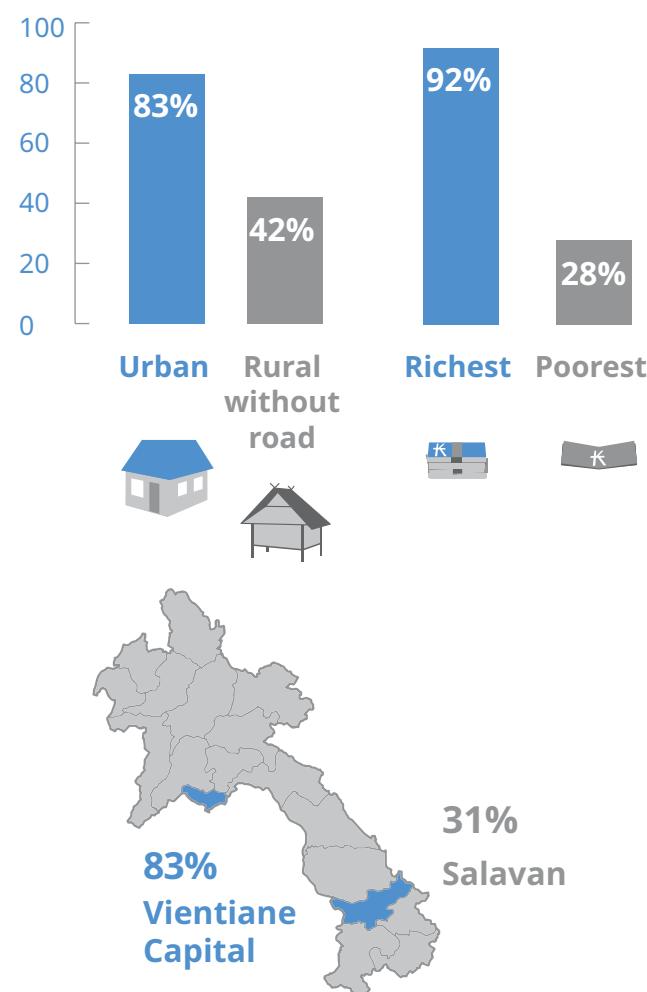
Coverage under the current skills development system is inadequate in Lao PDR. Access to TVET, career guidance, reliable labour market information and employment services is limited, especially for people in rural and remote areas.

Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) stood at 42.1 per cent in 2017 based on the national labour force survey<sup>1</sup>.

Specific challenges for youth trying to access the labour market in Lao PDR include lack of labour market information and job search experience, skills gap and lack of diversified working experience, socio-cultural and family pressures and lack of capital. Thus, a range of labour market assistant programmes need to be updated to address these challenges and respond to changing market needs. A more regular method for labour market information is needed to better understand the evolving market demands. Promoting youth entrepreneurship and business skills development would also help realize the economic potential of Lao youth and promote their engagement in business and trade at both the regional and national levels. The recurrent natural disasters, which appear to be increasing in frequency, coupled with limited capacity to respond, highlights the need to strengthen disaster risk resilience, including climate change resilience across the country. This requires a joint and integrated response from government stakeholders, the UN and key development partners.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION strongly correlates with SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS<sup>1</sup>:

### Disparities in lower-secondary education, 2017:



Finally, two of the UNPF Outcome 4 indicators continued its upward trajectory but growth need to be accelerated to meet the 2021 targets. Accelerated efforts are also needed to ensure groups of children are not being left behind, and that those in school, particularly in the rural areas acquire the needed skills to thrive in the 21st century. These key challenges, if not addressed, could hinder Lao PDR's potential graduation from LDC status and transition to High Middle-Income Country by 2030.

## 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

In 2019, Lao PDR continued to see gains in getting more children and youth to school and ensuring they stay in school. Financial challenges, however, slowed down progress putting further pressure to accelerate reforms and increase gains in 2020 to meet the 8th ESDP 2016-20 and 8th NSEDP targets, as well as the 2021 targets of the UNPF.

The rollout of the UNICEF-supported institutional pedagogical adviser training programme continues in early 2020 to reach remaining parts of the country. 2019 saw districts allowing pedagogical advisers to extend mentoring support to 1,810 school principals and teachers in seven districts across four provinces. Trainings and on-the job support aimed at strengthening capacity of service providers to deliver quality early childhood education (ECE) reached 298 pre-primary teachers, 180 community-based school readiness programme village facilitators, and 48 provincial and district education staff, benefitting 7,170 pre-school aged children living in rural areas. UNICEF also supported two provinces (one-district each) to strengthen sub-national planning across social

<sup>1</sup> LSIS I, LSIS II.

1 National Labour Force Survey 2017

sectors, including in education.

A revised pre-primary curriculum and accompanying teachers' guides have been finalized and approved in 2019 by MoES with UNICEF support. Initiated in 2018, the rollout for Grade 1 is ongoing and will continue for Grade 2 in 2020 reaching Grade 5 in 2023. A minimum quality standard for ECE was also developed, which is expected to be rolled out in 2020. UNICEF also supported MoES to undertake a national assessment of learning outcomes (ASLO) for Grade 9 (end of lower secondary) and started groundwork for a Grade 5 assessment (end of primary) as part of the Southeast Asia-Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) initiative, which is a regionally comparable assessment of how Grade 5 students perform in reading, writing, math and global citizenship. Results from Grade 9 (end of lower secondary) highlighted the need to improve the quality of education, particularly at the pre-primary and primary levels to ensure students acquire the building blocks and fundamental skills needed to transition to secondary education or vocational-technical education. These findings will be used as reference for improvements in lower secondary and primary education.

Working with the LWU and relevant ministries, UNICEF has developed a parenting education package for rollout in pre-schools, CBSR centres and health centres. The package is designed to support children's holistic development and learning and has been approved for rollout in 2020 by the LWU.

UNFPA is discussing with development partners including Plan International and Save the Children on the possibility of expanding CSE to Oudomxay, Luang Prabang, Phongsaly and Houphan province.

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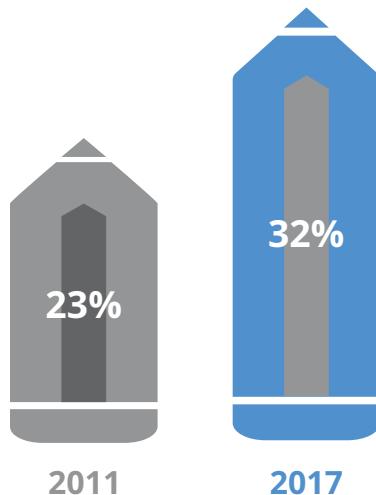
CSE contents were also integrated into the Grade 2 national primary education curriculum approved by MoES and rollout is set for 2020, expected to reach approximately 400,000 primary school students nationwide.

Much progress has been made in recent years in expanding access to education and strengthening the education system. However, much remains to be done to ensure those in school are learning, in particular those from disadvantaged background; and to get more young Lao people to attend and complete secondary and/or vocational-technical education. Moreover, progress needs to be accelerated if targets in the 8th ESDP and NESDP are to be met and progress maintained for a smooth graduation from LDC status. This is a formidable challenge that calls for a stronger prioritization and commitment to identifying and addressing key bottlenecks.

Creating a strong sense of national ownership through involving relevant government counterparts in the onset of activity design and strengthening their capacities throughout the process has been essential in achieving desired results over the past three years. The main challenge has been a gap between limited capacities of government and the expected pace of implementation by UN agencies. It is vital to consider existing capacities and trying to avoid parallel interventions that could overwhelm relevant technical departments.

Understanding that strengthening systems and institutional capacity development takes time, substantial investments, sustained coordination and collaboration between UN agencies and other development partners will be key for promoting greater policy coherence in the sector. Supporting the MoES (at all levels of the system) will strengthen strategic approaches in designing and implementing cost-effective interventions with the highest impact on student learning.

## 2 IN 3 CHILDREN still DO NOT HAVE ACCESS to EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> LSIS I, LSIS II.

# SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME

In 2019, approximately 138,000 pre-primary and primary school students (49 per cent girls) in 1,439 schools across eight provinces (Phongsaly, Oudomxay, Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, Khammouan, Salavan, Xekong and Attapeu) received mid-day school meals provided by WFP, including two special schools for students with hearing and visual impairments. The food assistance was complemented by nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), literacy and school gardening among other initiatives as part of a comprehensive support programme. In line with the handover plan signed with the MoES, school meal programmes in 515 schools were handed over to the Government in July 2019, with programmes in the remaining 924 schools scheduled for hand-over in mid-2021 and incorporated into Lao PDR's National School Meals Programme.

The successful first phase of the hand-over in mid-2019 was made possible through close engagement with Government and communities, and was the culmination of support to institutional frameworks, legislation, school meals management and school infrastructure. In 2019, WFP also supported Government to develop a number of decrees and legislation, including a Prime Minister's Decree to integrate school feeding into the national budget (currently in process) and guidelines on school meals implementation at the national, provincial, district and community levels.

At the community/school level, WFP designed three packages of support according to results from community capacity assessments: 1) strengthen Village Education Development Committees; 2) improve water infrastructure; and 3) strengthen food availability and resilience through the construction and rehabilitation of school meals-related infrastructure (e.g. kitchens, dining rooms, school gardens, etc.). Prior to the handover, a series of workshops were held to identify areas requiring further support to ensure a sustainable transition.

A cost-benefit analysis of the school feeding programme in 2018 showed that for every USD 1 invested in school meals, there was a return of up to USD 6.1 over the lifetime of the child. Not only has Laos seen an average 14 per cent school enrolment increase over the last 10 years, children receiving school meals are also spending one year longer at school compared to their peers.

# 5. HEALTH, WATER AND SANITATION

People enjoy improved access to quality health services, and water, sanitation and hygiene



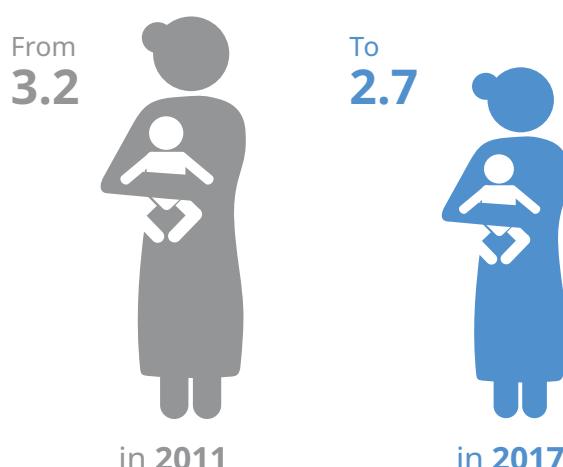
## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

With high level political commitment from Government to achieve UHC by 2025, the MoH endorsed new and adapted policies, strategies and approaches in 2019 to improve the quality of service delivery, reduce financial health costs and expand coverage of health services to the most vulnerable populations living in remote and rural areas. The 8th Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP) and Health Sector Reform Strategy were also reviewed and updated for the next phase, based on the above priorities.

The National Health Insurance (NHI) Fund, a Government funded, tax-based system with low co-payment introduced in 2017, expanded coverage to all 17 provinces across the country in 2019, excluding the municipality of Vientiane capital. As reflected under the Outcome 2 indicator on social protection, overall coverage has now reached 94 per cent, significantly contributing to the goal of UHC by 2025. In 2019, WHO coordinated an assessment of progress achieved during the first three years of NHI, noting impact in terms of increasing access to outpatient and inpatient services.

Since 2014, maternal, neonatal and child health care is free of charge for pregnant women and children under five. In 2017, the Government approved the integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the national curriculum at primary levels. In 2019, it approved the revised teacher manual on CSE to supplement national curriculum in secondary education and one-week-in-depth CSE in Technical and Vocational Education and Training courses for adolescents to make healthy choices, prevent early pregnancy and sexual transmitted infections and support healthy relationships with peers and parents<sup>1</sup>.

### FERTILITY RATE has FALLEN<sup>2</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> LSIS I, LSIS II.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA inputs to UNCT Contribution to UPR 35th session, 2019.

In 2019, the National Immunization Programme (NIP) continued to deliver infant and maternal vaccination through an increasingly integrated platform including antenatal and postnatal care, nutrition and family planning. To strengthen the delivery of routine immunization, WHO supported the NIP to roll-out an in-service training targeting EPI Managers, in support of the development of micro plans to improve equity and implement quarterly community meetings (QCM) to empower and support local leaders and village health volunteers with the identification of children due for immunization and other essential health services.

Immunisation coverage for DTP3 (Diphtheria Tetanus Toxoid and Pertussis) in 2019 stood at 92 per cent at national level; however, coverage ranged from 59 per cent in Saysomboun to 108 per cent in Champassak. Just 12 of the 18 provinces (67 per cent) achieved the target of 90 per cent. This variable coverage resulted in a number of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks including a large measles outbreak in Vientiane Capital.

Steady progress has been achieved in AIDS / HIV response, with 85 per cent of approximately 12,000 people living with HIV knowing their status and 64 per cent of these, receiving anti-retroviral therapy<sup>3</sup>. Through joint efforts with Government and partners, coverage of services has been extended with HIV prevention programmes currently available in five provinces for female sex workers and Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). It is critical to continue supporting to efforts by Government and partners, including at the community level, to ensure that the Lao Generation 2030 is free from HIV, and that the most vulnerable and marginalized groups are reached, so that no one is left behind.

Despite the progress, challenges persist, with only 64 per cent of people living with HIV currently having access to treatment. Urgent attention is also needed to address the alarming increase in HIV prevalence among MSM. The prevalence of sexually transmitted infections among female sex workers stands at a high rate of 31 per cent. As of 2019, the lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS among the Lao public is cause for concern, with only 19 per cent of females and 26 per cent of males having a comprehensive understanding of HIV/AIDS. More community engagement is required both in HIV prevention and care and support. Lessons learned at global level have shown that working with local communities allows greater access to hard to reach groups who are among the most vulnerable to HIV infection. While Government should be commended for increasing its investment in HIV/AIDS response, the resources need to be further augmented, particularly in the face of declining external resources for the subject<sup>4</sup>.

The MoH envisions a generation free of Tuberculosis (TB) infection and disease and has endorsed the milestones

<sup>3</sup> The trend has in been in-lined with the data in 2017, mentioned in the MTR of the 8th NSEDP

<sup>4</sup> "Communities in Lao PDR make the difference in HIV response to end AIDS by 2030", WHO 2019. <https://www.who.int/laos/news/detail/01-12-2019-communities-in-lao-pdr-make-the-difference-in-hiv-response-to-end-aids-by-2030>



and targets of the WHO End TB Strategy and sustainable development goal (SDGs) for a World free of TB, zero deaths, disease, and suffering due to TB by 2030. Lao PDR endorsed the TB UN High-level Meeting Declaration and multi-sectoral accountability framework. Lao PDR reached the Millennium Development Goal target (MDG 6, Goal 4) of halving the TB prevalence in 2015 compared to 1990. However, TB burden remains high and estimated TB treatment coverage remains sub optimal (57 per cent in 2018)<sup>1</sup> due to limited access to quality health services available to a large number of the population living in remote rural areas of the country.

It was also noted that there are a wide variety of mobile and static population groups at risk of Malaria in areas of Lao PDR where the disease is endemic. The epidemiology of the disease varies considerably from one group to another and may require different Malaria control strategies, adapted to risk group behaviour, local cultural and traditional practices, local health infrastructure and environmental conditions. While the overall Malaria trend is downward, the disease is still considered an important public health challenge in Lao PDR and the country remains at risk of epidemics. The number of Malaria cases decreased between 2001 and 2019, from 279,903 cases to 6,409 cases, with a 30 per cent decrease in cases recorded between 2018 and 2019. Malaria testing increased by 57 per cent between 2018 and 2019.

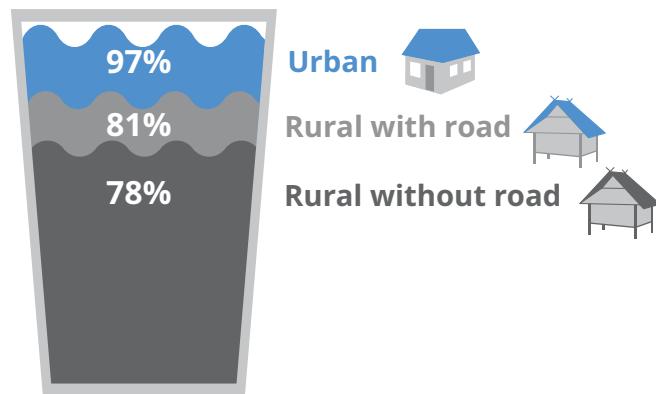
In 2019, it became increasingly apparent that Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities are vulnerable to environmental pollution and climate change as evidenced in extensive damage to over 200 water supply systems and 37 water and sanitation facilities in health centres as a result of floods in 2019.

<sup>1</sup> MRT 8th NSEDP, 2018

In response, the UN System including WHO, UNICEF and UN Habitat working in conjunction with the MoH and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MoPWT), have introduced more climate resilient water safety plans for water supply systems in urban areas prone to floods and storms. However, insufficient WASH facilities and practices continue to be a challenge in many vulnerable settlements. For example, in Sanamxay District in Attapeu Province alone, some 2,440 (Hat Nyao: 838; Dong Bak: 1,048 and Dong Bok: 554)<sup>1</sup> people continued to live in over-crowded temporary settlements without access to adequate WASH facilities, following the devastating floods in 2018, which placed them at greater risk of public health emergencies. It is therefore imperative that UN agencies continue to work together not only to strengthen WASH infrastructures but also to promote good hygiene practices in vulnerable communities, as one of the most effective and cost-efficient measures to prevent infectious disease and maintain good health and well-being.

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) represent a key public health challenge in Lao PDR and result in a negative impact on the country's health and economic situations. In 2019, there are 1,349,432 school age children (19.2%) of total population in Lao PDR require preventive chemotherapy (PC) for Soil-transmitted Helminths (STH) and 112,614 people (90%) of total population in Khong and Mounlapamok districts of Champasack province require PC for Schistosomiasis, respectively<sup>2</sup>. In 2018, prevalence infection for STH and SCH were 40% and 3.2% at sentinel sites, respectively<sup>3</sup>. Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) was endemic only at Attapeu province. Mass drug administration was implemented for 6 years continually and stopped in 2017. After stop MDA, transmission assessment survey was conducted in 2017 and 2019. The result showed that all samples were negative for LF<sup>4</sup>.

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**84% of people use IMPROVED sources of drinking water<sup>5</sup>:**



<sup>1</sup> DPWT Attapeu 20th October report

<sup>2</sup> Preventive Chemotherapy and Joint Reporting Form in 2019

<sup>3</sup> Preventive Chemotherapy and Epidemiological Data Reporting in 2018

<sup>4</sup> Epidemiological Data Reporting in 2019

<sup>5</sup> LSIS II.

## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>5. PEOPLE ENJOY IMPROVED ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH SERVICES, AND WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE</b>			
5.1. Maternal mortality ratio (National SDG Indicator 3.1.1)	197 per 100,000 (2015) <sup>1</sup>	160 per 100,000 (2020) <sup>2</sup>	185 per 100,000 (2017 UN estimate, published 2019) 167 per 100,000 (2019, MoH)
5.2. Under-five mortality rate, girls/boy (National SDG Indicator 3.1.2)	64 per 1,000 (2016) (girls: 83 per 1,000; boys: 95 per 1,000)	40 per 1,000 (2021) (girls and boys) <sup>3</sup>	47 per 1000 live births (girls 42; and boys 52)
5.3 Percentage of population using improved drinking water source and sanitation facility (National SDG Indicator 6.1.1)	76% water supply coverage; 71% sanitation coverage (2015) <sup>4</sup>	90% water supply coverage (2020); 80% sanitation coverage (2020) <sup>5</sup> (female: 30% / male: 70%) (2021)	LSIS 2017: - Proportion of population using an improved source of drinking water is 83.9%  - Proportion of population having an improved but not shared sanitation facility is 73.8% <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>2</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>3</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>4</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>5</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>6</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

## 2. RESULTS

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In 2019, MoH reviewed progress in implementation of the 8th HSDP and the second phase of the Health Sector Reform Strategy (HSRS 2016-2020) and developed the draft 9th HSDP and the updated HSRS for the third phase (2021-2025) with support from WHO. The overarching goal of the health sector reform is to achieve UHC by 2025 through strengthening primary health care in alignment with Government's directives including the three builds (Sam Sang). Health systems strengthening has been guided by the HSDP and the HSRS.

Key achievements in 2019 included the adoption of the National Health Insurance Law, an assessment of impact following the roll-out of national health insurance, updating provider payment under NHI, and integration of information systems of 12 key health programmes in one health management information system platform, DHIS2 (District Health Information Systems 2), and the introduction of licensing and registration system for healthcare workforce. Advances in the area of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) were also recorded by multisectoral engagement between the MoH, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and partners. WHO supported the harmonization of the birth and death notification forms in the health sector and facilitated wider stakeholder discussions on broader issues relating to CRVS.

A key achievement during the first half of 2019, was the endorsement of the revised Reproductive Health Policy which notably, included adolescents as a major beneficiary group. The endorsement benefitted from support to policy development and advocacy provided by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and I-NGOs. In addition, WHO provided analytical support through its regional office. This is now referred to as the Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (SRMNCAH) Policy, now incorporating men, women and young people of all ages and genders into the current socio-economic development context of the country. The policy is also anchored around a holistic life-cycle approach, closely aligned to goals defined in the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health 2016-2030.

In 2019, MoH successfully developed and passed a new Immunization Law that is applicable to the entire country and provides the legal framework for the principles, regulations, and measures on management, monitoring, and inspection of immunization activities. The NIP continues to disseminate the law at sub-national levels including engagement on immunization from decision-makers, local authorities, and communities.

Additional key milestones in 2019 included the adoption of the revised Primary Health Care (PHC) policy and the development of an implementation strategy to strengthen community health, which focuses on the achievement of UHC by 2025 through expanding coverage of essential

health and nutrition services to all ethnic communities and enhancing community engagement and participation. The PHC policy is in line with the 2018 Declaration of Astana's new global commitment, PHC for All, and focuses on universal access to health services for all groups through increased community participation<sup>1</sup>. As stipulated by the MoH Health Sector Reform, it will "provide legal corridor for flexible PHC services that are well adapted to diverse local, social, geographical condition, especially in rural areas of Lao PDR"<sup>2</sup>. The MoH focus on PHC includes ensuring that the delivery of health services is people-centred and responsive to needs through multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration to systematically address the broader determinants of health, including social, economic and environmental factors, as well as individual characteristics and behaviour. The MoH focus on the engagement of individuals, families and communities aims to optimize their health and support their role as co-developers of community-based health services.

In November 2019, at the Nairobi Summit for the ICPD, Lao PDR committed to increasing the proportion of deliveries with Skilled Birth Attendance to 90 per cent, delivery in health facilities to 70 per cent, modern contraceptive prevalence rate to 70 per cent, and that all health centres should have at least one midwife by 2025. The statement from the Lao PDR delegation included a pledge for modern contraception to be made available by 2030 through increased resources and the expansion of quality youth friendly services, including sexual reproductive health information and family planning services to women, men and unmarried young people. In support of Lao PDR's commitments, UNFPA provided support to inter-ministerial coordination along with financial support to enable the Vice President of the LWU to participate in the Summit.

The endorsement and launch of the National Strategy for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene for Lao PDR 2019-2030<sup>3</sup>, provided strategic direction and approaches for addressing many of the WASH challenges in Lao PDR. The focus on equity is critical with significant geographical, socio-economic, and ethnic inequities evident in access to WASH services, even as the country progresses towards potential graduation from LDC status. The policy and strategy establish clear ambitious targets to achieve universal access to basic WASH services, enabling appropriate strategies and targets to be incorporated into the 9th NSEDP to guide WASH investment.

With HIV infections continuing to rise in Lao PDR, UNAIDS working closely with the Centre for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections, developed an HIV prevention roadmap to help outline priority actions, service prevention gaps targeting key populations, and the identification of needs for technical support. The roadmap will be used to guide national partners on HIV prevention for

1 [https://www.uhccpartnership.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UHC-annual-report-2018\\_WEB-spreads.pdf](https://www.uhccpartnership.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UHC-annual-report-2018_WEB-spreads.pdf)

2 Health Sector Reform Strategy and Framework till 2025

3 World Bank, scaling up water supply, sanitation and hygiene project

high-risk groups, address inconsistency of HIV information/data and as a tool for domestic and external resource mobilization. A video called “Live Life Positively”<sup>1</sup> was developed to raise awareness on sensitizing communities to promote their positive and harmonious engagement with people living with HIV/AIDS. The video was widely disseminated through social media, YouTube and outreach activities during the World AIDS Campaign.

WHO, UNAIDS, and partners supported the National TB and HIV programme’s first Joint TB and HIV Program Review in October 2019 through coordination, preparation and implementation of the review process that resulted in a report that included 11 priority recommendations. The review contributed to the framework development and prioritization of activities for the new TB and HIV National Strategic Planning. Moreover, the analysis and strategic plan became basis of the joint Global Fund and World Bank funding request which will support more than 80 per cent of the TB and HIV activity budget for next 5 years.

In 2019, the national Malaria control program conducted a mid-term program review of the strategies and impacts of the current national Malaria control strategy, 2016-2020<sup>2</sup>. Results from this intensive external and independent review process, supported by WHO, were used to develop the next national Malaria strategic plan, 2021-2025. The next strategic plan built on the successes of the current plan but focused on support to push more aggressively to eliminate P. Falciparum as soon as possible and building elimination-capable systems that are integrated into the broader health structures and systems. The objective is to achieve a more sustainable approach to reaching the national Malaria elimination target by 2030 and to maintaining the country’s elimination status.

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

MoH has made great strides toward the implementation of its 5 Goods and 1 Satisfaction Policy to improve quality health service delivery, which will be a key focus of the third phase of the Health Sector Reform Strategy for 2020-2024. The 5 goods aim to improve the quality of health service provision within health facilities through five criteria: cleanliness, convenience, diagnosis, treatment and service. Ongoing efforts to develop national standard tools, guidelines and systems to measure, monitor and improve health service delivery at all levels, were supported by WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and development partners.

UN Joint Programme partners supported the MoH in carrying-out a midterm review of the national RMNCH Strategy and Action Plan in 2019<sup>3</sup>. Using the available

data from DHIS2<sup>1</sup>, (MoH’s health information system) and the recent Lao Social Indicator Survey II with additional collection of data through health facility assessments, the national strategic framework for RMNCH was made more people-centred and focused on providing a more integrated service delivery approach of essential services at all levels of the health system. Another recommendation from the evidence was the need to focus more on adolescents needs, thus, the updated RMNCH Strategy will now include “A” for adolescent health, that will now be called the RMNCAH strategy, and will have a stronger focus on adolescent health. Additional components in programming included the focus more strongly on “upstream support” and less on “implementation support” in line with the agency’s strength and the division of labour amongst development partners. This included supporting the RMNCAH policy advice and knowledge transfer at the national level, strengthen the linkage between national and sub-national levels and standardization of approaches, guidelines and tools to support the scale-up of high impact interventions. UNJP partners also supported the MoH in revising the national PHC policy to be in line with the 2018 Astana Declaration on PHC<sup>2</sup>. PHC is a core priority for the 3rd phase of Health Sector Reform and the revised RMNCAH Strategy will contain a specific cross-cutting objective aimed to strengthen the community-based delivery of integrated services. The UN Joint Programme brings together 3 strong UN health partners to support the MoH. The model contributed to the development and validation of modules and tools, capacity building of evidence-based planning and monitoring of national, subnational and health centre program staff, with community participation. As part of the overall systems-building approach, activities related to strengthening data collection, planning, and reporting for RMNCAH strategy, HIV/AIDS, TB programme, Malaria programmes and WASH were also carried out.

UNFPA, UN agencies and other partners continued to work together in 2019, to empower adolescent girls through efforts targeting the Noi 2030 framework results that are closely monitored through 5 indicators aligned with the SDG framework: i)<sup>3</sup> Anaemia in girls aged 15-19, ii) Adolescent Birth Rate, iii) Adolescents out of school, iv) child marriage and v) child labour. At policy level, technical support was provided to the LYU to develop the first ever national youth and adolescent policy, as well as for developing national youth law; to the MPI for revising the national population and development policy; to MoH on the national sexual and reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health policy; and to LWU on the preparation of the gender equity law. Comprehensive sexuality education was introduced in primary, secondary and technical and vocational education. Teachers from all 5 districts of Bokeo province and from Bokeo TVET college strengthened their capacities and are delivering comprehensive sexuality education to more than 25,000 students in 45 secondary schools.

1 Live Life Positively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5V46kffwcI>  
[https://web.facebook.com/UNAIDS/videos/live-life-positively-360hiv-trailer/382442005829544/](https://web.facebook.com/UNAIDS/videos/live-life-positively-360hiv-trailer/)

2 [https://www.malariafreemekong.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Laos\\_Malaria-NSP.pdf](https://www.malariafreemekong.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Laos_Malaria-NSP.pdf)

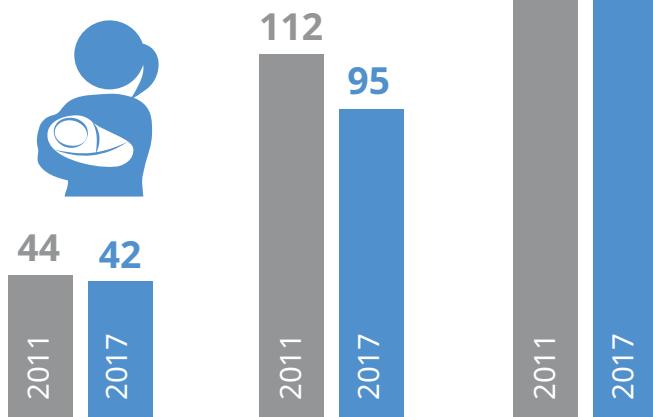
3 [http://www.laoshealth.org/assets/national-rmnch-strategy-2016-2025.pdf](https://www.laoshealth.org/assets/national-rmnch-strategy-2016-2025.pdf)

1 DHIS2

2 [https://www.uhccpartnership.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UHC-annual-report-2018\\_WEB-spreads.pdf](https://www.uhccpartnership.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UHC-annual-report-2018_WEB-spreads.pdf)

3 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19385Lao\\_Final\\_VNR\\_19\\_June\\_2018\\_web.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19385Lao_Final_VNR_19_June_2018_web.pdf)

**RURAL** areas without road are **LEFT BEHIND** in decreasing **ADOLESCENT BIRTH RATE** (per 1,000):<sup>1</sup>



Family Planning (FP) is one of the key pillars that reduce maternal and newborn mortality rates and improves the health and wellbeing of women and their existing children. It allows women and men to decide whether to have children or not when to have them, how many to have and how often to have them. In 2019, through FP services supported by UNFPA, 257,000 unintended pregnancies were averted, 61,000 unsafe abortion averted, and 230 maternal deaths averted<sup>2</sup>.

In order to improve the provision of adolescents and youth-friendly health services, 290 healthcare providers from Bokeo, Savannakhet and Bolikhhamxay provinces were trained in 2019 and are providing reproductive health information and services to around 435,000 adolescents and young people. Additionally, 187 employees from 4 factories and 52 peer educators were trained on reproductive and sexual health which resulted into 426 factory workers accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare services. More than six hundred adolescent girls from 29 villages in Sepone and Pha Oudome districts of Savannakhet and Bokeo provinces enhanced their health, social, economic and cognitive skills through their participation in Nang-Noi Girls Groups<sup>3</sup>.

Through UNICEF support coordinated with sector partners, in 2019, sanitation and social mobilization

1 LSIS II.

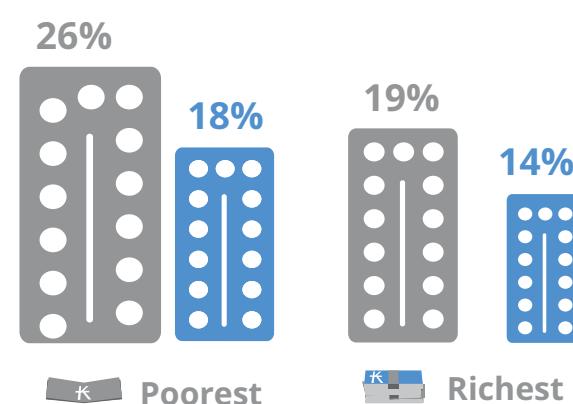
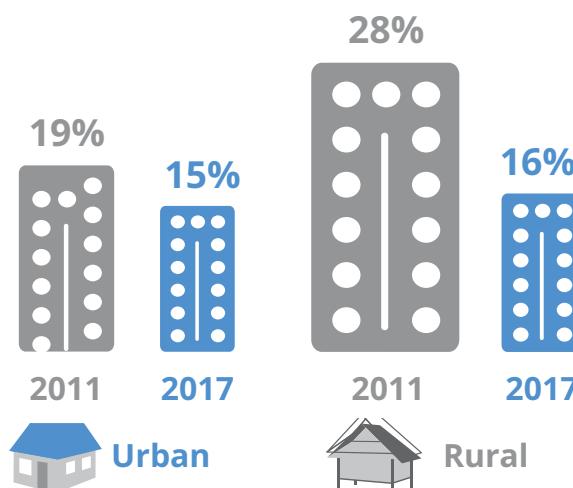
2 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/tracking-progress-family-planning-programme>

3 <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/empowering-lao-adolescent-girls-implementing-noi-ecosystem>

approaches were increasingly successful, with seven districts (Phongsaly, Bokeo, Houaphanh, Xieng Khouang, Savannakhet, Salavan and Attapeu) declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). At national level, increased momentum was evident, with all Provincial Vice-Governors committing their provinces to becoming ODF by 2025<sup>1</sup>.

To support Government efforts to address drug abuse, in 2019, UNODC continued to work with the Government to enhance access to evidence-based treatment for drug users, particularly through Community Based Treatment services (CBT). There are currently 28 CBT centres across the country offering counselling and treatment services to drug users<sup>2</sup>.

Unmet need for **FAMILY PLANNING** among married women has **DECREASED** but **DISPARITIES** are visible<sup>3</sup>:



1 <https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/new-milestone-lao-pdrs-bid-achieve-total-sanitation>  
<https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/khamkout-district-declared-open-defecation-free-and-healthy-model>  
<https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/pakkading-district-declared-open-defecation-free-and-healthy-model>  
<https://laopdrnews.wordpress.com/2020/08/02/a-new-milestone-in-lao-pdrs-bid-to-achieve-total-sanitation/>  
<https://snv.org/update/lao-government-declares-7-villages-open-defecation-free>  
<https://www.unicef.org/laos/stories/toilet-price-three-chickens>

2 <https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/en/laopdr/2019/10/sisattanak-community-based-treatment/story.html>

3 LSIS I, LSIS II.

Similarly, UNAIDS supported the Centre for HIV/AIDS and STI (CHAS) with development of a training curriculum for the capacity development of CSOs to deliver quality services to critical populations, in particular, MSM, sex workers and people who inject drugs. The trainings are expected to be rolled out in early 2020. In addition, approximately 70 participants from both CSOs and government partners are expected to be trained on new approaches to reach hidden key population groups.

Through WHO's technical support in strategic information, in 2019, the National TB Center (NTC) and the Centre for HIV/AIDS and STI (CHAS) strengthened systematic data collection and analysis of aggregated and individual level information through DHIS2 platform and conducted operational researches.

A Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water survey was conducted in 2018-2019 to assess the current situation, gaps and needs of the WASH policy, monitoring mechanisms, institutional and human resource capacities, and investment/financial support needs. The survey revealed that capacity building on water safety and sanitation services for rural communities at both provincial and district level is needed. The results also highlighted gaps between urban and rural WASH investment plans. While there is a well formulated policy, strategy and regulatory framework, gaps in implementation capacity exist at community and institutional levels. The survey findings were folded into the development of both the rural WASH and urban WASH strategic plans.

In 2019, the MoPWT benefited from UN-Habitat support to improve governance in the water sector<sup>1</sup>. Key performance indicators measuring effectiveness and efficiency standards of water utilities were streamlined and Quality Management Systems were introduced at national and provincial levels. UN-Habitat worked closely with partners in setting up a database to monitor the water supply and sanitation coverage in urban areas. It supported the access to basic infrastructure systems and services were improved through the completion of 42 small-scale adaptation infrastructures. In Attapeu and Xekong, 11 small-scale climate resilient water supply systems were successfully completed and a guideline for boosting Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) was developed. UN-Habitat continues to support improved service provision and coverage, through establishing a platform where public and private sector actors can meet, cooperate, and act, to facilitate climate sensitive and resilient water infrastructures<sup>2</sup>.

Following Mass Drug Administration (MDA) for Soil-transmitted Helminths, Lymphatic Filariasis and Schistosomiasis, continually conducted over several years, the prevalence of infection to these parasites was reduced from 61.8 per cent in 2002 to 40 per cent in 2018 for Soil-transmitted Helminths<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-and-adaptation-fund-forge-partnership-with-the-government-of-lao-pdr-on-building>

<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat on-going projects. See <https://www.ndf.fi/project/ncf6-en-couraging-climate-adaptation-and-mitigation-investments-through-private-sector>

<sup>3</sup> Preventive Chemotherapy Epidemiological Data Reporting Form in 2018

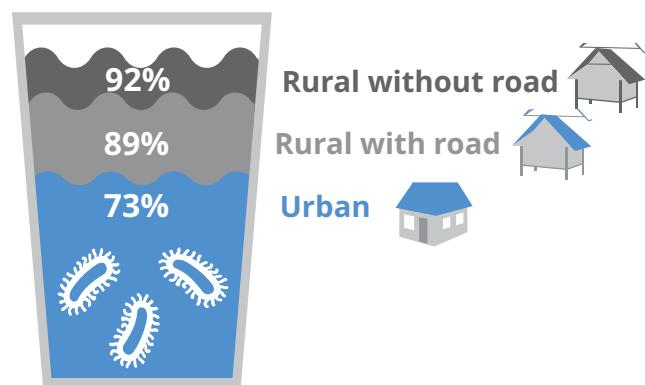
27.4 per cent in 2009<sup>1</sup> to 0 per cent in 2019<sup>2</sup> for Lymphatic Filariasis and from 11 per cent in 2003<sup>3</sup> infection down to 0.1 per cent in 2019 for Schistosomiasis<sup>4</sup>. MoH was close to elimination as public health problem in 2021 and 2025 for Lymphatic Filariasis and Schistosomiasis, respectively.

Lao PDR has achieved substantial progress in strengthening its capacity to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies. The National Emerging Infectious Disease, Public Health Emergencies and Health Security Workplan is a multi-year plan that guides the country in strengthening capacities under the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005)<sup>5</sup>, which draws on the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Infectious Diseases and Public Health Emergencies as the framework for action. WHO worked closely with MoH to develop, implement and monitor the Workplan.

Lao PDR experienced the second largest Dengue outbreak ever reported in the country in 2019, with over 39,000 cases and 76 deaths<sup>6</sup>. Throughout the year, WHO provided technical support in coordination, surveillance and laboratory, clinical management, vector control and risk communication. WHO also provided technical support during field investigations of major outbreaks in 2019 for Dengue, Measles and seasonal Influenza. The Lao PDR Field Epidemiology Training (Lao FET) is a key resource for responding to outbreaks and eight trainees successfully graduated from the program in 2019. The Lao FET was jointly reviewed by MoH and external reviewers with support from WHO, focused on the identification of options for long-term sustainability of the Lao FET and propose options to ensure continued capacity building for graduates.

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## 86% of HOUSEHOLD WATER samples tested found positive for E-COLI (cause of severe Diarrhoea)<sup>7</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> WHO Programme to eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis in Lao PDR

<sup>2</sup> Preventive Chemotherapy Epidemiological Data Reporting Form in 2019

<sup>3</sup> Prevalence of helminth infection among the population of Khong district, May 2003

<sup>4</sup> Preventive Chemotherapy Epidemiological Data Reporting Form in 2019

<sup>5</sup> Lao PDR-WHO Strategic Cooperation 2017-2021

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/14/c\\_138554381.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/14/c_138554381.htm)

<sup>7</sup> LSIS II.

# UN JOINT PROGRAMME FOR REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEWBORN, CHILD, AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH

In Lao PDR, the Ministry of Health, the Government of Luxembourg and UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO worked together under a UNJP to advance RMNCAH. In June 2019, a Mid-term review of the programme was undertaken and key findings confirmed the programme's continued relevance, bringing together expertise from three UN system health partners to support the MoH and the RMNCH Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2025.

The UNJP made good progress in 2019, towards achieving key programme results. It also provided significant support to the development of national guidelines, tools and models for RMNCH service delivery.

In addition, the programme provided critical institutional capacity building and support to implementation and monitoring of the RMNCH Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2025. Three focus provinces (Bokeo, Bolikhamxay and Savannakhet) benefited from the initial modelling and testing of guidelines, tools and approaches. Through the Midterm review, drawing on data from DHIS2 and the recent LSIS II along with additional data collected through health facility assessments, the national strategic framework for RMNCH was made more people-centred and focused on providing a more integrated service delivery approach for essential services.

# UN JOINT PROGRAMME ON HIV-AIDS

Approximately 90 per cent of the 12,000 estimated people living with HIV in Lao PDR know their status of which, 64 per cent, receive Antiretroviral (ARV) therapy. In addition, 7,150 people living with HIV (3,154 women of which, 138 are girls) have access to ARV treatment in 2019. The WHO Test and Treat Policy implemented by health partners, has resulted in 24 per cent of new HIV cases benefiting from access to ARV within one day and 62.8 per cent within seven days. Reported HIV infections continue to rise in Lao PDR, particularly among populations such as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and female sex workers. In Lao PDR, the national HIV prevalence among MSM has increased from 1.6 per cent in 2014 to 2.4 per cent in 2017. In Vientiane capital the HIV prevalence has also increased from 2.8 per cent in 2014 to 7 per cent in 2017.

In 2019, concerns and issues around HIV-AIDS were raised at the national level through UN joint team efforts to produce the Country Report on the status of "Women, the Girl Child and HIV-AIDS". At country-level, regular updates on HIV issues were made in 2019 through press releases, seminars, consultation meetings and social media. With technical support provided by the UN JP on HIV-AIDS, the Centre for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), the MoH was able to strengthen evidence-based programming and address noted inconsistencies in HIV information/data. In 2019, the UN JP also supported a series of interventions aimed at enhancing Lao PDR's response to HIV/AIDS. This included for example, the development of a training curriculum to strengthen the capacity of CSOs and national partners to deliver quality services to vulnerable populations.

### 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

Resource allocations from Government, partners and donors that entail a programme specific approach, are a challenge to delivering health care services in Lao PDR. For example, partners' increasingly incentivized immunization outreach support is preventing Government from building sustainable service delivery platforms for essential service provision. Furthermore, each partner's incentivized programs have differing standards of service delivery, making consistency and integration into Government's agreed standard essential health service package, programmatically and financially challenging. More active effort should be made by each partner and donor to shift their respective technical and financial support from a programmatic centred approach to a more holistic systems-approach.

As Lao PDR prepares to graduate from LDC status by 2030, it also expects to face declining external financing and the need to increase domestic financing for health. As Lao PDR begins the process of phasing out from Gavi support to the immunization programme, other donors are also beginning to consider medium-term transition. Lao PDR has entered the Gavi accelerated transition phase after passing the GNI threshold and is expected to fully transition from Gavi support by the end of 2021<sup>1</sup>. This will result in a reduction of investments, despite the fact that health service delivery mechanisms are not yet sufficiently well-established. Many WASH-related challenges stem from low prioritization of WASH services in the 8th NSEDP, leading to associated lower budget allocations and limited national guidance provided on social mobilization sanitation approaches and water safety planning. The National Strategy for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene for Lao PDR 2019-2030 provides key opportunities for addressing many of these constraints. Greater prioritization of investment into strengthening WASH services and advocacy for the incorporation of these strategies and associated targets into the 9th NSEDP will be fundamental in ensuring that Lao PDR achieves the SDGs associated with WASH.

The 2019 floods also took a heavy toll on health facilities, infrastructure, and health service delivery, including for example, the disruption of water and electricity supply. Establishing and applying a climate adaptive and resilient lens to all programmes and support is essential to ensure health systems become more resilient to climate change and natural disasters.

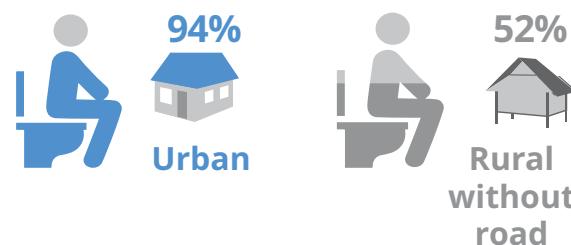
Challenges were also noted in Tuberculosis (TB) with the number of TB incidences failing to reach the SDG target. In addition, nearly two thirds of TB patients facing catastrophic total costs in 2019, higher HIV prevalence among key populations compared to the general population,

and increase of HIV prevalence among MSM in large provinces from 1.7 per cent in 2014 to 2.5 per cent in 2017. Continuous technical assistance to the national strategic planning and implementation of priority prevention, case finding, treatment and care under the new GF/WB funding mechanisms is crucial to address these key challenges.

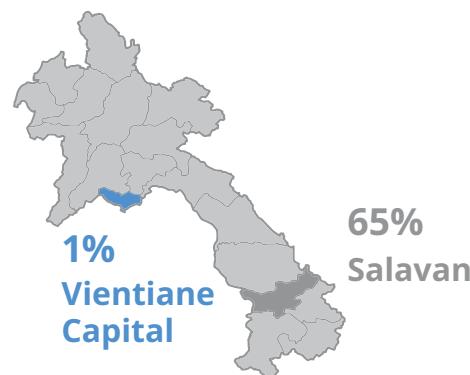
Reinfection of Soil-Transmitted Helminths and Schistosomiasis may continue to be a pressing challenge since the coverage of water and latrines is still low in some areas of the country, particularly schools located in mountainous areas and villages located on islands. The public's lack of awareness of Schistosomiasis and the side effects of medications, means that some people refuse to take the prescribed treatment, so health education needs to be provided before Schistosomiasis MDA in 2020.

Multisectoral collaboration and coordination were among the key contributing factors in many achievements in the health sector in 2019. A good example was the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) for the designated Point of Entry for routine public health capacity by the MoH alongside other sectors and with the support of WHO. WHO also supported the National Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Strategic Plan that was endorsed by the MoH in 2019 in collaboration with various sectors. National AMR surveillance was established in 2019 with three functioning surveillance sites<sup>1</sup>. For the first time, AMR data for 2019 will be submitted to the Global AMR Surveillance System.

#### 74% of people use IMPROVED SANITATION<sup>2</sup>:



#### 24% still practice OPEN DEFECATION:



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gavi.org/news/media-room/lao-pdr-qa-manager-national-expanded-programme-immunization>  
<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1079>  
<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/680971512154814781/pdf/121810-REVISED-Policy-Brief-HFSA-11-12-17-v2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> LSIS I, LSIS II.

## 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

A change in an approach focused solely on access to water, to pollution, climate resilient water facilities, safe water plans, which may be scaled-up nationally, should be reflected in programme cycle targets. A limited, exclusive focus on access to water, accompanied by inadequate consideration of water quality and climate resilience is costly, inefficient and unsustainable.

Behavioural change strategies to increase the use of soap when handwashing to further reduce Diarrhoea, Pneumonia and other health risks in particular, (and now also reflecting on experiences and lessons from the COVID-19 epidemic that struck in early 2020), should be incorporated into WASH activities and programs. Results from 2019 into 2020 will be used to support advocacy for greater investment by Government and relevant partners in sanitation and social mobilization programmes to support provinces to achieve their ODF targets. Importantly, the behaviour change approach also incorporates handwashing with soap, meaning that progress towards national ODF will also result in significant increases in rates of handwashing with soap.

In the first half of 2019, MoH together with development partners and the UN system, conducted a comprehensive Mid-term Review (MTR) of the RMNCAH Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2025<sup>1</sup>. The MTR included extensive facility-level data collection on quality of health care, health outcomes, service coverage and implementation status. It found significant missed opportunities for providing services to patients at the point of service, which led to a strategic shift from a programme-based approach to one that was more “people-centred”<sup>2</sup>.

**54% OF HOUSEHOLDS** have hand washing stations with WATER AND SOAP<sup>3</sup>:



Under-five MORTALITY RATE (per 1000) has DECREASED<sup>1</sup>:



The governance mechanism for RMNCAH was for example, restructured to focus on target groups (e.g. adolescents, pregnant women, new-borns) to improve needs-based service delivery and the continuum of care. Key MTR findings and policy recommendations included aligning domestic and external resources, having a national standard on essential services and scope of practice, institutional pre-service education for midwives, stronger focus on adolescent health and strengthened monitoring system. The restructured RMNCAH governance mechanism is now established and guides the implementation of the MTR recommendations. The revised RMNCAH strategy and new Action Plan for 2021-2025 are expected to be endorsed in 2020. With RMNCAH considered a spearhead of Health Sector Reform in Lao PDR, the MTR generated valuable information about the health system's performance as a whole and will contribute to the formulation of the Health Sector Development Plan 2021-2025 and the 9th NSEDP.

Notable collaborative efforts in 2019, included ILO, UNFPA, WHO and other development partners (World Bank, Swiss Red Cross, JICA), working with MoH to estimate the cost of the Essential Health Service Package (EHSP) and the related National Health Insurance benefit. The study will inform policy discussions on domestic funding allocations for health to ensure sustainable financing for UHC. The estimate will be used to set standards on services to be included in an EHSP at all levels, improve planning and budgeting of health service delivery, support equitable, efficient resource allocation, and determine provider payment rates and inform forthcoming discussions about hospital autonomy. Increasing budget constraints demand a prioritized and efficient service delivery through active collaboration from each program, sector, and partners, ensuring essential health services are delivered. Working through a convergence approach of WASH, agriculture, nutrition, education and health programmes is likely to result in strong cross-sectoral gains. It is critical to strengthen inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms among government institutions, partners and donors.

1 <https://laopdr.un.org/en/32459-lao-pdr-government-luxembourg-and-un-partners-focus-further-strengthening-reproductive>  
2 <https://rtm.org.la/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Health-SWG-Progress-Report-2019-1.pdf>  
<https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Laos-2019-COAR.pdf>  
3 LSIS I, LSIS II.

# CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM FOR NOI: PROGRESS IN 2019 1

The implementation of Noi ecosystem for empowerment of adolescent girls was further advanced during the year 2019 through multispectral efforts led by UNFPA and partners. Following are the key achievements towards strengthening the ecosystem for Noi:

## EVIDENCE AND DATA

A situation analysis was conducted in 5 districts of Savannakhet province namely, Xepon, Nong, Vilaboury, Phin and Thapanthong to understand the ground realities faced by adolescent girls and boys. Adolescent research day was organized in Vientiane which brought 200 researchers and practitioners to discuss about the status of gender equality among adolescents and way forward for addressing gender disparities among adolescent boys and girls.

## OUT-OF-SCHOOL/ COMMUNITY

600 adolescent girls from 29 villages in Sepone and Pha Oudome district of Savannakhet and Bokeo provinces enhanced their health, social, economic and cognitive skills through 60 mentors in Nang-Noi Girls Groups. Over 6,000 parents and adolescent boys were also sensitized on reproductive and sexual health and rights of adolescent girls' trough village level awareness campaigns and participatory activities.

## IN-SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS

Comprehensive sexuality education was introduced in primary, secondary and TVET education. 110 teachers from 5 districts of Bokeo province were trained and they are delivering comprehensive sexuality education to 900 students. Integrated CSE into revised primary curriculum which will cover around 400,000 primary students in coming years.

## EXPANDING PARTNERSHIP FOR ADOLESCENT

3 new partnerships were started with Sinouk Coffee, Banque Franco-Lao and China Radio International to raise awareness and encourage more investment on reproductive and sexual health, promote financial literacy and empowerment of adolescent girls.

## ENGAGING YOUTH TO TAKE ACTION

A new campaign 'Me, My body, My Planet, My future' was initiated to encourage adolescent and young people to take action on advancing the sustainable development goals regarding their own health and well-being, climate change and protect gender equality. Over 9,000 adolescents and young people have been engaged through this campaign.

## ADVOCACY

International Day of the Girl Child was observed in October 2019. A high level forum chaired by Dr. Bounkong Sihavong, Minister of Health was attended by around 500 people. Bilateral and multilateral conversation were held throughout the year with relevant stakeholders for accelerating ICPD agenda and increasing investments in adolescent girls and boys.

## POLICY ADVICE

Support was provided to develop the final draft of national youth and adolescent policy and revising the national population and development policy, national sexual and reproductive, maternity, newborn, child and adolescent health policy as well as for developing national youth law and national gender equity law.

## REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

100 new healthcare providers from Bokeo, Savannakhet and Bolikhamsai provinces were trained on adolescents and youth friendly health services. A total 290 trained healthcare providers are providing information and service to around 435,000 adolescent and young people. Additionally, 187 employees from 4 factories and 52 peer educators were trained which resulted into 426 factory workers accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare services. Over 8,000 adolescent and young people participated in outreach activities by the trained healthcare providers.



## ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Two women friendly spaces established in temporary shelters in Sanamxay district of Attapeu province provided essential services to 2,000 people affected by the natural disaster. 50 representatives from health, social, police and justice sectors came together in Vientiane and discussed about adapting the essential service package in Lao context for improving the quality of health, social and justice services for victims and survivors of various forms of violence.

1. [HTTPS://LAO.UNFPA.ORG/EN/NEWS/EMPOWERING-LAO-ADOLESCENT-GIRLS-IMPLEMENTING-NOI-ECOSYSTEM](https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/empowering-lao-adolescent-girls-implementing-noi-ecosystem)

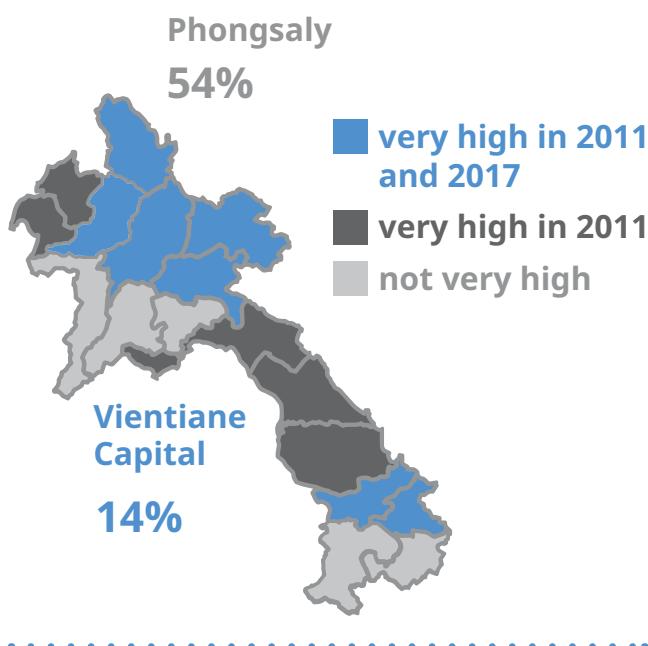
# 6. FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The most vulnerable people benefit from improved food security and nutrition



## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

8 provinces out of 18 have **VERY HIGH LEVELS OF STUNTING** (above 40%) in 2017, DOWN 5 from 2011:



Globally, our relationship to the world around us, and our ways of growing, distributing, and consuming food is increasingly challenged by pressures like climate change and environmental degradation. In Lao PDR, good progress has been made over the past twenty years in reducing poverty and hunger, but malnutrition continues to be one of the main SDG challenges affecting children across socio-economic status. Stunting affects around one-third of children under age five, though in some provinces and specific ethnic groups, more than half of children under five are stunted. Improving access to healthy, diversified diets and ensuring children receive appropriate care is vital to improving nutrition.

Surveys in 2011 and 2017 showed some notable progress in meeting SDG2.2 (National SDG Indicators 2.2.1 to 2.2.4) and other nutrition indicators, for children aged 2-5 years, the rate of underweight decreased slightly from 28.9 per cent to 24.0 per cent<sup>1</sup>. The number of children under five who are stunted decreased from 44 to 33 per cent<sup>2</sup>, while wasting or acute malnutrition has remained constant at 9 per cent. Eight out of 18 provinces continue to show stunting rates above 40 per cent.

In the context of the second cycle UPR, Government accepted recommendations to reduce malnutrition<sup>3</sup>. It has adopted the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan for 2016-2020. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality integrated an emphasis on food and nutrition,

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF and Ministry of Planning and Investment of Lao PDR, SDGs, and Children - Measuring Progress on Child Wellbeing in Lao PDR – Final Report (December 2018).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/every-stunted-child-also-deprived-three-or-more-areas-well-being>

<sup>3</sup> See recommendations 121.44 and 121.49 in A/HRC/29/7.

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality integrated an emphasis on food and nutrition, including reducing underweight girls under age five to 13 per cent and reducing stunting among girls to 25 per cent<sup>1</sup>.

The country has also made headway towards food security, including a steady reduction in the proportion of people living under the poverty line and achievement of self-sufficiency in rice, the country's staple food, however some cause for concern remains. Data from the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 6 revealed that slightly over a fifth of the population in Lao PDR experienced 'severe' or 'moderate' food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. An urgent and radical shift is required to address the extreme weather, droughts and floods that now impact Lao PDR more frequently, while concurrently, attending to the food and nutrition needs of vulnerable populations through the provision of healthy foods produced in an environmentally sustainable way. Rice exports in 2020 are expected to decline significantly and are projected to only reach 100,000 tons. Despite the need to cover domestic consumption requirements, this small quantity will likely be exported since traders still frequently prefer to sell to neighboring countries instead of to areas experiencing shortfalls, due to the high transportation costs associated with poor local road network. Linked to SDG2 on zero hunger and improved nutrition, in Lao PDR, food security and nutrition under UNPF Outcome 6, aims to ensure that the most vulnerable people benefit from improved food security and nutrition.

Two key analyses were undertaken in 2019, one on multiple deprivation and another on financial allocations/contributions to nutrition across sectors. The first ever national meeting to discuss and share outcomes of key analyses was also held in 2019, with broad participation from across key line ministries at both central and provincial level. The enabling environment for nutrition was further improved through the endorsement of the national Decree No. 472/GOL on the regulation of breast milk substitutes<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the capacity for scaling-up nutrition interventions was strengthened with mainstreaming of nutrition into the revised RMNCAH strategy and the development of the technical guideline for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM).

In 2019, most nutrition interventions under the health sector focused on maternal and child health, as articulated under the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Service on RMNCAH 2016-2025<sup>4</sup>. Government conducted a comprehensive midterm review of the strategy in 2019<sup>5</sup>, including extensive facility-level data collection on quality of health care, assessing clinical quality, readiness for provision of essential services,

<sup>1</sup> FAO, Lao PDR Country Gender Assessment on Agriculture and Rural Sector (January 2018).

<sup>2</sup> 6th Lao expenditure and consumption survey

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/lao-pdr-adopts-marketing-breastmilk-substitutes-decree-protect-and-promote#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20new%20decree%20on%20Breastmilk,of%20such%20products%E2%80%9D%20said%20Ms.>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.laoshealth.org/assets/national-rmnch-strategy-2016-2025.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://laopdr.un.org/en/32459-lao-pdr-government-luxembourg-and-un-partners-focus-further-strengthening-reproductive>

and health system and supporting environment for all five RMNCAH areas: reproductive, maternal, new-born, sick child, and well child (including nutrition, immunization and child development) in addition to traditional data on health outcomes, service coverage and implementation status. The review revealed missed opportunities in the RMNCAH service delivery including nutrition-specific services during service provision to pregnant women, new-born and children. The RMNCAH strategy midterm review led to a strategic shift from a programme-based approach to a more “people-centred” approach addressing the missed opportunities highlighted above.

## 2. RESULTS

### POLICY SUPPORT

During 2019, the UN system provided critical policy support to Government in multiple areas. For example, through technical and financial support from UNICEF, strengthening and improved functioning of multisectoral coordination for nutrition continued, not only at central but also at provincial and district levels across 10 out of 18 provinces (Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Phongsaly, Luang Prabang, Houaphanh, Xieng Khouang, Khammouan, Savannakhet, Salavan and Attapeu). Technical and financial support was provided to mainstreaming nutrition into the new national RMNCAH strategy to achieve a more comprehensive “whole child” approach throughout the lifecycle and to ensure greater accountability for the

delivery of nutrition interventions with health interventions, in addition to support and advocacy for the Decree on breastmilk substitutes and designated products, passed in late December 2019.

The Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development chaired by the MAF and co-chaired by FAO and France, was transformed into an interactive panel with plenary discussions. The formulation of Lao PDR’s next Agriculture Development Strategy, also benefited from FAO’s support through the development of a results-based approach linking sector objectives, indicators and targets with the NSEDP. In addition, 2019 marked the first time that the Agriculture Development Strategy will be accompanied by an agriculture investment plan<sup>1</sup>. In 2019, the newly established Department of Policy and Legal Affairs (DoPLA) became operational through FAO support that strengthened MAF’s policy formulation, monitoring and reporting capacities. This is an important achievement, given the newly established department’s mandate to ensure that research leads to effective national policies<sup>2</sup>.

### IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

The MAF, with technical assistance from FAO, prepared in 2019, a Resilient Agriculture Systems and Livelihoods (RASaL) Programme<sup>3</sup>. Building on progress with RASaL, MAF and FAO are currently developing future scenarios for agricultural crops that should be completed in 2020. These tools will set the stage for the development of a long-term plan based on the potential production of crops under multiple climate change scenarios, placing Lao PDR at the cutting-edge of climate-resilient planning based on a 100-year timeframe. Momentum in Lao PDR’s forestry sector has picked up, particularly in response to the global climate change agenda, with technical support from the UN System including FAO. Examples include the revision of the Forestry Law, private-public dialogue on the promotion of industrial tree plantations, support for a Voluntary Partnership Agreement for legally verified timber trade between Lao PDR and the EU<sup>4</sup>, national consultation on forestry sector review covering the past decade, and lessons learned for the next decade and a proposition of a jurisdictional approach to deforestation-free agriculture in support of REDD+.

In 2019, WFP, in collaboration with IFAD, continued to support Information, Education, Communications material in terms of nutrition-sensitive products, both for Government agriculture staff including Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office and District Agriculture and Forestry Office as well as, village level facilitators. The materials reflect the four priority agriculture interventions under the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan.

1 <http://www.maf.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/MDS-2025-and-Vision-to-2030-Eng.pdf>

2 <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8853en/CA8853EN.pdf>

3 <http://www.laofab.org/document/download/4038>

4 <http://www.euflegt.efi.int/laos>

<https://flegtlaos.com/laos-eu-hold-first-formal-negotiations-towards-voluntary-partnership-agreement-legal-timber-trade-forest-governance/>



In order to improve food safety through better governance, ITC continued to support MAF, in particular the Department of Agriculture at national and provincial level with a series of interventions in 2019. The project's specific objective is to strengthen regulatory framework for control of plant health and pesticides in the fruits and vegetable sector and other plant products through the application of norms and standards and improve market access. During the year key challenges, but also stakeholders (farmers/companies, pack houses, exporters etc.)

and priority commodities were identified and confirmed, namely watermelon (Luang Namtha province), rice (Vientiane province), as well as chilly and basil (Champasack province). Based on this gathered information, action plans and concrete recommendations by province/commodity are being developed.

## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>6. THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION</b>			
6.1. Prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity (FIES 2018) (National SDG Indicator 2.1.2)	FIES within the LECS 2017/2018	TBC	As per LECS6, 9.4% of households have 'severe' and 10.9% 'moderate' experience of food insecurity
6.2. Percentage of children 6-23 months with improved dietary diversity	TBD from LSISII	TBC	45.3 % of children 6-23 months received minimum dietary diversity (LSISII)
6.3. Wasting prevalence among children under 5 years (National SDG Indicator 2.2.3)	9.6 % (LCAAS 2015)	5%	9% of children under age 5 with weight for height below -2 Standard Deviations (wasted)
6.4. Annual data on nutrition generated by national nutrition surveillance system	Nil	Available source: Annual reports	First two rounds of surveillance were undertaken in 2019 with results of round one shared at the national Nutrition Forum in Dec. 2019 and round 2 still under analysis
6.5. Percentage of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting (LSIS, 2012; 2017) (National SDG Indicator 2.2.1)	44% (girls 43% / boys 46%) (2012)	34% (girls and boys) (2020) <sup>1</sup>	Percentage of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting: 33%, girls 32% / boys 34%
6.6. Prevalence of undernourishment in the population (Annual FAOSTAT data) (National SDG Indicator 2.1.1)	22% (2014)	10% (2021) <sup>2</sup>	16.5% for years 2016-2018, FAOSTAT 17.1% Mid-term review NSEDP (data related to 2018)
6.7. Percentage of rural households with poor and borderline food consumption	11.2% (Annual Risk and Vulnerability Survey, and biennial Government/ WFP Food Security Assessment, 2013)	8% (2021) <sup>3</sup>	As per LECS6, 1.8% households have poor and 4.5% have borderline food consumption.

<sup>1</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>2</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

<sup>3</sup> UNPF 2017-2021

## EMERGENCY SUPPORT

In early September 2019, six southern Provinces in Lao PDR - Attapeu, Champasak, Khammouan, Salavan, Savannakhet and Xekong – were affected by heavy floods caused by Tropical Storm ‘Podul’ and Tropical Depression ‘Kajiki.’<sup>1</sup> At the height of the flooding, there were an estimated 765,000 persons affected across the six provinces, with an estimated 102,000 persons displaced by the floods<sup>2</sup>. In response, UNICEF worked closely with partners such as MoH at central and provincial/district levels to deliver emergency nutrition interventions, and more than 1,361 children were screened for acute malnutrition; of whom, 154 children with Moderate Acute Malnutrition and 21 with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) were identified, and referred for treatment. UNICEF procured 50 cartons equivalent to 7,500 sachet packs of Ready-To-Use-Therapeutic Food and also provided support to 5,411 caregivers of under-five children for infant and young child feeding and health and hygiene promotion. UNICEF also procured essential supplies to support the identification and treatment of SAM including 341 solar scales, 50 height length boards and 47,250 MUAC tapes (945 packs). In response to the 2019 floods, WFP supported direct nutrition interventions, supplying specialized nutritious food supplements and nutrition-sensitive investments in Attapeu and Khammouan provinces, safeguarding nutrition and building resilience for flood-affected communities.

In response to the floods but also drought, delayed rainfall and challenges such as African Swine Fever and Fall Army Worm that took place in Lao PDR over the last two years, FAO’s technical teams provided critical assessments and recommendations that will strengthen Lao PDR’s response to future incidents. To support Lao PDR citizens’ improved resiliency in the face of climate change, support to the MAF focused on raising funds and developing a comprehensive strategy based on seven priorities comprised of reinforcement of the use of native plant species and varieties that are more disaster resilient, promotion of green extension for the northern highlands, support to diversification of rice farm environments, boosting climate change resilience of the tea sector, improved livelihoods in flood affected areas in Attapeu, development of disaster data management systems for local level planning, and the establishment of early warning and disaster classification protocols. In addition, FAO developed LaCSA, which strengthens farmers’ resilience by providing analysis and dissemination of agro-climatology information and crop climate risk advisories<sup>3</sup>. The year 2019 also saw UNICEF conduct a rapid household-level nutrition assessment within the first four weeks of the emergency, including the screening of children below age five from seven evacuation camps for acute malnutrition, training of health workers and health

1 <https://reliefweb.int/report/lao-peoples-democratic-republic/situation-update-no-2-tropical-storm-podul-and-tropical>

2 [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AHA-Situation\\_Update-no2-LaoPDR\\_TS-PODUL-TD-KAJIKI.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AHA-Situation_Update-no2-LaoPDR_TS-PODUL-TD-KAJIKI.pdf)

3 <http://www.fao.org/in-action/samis/agrometeorology/en/>

volunteers to manage moderate and severe acute malnutrition using the national IMAM guidelines.

To increase farmers’ resilience against the ASF, country experts participated in the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases, OIE, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). In this framework, FAO working with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) organized a discussion on ASF, engaging experts on epidemiology, laboratory, biosecurity, and prevention as well as socioeconomic aspects. At field-level, an FAO Emergency Management Centre on Animal Health mission to assess the situation and response strategy took place in May 2019 and training for field staff on outbreak response including a table-top exercise was conducted. The first cohort of trainees completed the FAO tutored e-learning course on ASF in December 2019 with plans developed to expand the trainings in 2020 to multiple regions.

In 2019, strengthening resilience against the FAW was also a key priority. FAO shared a number of key recommendations with the MAF, followed by financing of a national infestation surveillance scheme. The National Standard Operating Procedure for FAW was developed and the capacity of the Plant Protection Centre staff to undertake monitoring was significantly strengthened. As the next step, plans to develop and ensure wider use of FAW-integrated pest management will be developed.

Affordable and sustainable control measures the use of bio-pesticides/biocontrol options to reduce effect on human health and environment will be prioritized.

Ongoing work on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) became more strategic and organized in 2019, than in previous years. An HPAI work plan for the Department of Livestock and Fisheries was prepared with an improved focus on results rather than process and activities. In addition, several training initiatives have led to strengthened capacities of National Animal Health Laboratory (NAHL) staff, who have taken on leadership roles to initiate, monitor and report on the HPAI surveillance plan. NAHL staff also received the necessary tools and equipment to respond to incidents of HPAI, Foot and Mouth Disease and other zoonotic diseases. In addition, through FAO’s technical support, the first ever action plan on Anti-microbial Resistance was developed in 2019<sup>1</sup>.

## NUTRITION

In 2019, significant progress was achieved in capacity for scaling-up nutrition interventions through improved multisectoral coordination at central, provincial and district levels. Improved capacity for planning and budgeting for nutrition was also seen, including the development of key analysis and the use of surveillance data to inform planning and prioritization. The capacity to manage and analyse data to track progress, inform policy and improve programmes was strengthened and key

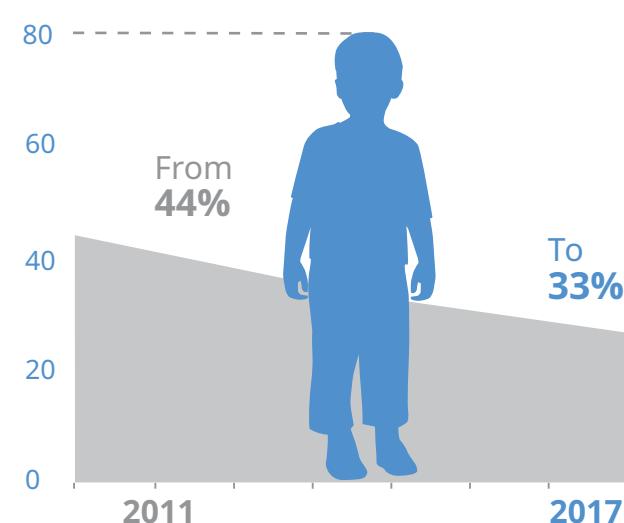
1 <https://www.who.int/laos/news/detail/19-11-2019-lao-pdr-steps-up-the-fight-against-super-bugs>

pieces of analytical work including a review of the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan, a multiple deprivation analysis and an analysis of financial allocations/contributions for nutrition across sectors, was undertaken.

While service delivery of key nutrition interventions remains challenging in terms of the quality of services, and availability/capacity of human resources, some improvements were noted. Support provided to children under the age of five and pregnant women, for at least four rounds of integrated outreach visits were undertaken each year in Attapue, Salavan, Savannakhet and Houaphanh provinces while in the provinces of Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Phongsaly, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang and Khammouan, support was provided to undertake a minimum of two rounds of integrated outreach visits every year. These visits provided a package of comprehensive supplements, including iron folate to pregnant women, Vitamin A supplements and de-worming to children under five years old in addition to tracking nutritional status (growth monitoring and screening), nutrition and health education, and nutrition-sensitive health interventions, family planning, ante-natal and postnatal care, vaccinations, and other critical health and nutrition support. In the four provinces of Attapue, Salavan, Savannakhet and Houaphanh, in addition to the above-mentioned package of interventions, the distribution of micronutrient powders and in-person demonstrations on their use, were also provided.

In 2019, through support provided by WFP, the roll-out of village-level, nutrition-sensitive investments in 400 villages in the northern provinces of Phongsaly, Houaphanh, Oudomxay and Xieng Khouang, was supported through the establishment of farmer nutrition schools focused on pregnant mothers and those with children under age two.

### **STUNTING in children under five has DECREASED<sup>1</sup>:**



<sup>1</sup> LSIS II.

The year also witnessed an improvement in technical capacity for the delivery of treatment to children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. This was achieved through the finalization of the national IMAM technical guideline, job-aids, and training of the IMAM task force members and a ToT in four provinces. UNICEF also supported a Lao delegation to participate in regional IMAM meeting together with participants from eight other countries in the region, to facilitate cross-country lessons and best practices on improvement of national IMAM programmes.

To strengthen the monitoring of interventions, UNICEF supported both central as well as provincial government officials in 10 provinces with monitoring of service provision and provided technical and financial support for the development of a sentinel site surveillance system, including the first two rounds of surveillance (April and December).

A further result achieved in 2019 related to enhanced awareness, knowledge, and incremental behaviour change among village members on nutrition and health for sustainable livelihoods, with support from UNDP. In collaboration with provincial and district LWU offices and the Department of Health (DoH), campaigns on food hygiene, nutrition and birth feeding in Saysomboun (62 participants, of which, 43 were women) and Salavan Provinces (250 participants, of which, 155 were women), were launched. The campaign strengthened knowledge among women and other vulnerable groups on basic healthcare, nutrition, and the prevention of diarrhoea and conjunctivitis.

Towards the end of 2019, to improve evidence-based understanding of nutrition, WFP commissioned two technical studies on 'Drivers of Food Choices' in collaboration with the Dutch NGO, SNV and 'Nutrient-dense food crops'<sup>1</sup> for promotion in farmer nutrition schools under the Agriculture for Nutrition programme, both undertaken in close collaboration with, and guidance from, the National Nutrition Institute (NNI).

### **3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019**

Some of the key lessons from 2019 pertain to the multisectoral nature of nutrition. A review of the national RMNCAH strategy underlined that in order to ensure the delivery of nutrition interventions through the health sector, nutrition must not be seen as a separate, independent programme area. Rather, it must be mainstreamed across existing programmes and delivery vehicles. For example, Vitamin A should be considered an integral part of the vaccination programmes, rather than a stand-alone or additional intervention. Another example of this may be seen with the inclusion of Iron Folate supplements during ante-natal care services. Responsibility for selected nutrition interventions should rest with the relevant programmes/programme managers, rather

<sup>1</sup> <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000113996/download/?ga=2.42419233.586489312.1597208956-374849151.1580888460>

than an external entity such as the National Institute for Nutrition.

A related lesson revolves around the need to ensure that prioritization of nutrition interventions in the National Plan of Action for Nutrition are in line with global evidence including the Lancet series on nutrition from 2013 and 2018, to ensure that all relevant direct and indirect interventions are included. It was also found however, that in the light of the limited financial envelope that prioritization of investments should be done, not only based on the source of available funding, but also based on interventions that have the highest potential for impact on the main outcome indicators. Unless there is greater focus on the most important first 1,000+ days plus of a child's life, it is highly unlikely that all interventions can be resourced, hence it is important that interventions with the greatest impact are financed on a priority basis.

A key lesson also centred around Government's continued capacity challenges across sectors and levels, for the planning, preparedness and response to emergencies including the availability of key commodities and supplies such as nutrition supplements, therapeutic foods, anthropometric equipment and medicines required for the treatment of acute malnutrition as well as seeds, fertilizers and key agricultural equipment.

Finally, work undertaken in 2019 underscored the need for an improved monitoring system, both to reduce the duplication of indicators and to ensure that indicators are measurable and collected. This would support improved prioritization by central government, local administrations, and donors regarding the planning, monitoring and implementation of key nutrition interventions. This would also contribute to the collection of evidence to allow for informed "course correction" as required, to improve both the quality and outcome of interventions.

One of the major challenges with RMNCAH in 2019, also included resource allocations both by the Government and partners caused by intensive, vertical, programme-specific approaches particularly in the areas of nutrition and immunization, prompted of nutrition and immunization, prompted by relevant donors, which is decelerating integration of a sustainable health system approach.

Despite improved collaboration among partners to support Government's policy and strategies, challenges remain in achieving a coherent, coordinated approach.

#### 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

While acknowledging that nutrition is highly prioritized and firmly represented in Government's development agenda, according to a budget analysis undertaken by UNICEF, implementation costs are primarily covered by Official Development Assistance. There is urgent need for increased public financing for nutrition. Prioritization for

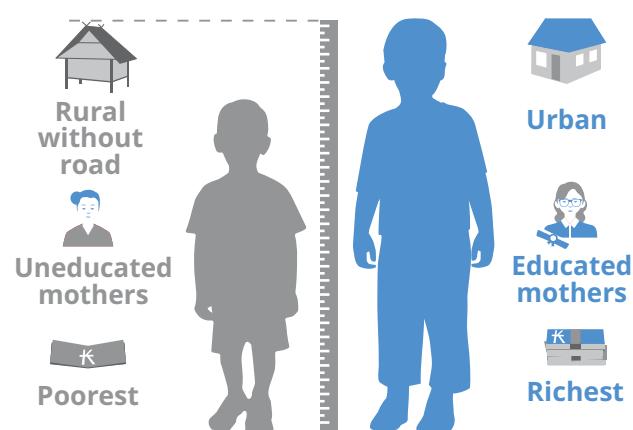
additional government funding is required to increase the coverage of comprehensive programme delivery at the national and subnational levels, including to support improved monitoring and supervision of service delivery as well as procurement of nutrition supplies and equipment.

Limited institutional capacity, low community demand for nutrition services and other factors, hinder access, and delivery of nutrition interventions in Lao PDR. Strategies addressing social norms and practices that underpin the uptake of services along with strengthened institutional capacity for nutrition programme planning and service delivery should be prioritized in the coming years.

Additional key priorities include the strengthening of data information systems. The National Information Platform for Nutrition has been established and will provide an excellent opportunity to improve evidence-based policy dialogue. The nutrition surveillance system sentinel site survey will provide additional data two times per year that line ministries and development partners may draw on for monitoring intervention outcomes.

Nutrition-related indicators show progress but require further effort, particularly to build a supporting environment beyond development partner-supported programmes. Further progress in nutrition necessitates strengthening of primary health care. At present Lao PDR has no sustainable foundation for primary health care, requiring ownership and resource mobilization from local authorities (see Outcome 5). The current approach to nutrition has contributed to multi-sectoral collaboration that lacks integration and the ability to move beyond a programme-specific focus to enable comprehensive progress.

.....  
Children in **UNDERPRIVILEGED CONDITIONS** are **3 TIMES** more **LIKELY** to be **STUNTED**<sup>1</sup>:



1 LSIS II.

# 7. INSTITUTION BUILDING

Institutions and policies at national and local level support the delivery of quality services that better respond to people's needs



## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Prosperous countries benefit from durable and effective institutions that contribute to poverty reduction and the inclusive delivery of services, that foster citizens' engagement in decision-making to facilitate social cohesion and trust between citizens and governments, and that are able to combine and coordinate efforts from diverse stakeholders towards national priorities. Linked in particular to SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, the UNPF's Outcome 7, aims to ensure that Lao PDR's institutions and policies both at national and local levels, contribute to the delivery of quality services that respond to Lao PDR citizens' needs and facilitate the achievement of strategic development goals.

Realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains a key over-arching objective for Lao PDR, which continued efforts to build the institutional architecture to realize this ambition 2019. For example, the National SDG Steering Committee officially endorsed a comprehensive set of 238 SDG indicators in June 2019 and allocated them across line ministries for ownership, monitoring, and reporting. Sixty per cent of the SDG indicators include baselines and are mainstreamed into the current 8th NSEDP. With 2019 being the penultimate year of the 8th NSEDP, the expectation is that plans now underway to develop the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025), will be able to go further in embedding SDG indicators into the national monitoring and evaluation framework to an

even greater extent.

There have also been clear steps to support improved alignment of efforts by stakeholders outside of Government to achieve the Goals. An SDG Communications Strategy was approved by the National Steering Committee on the implementation of the SDGs on 11 June 2019, with the aim of raising awareness and building support for the Goals. In November 2019, the National SDG Secretariat appointed an SDG advocate to further raise awareness amongst diverse stakeholders across the country. To disseminate information more efficiently to sub-national levels of Government specifically, in March and July 2019, the National SDG Secretariat partnered with the Secretariat of the Round Table Process held at the MPI.

The National Assembly plays a key institutional role in oversight to ensure accountability for delivery of the NSEDP and achievement of the SDGs. Demonstrating practical steps to fulfil this, during the National Assembly's 8th Ordinary Session in November 2019, members of the Assembly assessed the performance of 69 state officials specifically based on their leadership and contributions to the implementation of Party policies and state laws.

Recognizing the improvements in service delivery that can come from configuring institutional structures to empower local decision makers, Government also took measures to further operationalize the decentralization



## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>7. INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF QUALITY SERVICES THAT BETTER RESPOND TO PEOPLE'S NEEDS</b>			
7.1. Number of new households receiving 2 or more basic services from their districts	373,948 households (2015)	600,000 households (2021)	<p>386,115 Households (2019)<sup>1</sup>  <i>*It is anticipated that the number of households will increase when One Door Service Centres (including, those established in 2019 and those planned for 2020), become fully operational.</i></p> <p>Currently there are 43 ODSCs (27 in district and 16 in province level Government aspired to establish ODSCs in 50% of the total districts in the country by the end of 9th NSEDP)<sup>2</sup></p>
7.2 Percentile rank on aggregate Government effectiveness	39.4% (2014)	45% (2021)	24.5% (2018) <sup>3</sup>
7.3 Extent to which National Socio-Economic Development Plan monitoring informs evidence-based policy making	Limited extent (2015)	Large extent (2021)	<p>LaoInfo, managed by the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) continues to be used on a limited basis; Ministries provided limited data against indicators of the 8th NSEDP; The provincial statistics database (LaoInfo) system was established in five provinces for statistics dissemination, serving policy and decision making; the provincial database is linked to the national system used to track progress on SDGs.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Annual Project Review Report: National governance and public administration reform (GPAR) Program – Governance for inclusive Development Programme (GIDP) 2019

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs report # 95/PN, March 2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>

process (known as 'Sam Sang', or 'Three Builds'), which was officially extended to all 148 districts nationwide. This included working to develop integrated approach to planning, finance, and sub-national administration improvements, which underpin better service delivery to citizens, and the use of the District Development Fund to strengthen districts' capacity in NSEDP implementation and SDG alignment.

Driven by strong economic growth and rapidly improving health and education, Lao PDR is on track to graduate from LDC status. Given the importance of LDC graduation as a policy priority, a smooth transition strategy to help the country phase out certain international support measures, will be important to maintain development momentum and support of the 2030 Agenda and the 9th NSEDP (2021- 2025). This will require working with and strengthening national institutions to lead the management of the transition.

Related specifically to institutions in the health sector, in 2019, the MoH benefited from the UN system's support led by WHO, that focused on the strategic direction for health sector reform to strengthen UHC and health sector-wide coordination, to streamline ministries' work at national and sub-national levels. Given Government prioritization of updating the HSRS and Framework 2021-2030, in 2019, a key focus for support was the alignment of the priorities of the HSDP and the HSRS, to improve equitable access to quality health services without the financial hardship often associated with accessing health services in Lao PDR.

## 2. RESULTS

### STRENGTHENING NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE NSEDP AND ACHIEVE THE SDGS

During 2019, UNDP continued to deliver support to the National Assembly (NA) and Provincial People's Assemblies (PPAs) to further develop their effectiveness in oversight of the 8th NSEDP objectives and SDGs. In particular, support was extended to the legislative agenda of both the 7th (5-25 June 2019) and the 8th (7 November to 6 December 2019) Ordinary Sessions of the NA, during which it was able to complete its legislative plan for 2019, including the adoption of: the Law on Court Fees;<sup>1</sup> Law on Disaster and Climate Change Management;<sup>2</sup> Law on Income Tax;<sup>3</sup> Law on Consumption Tax; Law on Anti-Dumping;<sup>4</sup> Law on Gender Equality;<sup>5</sup> and amended laws including the Forestry Law; Land Law; and the Taxation

<sup>1</sup> <https://laoofficialgazette.gov.la/index.php?r=site%2Fsearchtip&s=Law+on+Court+Fees>

<sup>2</sup> <https://laoofficialgazette.gov.la/index.php?r=site%2Fsearchtip&s=Law+on+Disaster+and+Climate+Change+Management>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ecii.org/euro-lao-business/doing-business-in-lao-pdr/new-income-tax-law-2020/#:~:text=The%20New%20Income%20Tax%20Law%20replaces%20Tax%20Law%20No.,\)%2C%20and%20covers%20the%20following%3A&text=Profit%20tax%20\(%E2%80%9CPT%E2%80%9D\),change%20in%20the%20filing%20period.](https://ecii.org/euro-lao-business/doing-business-in-lao-pdr/new-income-tax-law-2020/#:~:text=The%20New%20Income%20Tax%20Law%20replaces%20Tax%20Law%20No.,)%2C%20and%20covers%20the%20following%3A&text=Profit%20tax%20(%E2%80%9CPT%E2%80%9D),change%20in%20the%20filing%20period.)

<sup>4</sup> <https://laoofficialgazette.gov.la/index.php?r=site%2Fsearchtip&s=Law+on+Anti-Dumping>

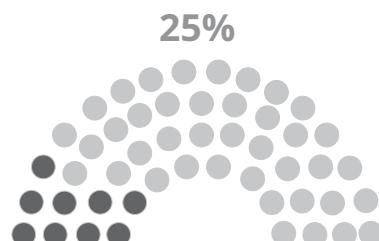
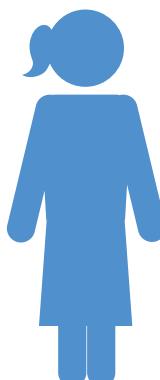
<sup>5</sup> [http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_Laos\\_to\\_260.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Laos_to_260.php)

Management Law. Of particular note during the year, was support provided to the lead economic, technology and environment committees in submitting the Land Law and Forestry Law to the 7th Ordinary Session, which included the sharing of best practices and lessons learned from the regional level.

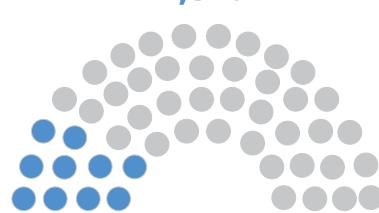
The NA and selected PPAs also made significant progress towards enhancing legal capacities, improved skills on public engagement and representation, and enhanced scrutiny and oversight of Government processes, with technical support from UNDP. This included support for the organization of two intersessional programmes in June and November to provide a platform for the provision of independent opinions ahead of the Ordinary Session, with participation from the NA, line ministries, representatives of PPAs as well as Members of the Parliamentarian Performance Review Group<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, NA/PPA-constituent dialogue and interactions at the local level were supported through outreach missions and public consultations in nine districts within two provinces (Houaphanh and Salavan), allowing for feedback and inputs from constituents and key stakeholders<sup>2</sup> on draft laws and amendments prior to their adoption. Specific capacity building efforts in 2019, contributed to strengthening the understanding of both the 8th NSEDP priorities and SDG implementation amongst 160 NA members and 200 PPA members.

Lao PDR has one of the **HIGHEST** proportions of **WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS** in the region<sup>3</sup>:

#### Women in the National Assembly:



2011-2016



Since 2016

<sup>1</sup> A parliamentary mechanism for bringing together the NA and selected PPAs with representatives of relevant executive sectors

<sup>2</sup> Comprised of approximately 839 participants, of whom 243 were women.

<sup>3</sup> Lao Women's Union Gender Profile 2018

Through UNDP's support Governance for inclusive Development Programme, Ministry of Home Affairs were able to conduct a Service Users Feedback Survey (SUFS) in four districts, four provinces Phongsaly, Houaphan, Khammouan and Attapeu on public services in 2019. Results from the survey was presented at the provincial people's assembly (PPA) and used to improve public services.<sup>1</sup>

As part of UN analytical support to the achievement of the SDGs, DESA, in cooperation with the National Institute for Economic Research, supported research and dialogue on the potential implications of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on the 2030 Agenda. This included convening discussion on the progress of the SDGs in Lao PDR and reviewing BRI projects and available data.

This contributed to strengthening the analytical capacity of participating officials and experts to understand the potential opportunities and risks brought by the BRI, in order to develop an integrated policy framework incorporating economic, social, and environmental perspectives. Based on a request by MPI, a follow-up event will be scheduled to train relevant officials and experts on the effective use of the UN World Economic Forecasting Model and related quantitative analysis to inform evidence-based policy making.

Lao PDR's progress towards graduation from LDC status, potentially as early as 2024, would entail changes in a number of specific trade and other concessional measures available only to LDCs. As part of efforts to ensure continued development momentum towards the SDGs through the graduation process, the UN has been working with the Government to start developing a smooth transition strategy. Specifically, in 2019, Government undertook an analysis of the impact of graduation culminating in a round of consultations, including an ex-ante impact assessment and a vulnerability profile analysis in October 2019 with support from DESA and UNCTAD that involved an extensive research network of national institutes in a constructive dialogue. In November 2019, Lao PDR submitted its national LDC Report to the UN Office of the High Representative for the Landlocked Least Developed Countries. It is hoped that these efforts will help facilitate the preparation of a smooth transition strategy, which will guide policies for national institutions to efficiently manage the transition process.

As part of building the system to track progress against the SDGs, the National SDG Steering Committee Meeting adopted a set of 238 national SDG indicators in June 2019, that are intended to serve as a "living document". In support of national statistics efforts, DESA's Statistics Division organized two national activities in 2019, in support of capacity development towards improved SDG monitoring and dissemination. In June 2019, a user engagement workshop brought together the LSB and line ministries to develop SDG indicators working closely

with policy-makers, academia, civil society and other user groups that make use of the data, to share experiences, discuss challenges and draft a strategy for continued user engagement for SDG monitoring. Support extended to examination of the feasibility of harmonizing administrative data with national data system to ensure the integrity of data to support the implementation of SDGs. In August 2019, a workshop on metadata for SDG indicators was conducted with participants from LSB and 20 line ministries and agencies, building their capacity to compile metadata according to international standards and resulting in the compilation of draft metadata for a number of national indicators<sup>1</sup>. This collaboration paved the way for a revitalization of research institutions aimed at reaping the benefits of the rich national research capacity in support of informed decision-making with regards to measures targeting achievement of the SDGs.

## SAM SANG DECENTRALIZATION

Towards Government's efforts to decentralize and devolve service delivery to local government, and thereby to make service delivery more responsive to users' needs, the Sam Sang decentralization framework, was introduced in 2012. This delineated clearer lines of responsibility between central and local administrations, resulting in greater proactiveness and self-reliance in local public service delivery and poverty reduction.

In support of this, the District Development Fund (DDF), was established to support accelerated implementation of localised SDG priorities as reflected in Provincial and District Socio-Economic Development Plans. It was set up to provide districts with financing through a district capital financing mechanism to strengthen districts' capacity to deliver critical basic services as a designated "comprehensive district" in accordance with the Sam Sang policy. In 2019, UNCDF and UNDP jointly supported the Sam Sang decentralization process through the integration of the DDF into national planning and finance systems at sub-national level. They also provided support to improved transparency and accountability in the transfer of finance to districts via the national treasury system. An Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by MoHA with representatives from MPI and MoF, was formed to provide oversight of DDF's integration into national systems. With this support, the implementation of 12 local public service projects benefitting approximately 12,167 households (73,414 people) across 12 districts in eight provinces (Sayaboury, Attapeu, Phongsaly, Salavan, Houaphanh, Champasack, Khammouan and Luang Namtha) were completed in 2019.<sup>2</sup> These allowed vulnerable populations in local communities to benefit from more targeted and relevant public services available through small scale facilities established in remote areas.

As part of the DDF's third cycle, in 2019, UNCDF in partnership with UNDP, explored an innovative approach

1 "Governance for inclusive Development Programme (GIDP) 2019" Ministry of Home Affairs report # 95/PN, March 2018

1 For additional information: <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/meetings>

2 Annual Project Review Report: National governance and public administration reform (GPAR) Program – Governance for inclusive Development Programme (GIDP) 2019

to the Performance-based Grants (PBGs), through transitioning from an equal distribution model, to one which promotes SDG acceleration and the focused targeting of measures, applying the principles of Leaving No One Behind to ensure equitable access to basic services for the most vulnerable communities. The underlying principles of the PBG system have been retained with the application of minimum conditions of access, administrative performance, transparency, and participation serving as the initial screening criteria. To ensure citizens' participation in local planning, only projects that were identified and listed within the provincial government approved three-year district investment plans were considered for short-listing. Through this, an additional 7 DDF projects were selected using the explicit 'Leave No One Behind' methodology, reaching a total of 2,400 households, including 50 per cent poor households and 2,000 households from non Lao-Tai ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>.

Crucially, in 2019, the DDF was implemented with co-financing from the Government budget. This ensured that the proposals were prepared based on local priorities/needs and were included in the Crucially, in 2019, the DDF was implemented with co-financing from the Government budget. This ensured that the proposals were prepared based on local priorities/needs and were included in the official, approved Provincial Plan in support of the 8th NSEDP and SDGs grid. This practice is part of the transition to state budget funding and in line with the overall exit strategy of developing systems that the Government can take forward independently.

UNCDF and UNDP also jointly supported greater local engagement in the delivery of public services through the Public Service Innovation Facility (PSIF). In 2019, the PSIF provided financial and technical assistance to 16 local partners, including local authorities and Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), to promote the participation of local communities and civil society in the improvement of local service delivery with a special focus on vulnerable groups including women, youth and ethnic groups. These projects tested locally identified, innovative solutions to address chronic bottlenecks in the provision of local public services. They also contributed to efforts to improve the quality, relevance, and alignment of basic services. The successful implementation and completion of the projects led to improved service delivery for at least 70,000 people, of whom, 50 per cent were women, over 75 per cent from non Lao-Tai ethnic groups, and 50 per cent were children and youth.

In 2019, UN-Habitat supported Sam Sang decentralization across eight districts (Kaleum, Dakcheung, Xaysetha, Sammakhixay, Sanxay, Phouvong, Samuoi and Ta Oi) in three provinces (Xekong, Salavan and Attapeu) and Vientiane Prefecture. This support included the collection of large quantities of data at the village level, which were subsequently developed into a series of infographics that were translated into the Lao language to support more effective and inclusive knowledge management and

<sup>1</sup> Annual Project Review Report: National governance and public administration reform (GPAR) Program – Governance for inclusive Development Programme (GIDP) 2019

decision-making at local level.

In a practical example of how decentralized decision making can address priority development needs, UN-Habitat also finalized climate change action plans that identified resilience-building measures that fed into local development plans. The climate action plans helped to define priority climate-resilient investments that cluster services and facilities among settlements. The results of the assessment identified areas and sectors that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, allowing for the development of focused and effective action plans. At the provincial and district levels, plans also included monitoring systems on land and water use and flood control measures that will be provided through UN-Habitat to MoNRE in 2020. Through this, the assessment tool helped to enhance community climate change resilience, disaster preparedness, land use planning, water resource management, and infrastructure development.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES

As articulated in the overall aim of Outcome 7, national and sub-national institutions play a central role in the delivery of the public services needed to achieve Lao PDR's strategic development goals. For this reason, efforts to build the strength and responsiveness of these critical institutions has consistently formed an important part of the UN's partnership across different sectors and different levels of Government.

At the sub-national level, in 2019, MoHA conducted a user survey in four districts (Hinboun, Xaysettha, Khoua and Xiengkhor) with support from UNDP. This collected feedback from 1,700 households on local public services, administrative performance, and governance practices, providing district authorities and the Provincial People's Assembly (PPA), with important information to guide the improvement of public service delivery. As a practical step to improve structures for service delivery, UNDP also supported a significant upgrade to the One Door Service Centres (ODSC) in Bachiangchaleunsook district, Champasack province, allowing for more convenient and timely delivery of district services to citizens including for example, access to legal certificates including birth, marriage and death, and land entitlements. ODSC design was improved through consultations with MoHA officials at national, provincial and district levels, and included the development of a framework and the preparation/communication of a process flow of clear roles and responsibilities, mandates, management framework and a Standard Operation Manual.

One key public service which is particularly important in Lao PDR given the share of the population involved in agriculture, is the fair and efficient administration of land. To support this, in 2019, UN-Habitat worked with MoNRE, Village Focus International, and a range district- and provincial-level decision makers<sup>2</sup> to develop innovative,

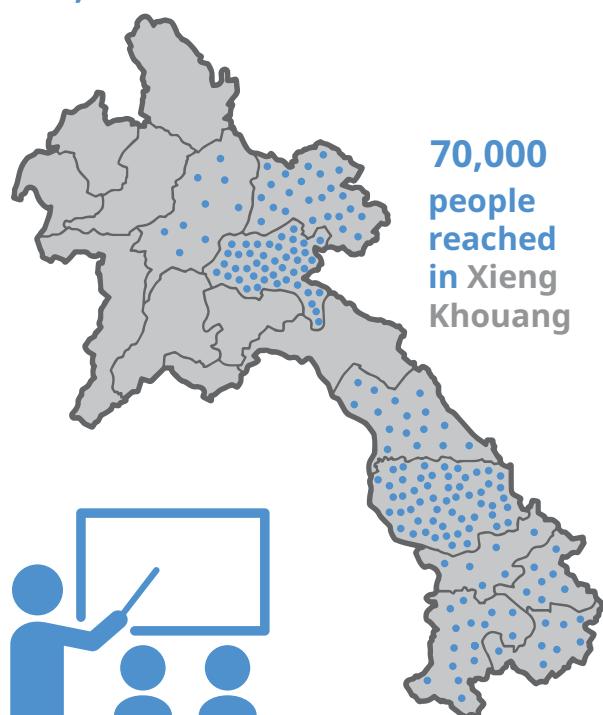
<sup>2</sup> The Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Department, the District Office of Natural Resources and Environment, the District Agriculture and Forestry Office, and the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office.

fit-for-purpose, gender-appropriate tools to improve citizens' access to land. This was undertaken through land rights enumeration at household level and participatory approaches in Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang provinces. More broadly, UN-Habitat supported the identification of gaps in land tools, through consultations with partners and the identification and prioritization of key Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) tools. As a result, over 70 government staff from district and provincial levels have benefited from trainings, developed through consultations with key partners and the identification and prioritization of GLTN tools. Also in 2019, through support from MoNRE, UN Habitat's Social Tenure Domain Model, was translated into the Lao language to simplify the land certification process.

Linked to Outcome 5's on health, the MoH review and update of the Health Sector Reform (HSR) Framework benefited from WHO support, including improvement in the structure, functions, and organizational processes for the governance and management of the health service system. The HSR focused on efforts to ensure universal health coverage by 2025 and strengthened linkages to the 9th Health Sector Development Plan for 2021-2025. In addition, in 2019, WHO provided technical support to MoH departments during a review and update of health policies and strategies, including the National Health Insurance Strategy, the National Financing Strategy, and the Health Workforce Strategy. WHO also provided support to Government's development of an implementation plan including a baseline survey on the capacity of health care facilities, a costing exercise of health workforce

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### In 2019, MINE RISK EDUCATION took place in 572 VILLAGES, benefitting 265,556 PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> Lao National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) Report 2019.

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planning and management to meet minimum requirements to deliver services. Quality improvement was a key focus of the HSR Framework. Technical support was also provided to implement the national policy on 5 Goods and 1 Satisfaction<sup>1</sup> for improving the quality of healthcare services.

On UXO, working in close collaboration with international development partners<sup>2</sup>, UNDP strengthened its technical support to both the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector in the Lao PDR and the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao), through six international resource persons. As set out in the 8th NSED, through more efficient and coordinated implementation of UXO clearance efforts, greater opportunities for decent livelihoods are expected to be created in rural areas where there are few economic opportunities as land becomes safe to use productively.

### INSTITUTIONS TO PROTECT WORKERS

Labour market institutions have an important role to play in determining the extent to which people's needs are met, and how development progress translates into improvements in welfare, and so represent an important area of work for the UN's partnership with Lao PDR. During 2019, the first Decree on Occupational Safety and Health<sup>3</sup> (OSH) was developed and entered into force in. The OSH Decree was developed through a series of consultations at national and provincial levels, with support from WHO and ILO. As part of the implementation of the OSH Decree and the Ministerial Agreement on Organization and Functions of Labour Inspectors in 2019, ILO supported a structured programme of training and institutional strengthening initiatives across several key sectors. This included supporting training-of-trainers on work improvement in small construction sites for labour inspectors from the central and provincial levels. ILO also supported an analysis of the OSH risk compensation and benefit claim mechanism of Lao PDR's NSSF, to identify persistent constraints and provide recommendations on making claims procedures more effective and user-friendly, and increasing social security members' value of compensation benefits.

The garment and coffee sectors in particular were a focus of concerted efforts to support OSH implementation.<sup>4</sup> A series of workplace improvement trainings were organized for the garment industry and coffee producers and cooperatives, based on results drawn from the 2018 OSH risk assessment and intervention design previously conducted in the two sectors. With ILO support in partnership with the Coffee Association, OSH training and

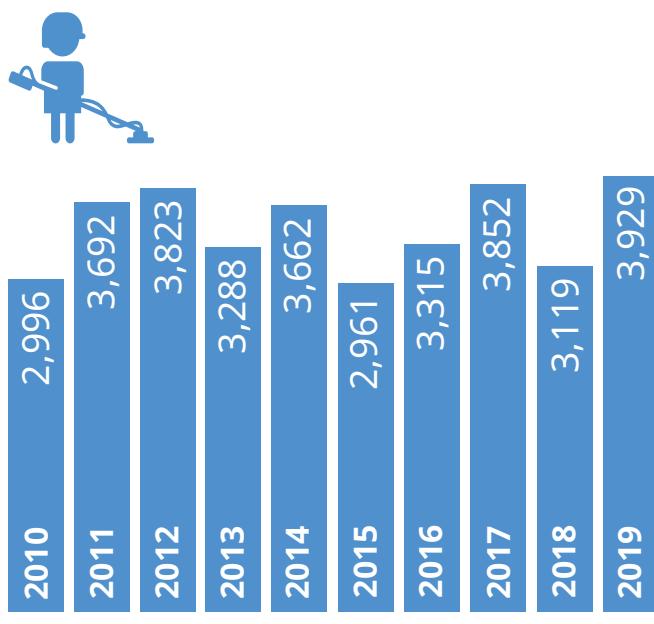
<sup>1</sup> Government's 2016 policy on "Five Good, One Satisfaction" which entails five service-related requirements in addition to patient satisfaction; and development of an essential service package (ESP) which serves as a tool to guide the provision of a minimum set of priority public health and clinical services that must be delivered in different types of health facilities and in the community.

<sup>2</sup> Australia, Canada, EU, Ireland, Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Luxembourg, New Zealand, Republic of Korea

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_New\\_decree\\_50.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_New_decree_50.php)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_648768/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_648768/lang--en/index.htm)

The **AREA CLEARED** in 2019 is the BIGGEST since 2010<sup>1</sup>:



communication materials for coffee farmers and plantations were developed, tested, and disseminated in Champasack province. For the garment sector, capacity building training for labour inspectors were also conducted to assist garment factories with the development of OSH improvement plans and implementation of improvement measures at garment factories in Vientiane. Specific training on OSH Committees was organized for officials of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions and representatives of garment factories in Vientiane to support the establishment of OSH committees in the garment factories. As a result, 10 garment factories and one footwear factory now have OSH factory committees.

Related specifically to child labour, at the 108th International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2019, the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) called on Lao PDR to report on the implementation of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999) requiring tripartite organizations to consult with relevant ministries to prepare a statement on the status of Lao PDR's implementation of the Convention. In response, ILO worked with MoLSW to support the national tripartite committee on labour standards to organize a technical expert meeting to share and discuss the recommendations from CAS and reporting obligations. The report from Lao PDR was subsequently submitted to CAS in September 2019. As a follow up, in 2019, the tripartite (led by MoLSW, the Lao Federation of Trade Union on behalf of workers, and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry on behalf of employers) plus committee, undertook a review and revision of the National Plan of Action, with the revised draft completed in December 2019 to be finalized in 2020.

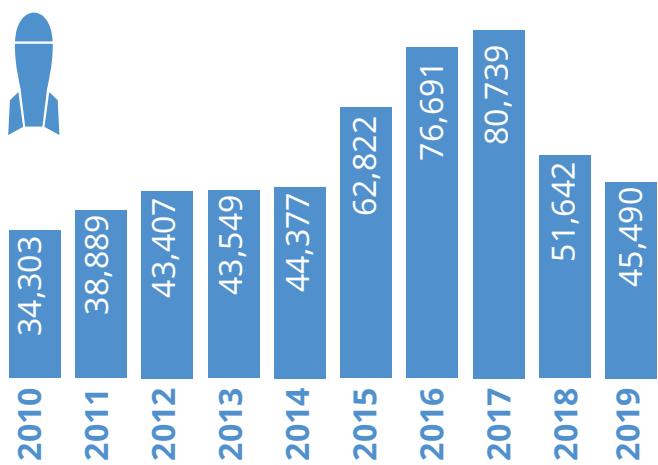
<sup>1</sup> Lao National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) Report 2019.

## INSTITUTIONS TO MANAGE CROSS-BORDER DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

As a land-linked country, surrounded by larger neighbours, and with increasing integration into the South-East Asian region and economy, it is crucial that Lao PDR's institutions keep pace with evolving cross-border issues that have the potential to threaten or slow development progress.

To support physical border management, in 2019 UNODC worked in partnership with MoPS to strengthen the capacities of the Government's network of 15 Border Liaison Offices, located in "hotspot" border locations (where there are frequent border crossings and legal and illegal movement of goods and people), across the country, through training on cross-border communication and coordination, aimed at improving data collection, intelligence production, information sharing and criminal investigations. To contribute to efforts to address human trafficking, IOM supported the coordination and collection of primary migration data to better understand of the profiles and vulnerabilities of Lao migrant workers to Thailand. IOM also initiated a small-scale survey, using IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, in Vientiane Capital from mid-July to mid-August 2019 where a total of 401 Lao migrant workers were surveyed. A report analysing the final survey data will be available in early 2020 with the intent to support evidence-based and protection-oriented policy interventions. Moreover, IOM, together with the Counselling and Protection Centre of Lao Women's Union, completed research on Community-Level Responses to Trafficking in Persons in Vientiane Province to better understand social responses, reporting patterns, and barriers to reporting. This research aims to support better understanding of community-level attitudes towards the existing legal mechanisms and anti-trafficking information campaigns, with a view to making recommendations to improve the effectiveness of behaviour change, information, education, and

**MORE CLUSTER MUNITIONS** are now found per hectare thanks to better targeting<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> Lao National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector (NRA) Report 2019.

communication (IEC) approaches. Specifically, the research findings will inform the anti-trafficking hotline operators and will be used in the development of the more effective anti-trafficking awareness-raising campaigns and IEC materials.

Complementing this, UNODC supported efforts to build capacity to counter trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants in 2019. This included technical trainings on media program production skills and strategic communication campaigning to combat trafficking in persons, and technical training on the enhancement of trafficking hotlines, data collection and reporting, and strategic referral processes. Key Government counterparts for these activities were MoPS and the National Committee on Anti-Trafficking in Persons.

The UN is also working with the Anti-Money Laundering Intelligence Office of the Bank of Lao PDR to strengthen management of the risks of cross-border financial crimes. Lao PDR will undergo its next Financial Action Task Force anti-money laundering and counter financing of terrorism mutual evaluation in November 2020. In 2019, UNODC provided support to Government and the private sector to prepare for this intergovernmental assessment. This included capacity building for customs to protect Lao PDR's border regions from smuggling of criminal cash and other illicit commodities and drafting an operational guideline to support investigators and prosecutors in the investigation of money laundering cases and the seizure of criminal assets.

As part of efforts to support improved rule of law in relation to trans-border issues, significant progress was achieved in the roll-out and use of digital forensics<sup>1</sup>, through the establishment of the first Digital Forensics Laboratory in Lao PDR in August 2019 with support from UNODC working closely with the Forensics Police Department under MoPS. The laboratory enhances capacities for analysis of digital evidence resulting from criminal investigations including transnational organized crime, cybercrime, and wildlife crime. The facility will also enable investigators to ensure the integrity and reliability of digital evidence while maintaining a proper chain-of-custody. Investigators will now be able to identify, transport, recover, analyse, and preserve digital evidence resulting from criminal cases for presentation as evidence in court. In addition, an in-depth assessment was conducted to review Lao PDR's law enforcement and criminal justice response to wildlife and forest crime. Based on the assessment results, a draft Plan of Action was submitted to Government. Through UNODC mentorship programmes, capacity building trainings and workshops provided to law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the judiciary in 2019, capacities to conduct effective investigations and gather credible evidence through wildlife forensics and legislative assistance were significantly enhanced. This new capability will help drive Lao PDR' criminal justice process forward, strengthening delivery of legal services and rule of law.

In response to wildlife crime, in 2019 UNODC conducted an in-depth assessment of Lao PDR's criminal justice response on behalf of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime, a consortium consisting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Secretariat, International Criminal Police Organisation, the World Customs Organization, the World Bank and UNODC. The resulting recommendations aim to strengthen actions to counter wildlife crime and will be implemented by UNODC and other international organizations and actors in 2020. In 2019, UNODC also supported Government in a number of capacity building activities, in particular trainings on investigation techniques, wildlife forensics and legislation. The primary national counterparts in these initiatives were the environmental police under the MoPS and the Department of Forest Inspection, under the MAF.

Supporting a strengthening of institutions for the governance of trade, UNCITRAL continued to support the Government with strengthening legal frameworks to promote private sector development and rules-based cross-border trade in 2019, in particular on the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG) and commercial contract disputes. Through work with government officials from line ministries, the national CISG drafting committee, judiciary, and potential end-users, Lao PDR moved towards compliance with the CISG in September 2019, becoming the 92nd State party to the Convention. UNCITRAL will continue to work in partnership with the MoJ to enhance capacity building to the judicial sector, including workshops on international commercial arbitration, electronic commerce, and insolvency.

### 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

During 2019, the UN continued to work in support of national policies to decentralize service delivery and move accountability and decision making closer to intended beneficiaries. Globally, successful decentralization experiences suggest that administrative de-concentration is more effective when matched by appropriate fiscal de-concentration. This suggests the need for continued technical and financial assistance to strengthen sub-national public financial management. Whilst significant support was provided for capacity development in 2019, going forward specific needs should be identified in order to tailor capacity development approaches more closely as the context evolves.

As with many development areas, progress with the decentralization agenda was also challenged by the limited availability of public sector financial resources. Challenges in domestic revenue collection reduced funds available to support line ministries' roles and responsibilities, so efforts to mobilize additional financial resources will be critical to support effective fiscal decentralization. In terms of planning, a medium and long-term decentralization policy is crucial for policy formulation and sourcing of potential funding for basic services. Strong

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cipsec.eu/content/introduction-digital-forensics>

coordination both within ministries and with development partners, should be actively pursued by all sectors to reduce and prevent duplication of work, ensure better alignment and support to sectors through combined efforts and effective use of limited funds.

With regards to efforts to strengthen national institutions to protect workers, building capacity to implement national legislation and regulatory reforms remains a priority. For example, capacity development in labour inspection requires further investment in both human resources and national budget allocations. Lao PDR also does not have a national database in place to record or monitor workplace accidents and occupational disease or illness, meaning that decisions need to be based on incomplete data from the National Social Security Fund.

Joint UN and Government efforts to strengthen OSH during 2019 also highlight important lessons. As in the case in other sectors, strengthening the capacity of coffee farmers on OSH knowledge and good practices is required to help them manage workplace hazards and risks to protect their health and promote productivity increases. The majority of farm workers are seasonal, and not covered under the National Social Security Fund. Most initiatives and interventions that have provided support to the coffee value chain in Lao PDR have focused on improving coffee growing, harvesting and post-harvesting techniques, and marketing channels. Limited attention has been paid to the health and safety of coffee farm workers and the workplace risks they face.

In 2019, the tripartite organizations, with support from ILO along with other national partners, undertook a short review of the implementation status, achievements, and challenges under the NPA on child protection, with the potential for formulating and implementing a second phase of the NPA in 2020-2025. The review found that while challenges and resource constraints remain, there

has been substantial progress in the implementation of NPA priorities, particularly in the agriculture and education sectors and in general capacity development for local government departments. The primary modus operandi for the NPA is the delivery of results through mainstreaming into existing policies and programmes in sector ministries. Based on a review of NPA's implementation against the 12 indicators, this strategy seems to have worked well, though available documentation is limited. The review found that mainstreaming NPA into the existing programmes and initiatives of various ministries has been an effective implementation strategy for NPA, and mainstreaming can therefore, be maintained as a key strategy in the next phase of the NPA. It is necessary however, to complement mainstreaming with capacity development and national level coordination. Major achievements fall into two broad groups. First, significant progress was achieved around the legislative framework with the expansion of compulsory education and adoption of the minimum age for employment legislation, including lists related to hazardous work and acceptable light work.

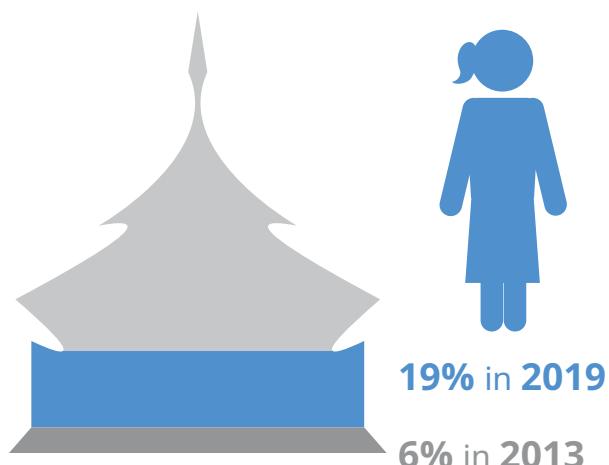
Second, progress was achieved in raising awareness related to child labour and building capacity to address child labour. The MoLSW, MAF and MoES have all undertaken substantial outreach and capacity development work. However, it was recognised that more work remains, particularly in the area of awareness raising and capacity development.

Despite progress, limited human resources and financial capacity for social welfare did still create significant challenges to strengthen child protection systems and the development of social welfare for the workforce. No single ministry or agency has a mandate for child protection, it resides with MoLSW only by default, and without clear authority to coordinate integrated policy. Therefore, whilst some progress has been made, it has led to parts of the system operating in silos or being disconnected, limiting impact. Other challenges and constraints include, as noted by ministries, the limited awareness and belief amongst some that child labour is a "natural" part of the Lao way of life, which represents a challenge to effectively addressing child labour. Therefore, despite the achievements, there is still an urgent need to work on behavioural change, not least among parents.

#### 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

Going forward, experience from 2019 indicates a number of clear priorities for the UN's partnership with Government under Outcome 7. One clear cross-cutting challenge is that Lao PDR faces tight fiscal pressures which will limit fiscal space to invest in the short to medium term. The economy is facing headwind in terms of limited investments, low capacity of the labour market, small population, debt sustainability and limited revenues. However, these could also give rise to opportunities for innovations to increasing public sector revenues and creating new pathways for sub-national governments to

#### WOMEN are still UNDER-REPRESENTED in senior GOVERNMENT positions<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> Lao Women's Union Gender Profile 2018; Lao Women's Union data 2019.

access capital markets to finance new projects for example, creating projects to links to the Belt and Road mega investments in Lao PDR, and linking communities these new investments. These possibilities should be actively explored.

Towards strengthening national data systems, efforts in Lao PDR should aim to improve data availability and disaggregation, establish a national SDG Data Platform, and build the capacity of the national statistical system so that the systems are able to better track and manage progress toward development ambitions. The roles and responsibilities of various ministries and stakeholders related to implementation and review, should be addressed in the 9th NSEDP, with support from the national Round Table Governance Sector Working Group. Overall, Lao PDR should continue to develop a strategy focused on a smooth transition/graduation from LDC status, which should be incorporated into the 9th NSEDP.

On OSH, lessons learned from the workplace improvement committee and the implementation of OSH improvement measures, should be documented and applied to larger interventions and other sectors. Sectoral collaboration and strong partnership with private sectors significantly influence the success of implementation of laws and improvement of OSH for Lao workers. OSH improvement should also be mainstreamed into strategies, policies and work plans for all relevant sectors and partners if zero occupational accident and disease are to be realized.

Implementation of NPA on the prevention and elimination of child labour is a critical element in Lao PDR's efforts towards achieving SDG Target 8.7 on elimination of forced labour, human trafficking, and child labour. Government reaffirmed its commitment to protecting children's rights in November 2019, with the Lao Generation 2030 pledge for future generations. In line with this, Government has committed resources through the national budget for the MoLSW, to coordinate and implement the NPA on the Elimination the worst forms of Child Labour, focusing particularly on (1) child labour monitoring and supervision at local levels in some provinces, (2) training for child labour focal points at central level, and (3) provincial workshops for mainstreaming child labour into other sectors in some provinces.

Implementation of the NPA on child labour requires increased active planning, coordination, monitoring and reporting among the committee members. MoLSW's capacity to lead the implementation and monitoring of the NPA requires further strengthening. Additional resources are needed to support tripartite partners to implement the NPA in their respective spheres. In an effort to address this, a Multi-sectoral Technical Working Group has now been established for the Child Protection system mapping and visioning exercise to promote better understanding and support from high ranking government officials and concerned ministries on child protection. The outcome is expected to be included in the 9th NSEDP. However, further technical, and financial

support is required to ensure NPA objectives are achieved by 2020 as specified in the NPA, 8th NSEDP, and contribution to SDG 8.7 (National SDG indicator 8.7.1 and 8.7.2).

In the health sector specifically, the MoH's review and update of the Health Sector Reform Strategy and Framework will provide strategic direction and overall guidance on health sector reform from 2021 to 2030 and the development of the 9th Health Sector Development Plan for 2021-2025 in alignment with the review and update of the Strategy and Framework in 2019.

# 8. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

People enjoy improved access to justice and fulfillment of their human rights



## 1. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

SDG 16 promoting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, includes a dedicated target on rule of law and access to justice, serving as a key accelerator of progress across the 2030 Agenda, and contributing in particular to the eradication of poverty (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). In Lao PDR, the UN works in partnership with national authorities to improve access to justice and realization of human rights under UNPF Outcome 8.

Access to justice is a basic necessity for the rule of law<sup>1</sup>. In Lao PDR, aspirations for SDG 16 are most clearly articulated in the Government's ongoing efforts to ensure its citizens enjoy expanded and equitable access to justice, as part of the transition to a 'Rule of Law State' by 2020<sup>2</sup>. Plans toward the establishment of a Rule of Law State represent long term goals that are reflected in the Legal Sector Master Plan, officially adopted by Government in September 2009, outlining a comprehensive sectoral reform agenda to support the country in becoming a state fully governed by the rule of law. Government remains committed to this principle, including strengthening citizens' awareness and understanding of their rights under the law, which was reiterated in the 2019 Round Table Meeting with Development Partners and other stakeholders.

Work under Outcome 8 requires engagement across all branches of Government and extending to organizations such as the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Youth Union. This broad scope for engagement presents both clear opportunities for enhancing inclusiveness to ensure no one is left behind, which is particularly challenging in Lao PDR, given the country's varied and diverse population, but also longstanding challenges in coordinating among diverse entities and interests to ensure all voices are equally heard.

The inclusion and participation of actors that extend beyond the three branches, including civil society, remains critical to ensuring inclusive participatory processes that will increase the likelihood of sustainability. Reflecting this, during 2019, the Government organised several consultations and discussions with Non-Profit Associations and international NGOs across a range of platforms including the Legal and Institutional Oversight Sub-Sector Working Group. Under the latter, a conference on Rule of Law was co-organized in late 2019 by Government, with support from Development Partners<sup>3</sup> and participation of experts from several countries in the region. Government's steady progress was noted in law making and capacity building for justice professionals,

<sup>1</sup> The UNSG Report stated, "the rule of law is ensured by national institutions that can generate and implement clear, public and just laws, and that provide fair, equitable and accountable public services to all people equally." Report of the UNSG, "Delivering justice: programme of action to strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels", 16 March 2012, A/66/749.

<sup>2</sup> Master Plan on Development of the Rule of Law in the Lao PDR toward the Year 2020 (2009) [https://www.la.undp.org/content/dam/laopdr/docs/Reports%20and%20publications/2018/LSMP\\_\\_Sep\\_2009\\_.pdf](https://www.la.undp.org/content/dam/laopdr/docs/Reports%20and%20publications/2018/LSMP__Sep_2009_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, EU, and GIZ.

under the Legal Sector Master Plan. Over recent years, significant progress was achieved under the implementation of the Master Plan, with improvements in capacity, procedures, and standards for legislative development and implementation, effectiveness and responsiveness of judicial institutions, systematic development of legal and judicial professionals, public understanding of legal rights and information, participation in the legal system, adoption, implementation, enforcement, monitoring and reporting of international legal instruments. The adoption of enhanced, more inclusive and transparent law-making process fed into a more consistent and effective legal framework, more closely aligned with international standards. Under the new process, authorities now post legislation for at least 60 days for public comments on the Lao Official Gazette, other websites including their own agency website, and printed media.

Recommendations from the Midterm Review of the 8th NSEDP in December 2018, led to new legislation and amendments in 2019, aimed at strengthening governance of the following priorities:

- Strengthened law enforcement;
- Enhanced legal capacity for improved access to justice, including in remote areas and for all ethnic groups;
- Strengthened legal capacity and ethics amongst lawyers;
- Establishment of a Child Protection Section; and
- Review of Legal Sector Master Plan to enable alignment with current trends and international standards in rule of law, duly adapted to national contexts.

The first Lao Penal Code was enacted on 10 September 2019,<sup>4</sup> with support from UNDP, serving as the key legal reference for the Judiciary. The Penal Code subsumes legal provisions and laws related to critical issues for the protection of human rights, including violence against women, children's rights, and environmental protection and is expected to improve access and referencing of laws by legal authorities. The Code also represents a clear commitment to strengthening rule of law and access to justice and is a notable effort on behalf of the Government to ensure that Lao PDR's domestic laws are increasingly in line with international commitments.

Other notable laws and regulations prepared and enacted in 2019 included the Law on Disabilities promulgated in January 2019, and the Law on Gender Equality enacted in November 2019.

In line with recommendations from the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by peer member states on human rights, the Government has made positive progress in enhancing rule of law as part of ensuring fulfilment of human rights. For example, the amendment of the Constitution in 2015 included a chapter on fundamental rights. The Government is also reviewing the National Steering Committee on Human Rights, established in 2012, to strengthen its performance and efficiency. During 2019, preparations were

<sup>4</sup> <https://laotiantimes.com/2019/09/11/laos-publishes-first-penal-code/>

made for the third cycle UPR in early 2020, with support to inputs provided by the UN Country Team.

In late October 2019, Government renewed its commitment to advance the Rights of the Child through a dedicated declaration on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in line with the global pledge. In 2019, Government also committed to strengthening the child protection system and reducing multi-dimensional child poverty to mark the 30th anniversary of the CRC<sup>1</sup>.

Given its strategic geographic location bordering multiple countries, Lao PDR is vulnerable to increased flows of drugs and pre-cursor chemicals necessary for drug production. In recent years, countries in the Mekong sub-region have witnessed a significant increase in the production, trafficking, and consumption of Amphetamine-Type-Stimulants. To combat trafficking by international criminal groups, targeted, evidence-based border screening is critical to tackling transboundary crime.



<sup>1</sup> <https://ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRC30pledges.aspx>

## 2. RESULTS

### FULFILMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The UPR mechanism facilitates a review of the human rights record of all UN Member States on a rotating basis. It also provides states with the opportunity to share actions undertaken to address their human rights record as part of their obligations under international law. Following the completion of the second UPR of Lao PDR, the Government adopted 116 of 196 recommendations. Lessons from the first UPR cycle highlighted the need for a well-elaborated action plan for follow-up. To support this, the UN works with national counterparts to strengthen capacity to facilitate harmonization with international obligations and standards. During 2019, a draft Lao national UPR report, including its set of human rights recommendations, was reviewed among line ministries, the UN System, development partners and stakeholders, prior to its formal submission to the 35th Session of the UPR Working Group on 21 January 2020. With support from UNDP, officials from MoFA's Department of Treaties and Laws were able to participate in international conferences including the 35th UPR pre-session in December 2019, on UPR Monitoring and Reporting, which strengthened their understanding of the UPR process.

As part of outreach to better engage disadvantaged groups in the development of legislation, the Legal and Institutional Oversight Sub Sector Working Group, provided opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement on the Penal Code and access to justice for groups including women and persons with disabilities in October 2019, jointly co-chaired by the MoJ, UNDP and the EU. Through this, line ministries, civil society including INGOs, Non-Profit Associations, and development partners shared views on available protective measures for the disadvantaged. They also discussed the new Law on Disabilities and ways to increase access to justice for persons with disabilities. The dialogue allowed various stakeholders to discuss next steps for enhancing the public's access to legal services.

In 2019, UNFPA, in collaboration with the LWU, the NCAWMC, international organizations, Lao civil society organizations, media agencies, and the UN system worked together to raise awareness under a 16-day public campaign focused on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls around International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, reaching an estimated 500,000 people in Lao PDR.

As part of the emergency response in Attapeu province, in 2019 the LWU, with support from UNFPA, managed two Women's Friendly Spaces<sup>1</sup> (WFSs) in two temporary camps in Sanamxay district. This included a total of 30 participants from LWU, Public Security, Health sector, Labour and Social Welfare Sector and Lao Youth Union

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/news/women-and-girls%20pathway-life-free-violence-lao-peoples-democratic-republic>

## STATUS OF UNPF OUTCOME AND OUTPUT INDICATORS

INDICATOR	BASELINE	TARGET	STATUS
<b>8. PEOPLE ENJOY IMPROVED ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND FULFILMENT OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS</b>			
8.1. Number of people's grievances redressed through courts and village mediation units using legal aid services	Formal Courts 4,000; Village Mediation Units 4,746 (2015)	Formal Courts: 7,000 Village Mediation Units: 8,000 (2021)	Formal Courts: 4,644 Village Mediation Units: 6,109 <sup>1</sup>
8.2. Number of Laws certified by the Ministry of Justice that are compliant with the requirements of drafting / amending and public consultations	0 (2014)	8 (2021)	Eight laws on track: Penal code, Law on Lawyers, Law on Judgement Enforcement, Law on Treaties and International Agreement, Law on Supreme People's Prosecutor, and Law on Disaster on Climate Change, Civil Code, Land Law
8.3. Percentage of accepted recommendations of the 2nd UPR cycle Implemented	0 (2015)	60% / 70 of 116 (2021)	On track – the Government adopted 116 recommendations from a total of 196 recommendations (59%).
8.4. Percentage of women in National Assembly, and in leadership positions in state and party (National SDG Indicator 16.7.1)	27.5% in National Assembly (2016); 6.06% in leadership positions in state and party (2013)	35% in National Assembly and 20% in leadership positions in state and party (2021)	27.5% (41 out of 149 parliamentarians). 31% (20,772 out of 66,828 leadership position and equivalent positions 1st Minister and equivalent to 8th Deputy head of Unit and equivalent 10% (1 out of 11 Politburo members, 7 women out of 69 central committee members).

<sup>1</sup> Draft annual project review report: Strategic Support to Strengthen the Rule of Law in Lao PDR (3S-ROL) 2019

staff who were trained with skills on counselling and how to respond to GBV in an emergency setting. The two WFSs were able to provide psycho-social support and counselling to 175 cases, of which 96 were health related and 79 were related to psychological issues. Activities under WFSs also included games, traditional dances, community cleaning up activities, health and sanitation awareness, and cooking classes to relieve stress for the affected people living in temporary camps. These recreational activities reached more than 2,000 people.

To support protection of children's rights, MoLSW and the National University of Lao PDR, in partnership with UNICEF, finalized and tested the training manual for the social welfare workforce, including sub-national Labour and Social Welfare staff and the Child Protection Network (CPN). The CPN continues to be the Government's main strategy for bringing child protection services closer to communities to strengthen identification, reporting and referrals of cases. By the end of 2019, the CPN was established in a total of 1,248 villages nationwide.<sup>1</sup> MoLSW also achieved progress in improving services for children with disabilities, through a family support model focused on children with disabilities through capacity building of parents, village coordinators and authorities on child rights and community support and care for Children with Disabilities (CWD), in the two provinces of Xieng Khouang and Savannakhet. The capacity of 93 government officials and village coordinators from five villages in Savannakhet province and 13 villages in Xieng Khouang province was strengthened in 2019, through four trainings and the collection of critical data on CWD. More than 100 parents of CWD, received training on care and support for CWD in 2019. Subsequently, 109 SWDs (of which 44 female) from target villages benefited from support, including referrals.

UNICEF also provided psychosocial support through Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) to 3,039 children and documented the experience to form the country's first-ever lessons learnt in Child Protection in Emergency. Transforming from immediate emergency services, key interventions have shifted to long-term recovery, with a focus on ensuring a family environment for orphans, establishing and capacity building of the government social welfare workforce, and providing preventive and alternative services. MoHA, through UNICEF's support, also provided mobile birth registration services to 783 children (353 girls and 430 boys) who were not registered at birth or those who lost legal documents during the disaster.

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Efforts to increase access to justice continued throughout 2019, with support provided by UNFPA, UNDP, IOM, and UNICEF, focusing on disadvantaged groups including women, particularly those who were survivors of GBV and natural disasters. Support mechanisms for GBV victims were strengthened through the launch and upgrade of the Women-Children Consultation Service Centre in

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Laos-2019-COAR\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Laos-2019-COAR(1).pdf)

Xieng Khouang province in partnership with the MoJ and the LWU. The LWU was also engaged as a key partner in an awareness-raising campaign and dissemination of information related to the law on Violence against Women. Following floods in Attapeu province in August 2019, legal aid centres provided services to those affected by the flood, through mobile legal aid. Continued financial and technical support and capacity development were provided for Village Mediation Units and Legal Aid Centres to improve their services towards enhancing access to justice for all. The LWU will now be able to finalize the National Guideline for the Protection and Assistance to Victim of Trafficking in early 2020, based on support provided by UNICEF in 2019.

To support improved access to justice for vulnerable migrant populations, IOM, in partnership with INGO Village Focus International, provided direct assistance services to 907 deported migrants from the Vangtao - Chongmek<sup>1</sup> Lao-Thai border, among which 485 were deemed to be vulnerable. These received safe temporary shelter and transportation, vocational training, food and clothing, psychosocial assistance, and family tracing. These direct services facilitated the return of the migrants to their home communities.

In 2019, the Office of Supreme People's Prosecutor (OSPP) developed three key manuals on Interview Skills



<sup>1</sup> Village Focus International, Narrative Report: Direct assistance services for vulnerable migrants in Lao PDR, June 2019.

Training, Case Management, and OSPP's In-House Manual on Trafficking-in-Persons Prosecution, for Lao PDR prosecutors with support provided by IOM. These manuals contain key techniques for improved, credible investigations and the collection of evidence, and were used in trainings provided to 282 prosecutors and judges to enhance their capacity to respond to, and prosecute, cases of TIP, in line with international standards. IOM also supported trainings to LWU in 2019, on the establishment of a standard mechanism for the screening of potential migrants to identify victims of Trafficking-in-Persons.

With regards to access to justice for children, the Secretariat for the Juvenile Justice Coordination Committee expanded community based legal and social assistance and diversion services for children in contact with the law to Xieng Khouang, Savannakhet, and Vientiane provinces with UNICEF support in 2019. Approximately 930 children (431 boys and 499 girls) from targeted provinces, benefited from legal and social assistance, community-based diversion including strengthening community awareness on child protection issues including Violence against Children, child marriage, and trafficking. UNICEF also engaged vulnerable children and families to develop evidence-based child protection and parenting education messages with the LWU, to tackle harmful norms, such as early marriage and violent disciplinary practices against children.

On broader legislative development to support improved access to justice, a notable result in 2019 centred on the expansion of the use of evidence-based processes for legislative development and was achieved with UNDP support to MoJ and other legal institutions. This contributed to improved access to justice and justice services, strengthened national capacity to harmonize and support integration of international obligations and standards into domestic law and practice, and increased public awareness of legal rights and responsibilities. This support was designed and implemented in a gender-sensitive manner, with for example trainings held to support female prosecutors in particular to improve their administrative and leadership capacities. These activities are expected to strengthen the ability of legal officers from various fields, to improve the accessibility, transparency, responsiveness, and effectiveness of justice services delivered at central, provincial and district levels.

Legal and judicial institutional capacities of evidence-based policy and legislative-development and justice service delivery were further enhanced through training supported by UNDP, with the participation of more than 1,000 people including lawyers, officials from the MoJ, People's Supreme Court, Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutors, police officers, as well as law professors and students. Moreover, the Law on Making Legislation<sup>1</sup> was amended through a consultative workshop in November 2019, to enhance law-making processes, in support of increased transparency and

accountability. The support also contributed to gender-sensitivity in the justice chain and the identification of gender issues and women affected by sexual and gender-based violence adapted to various needs and situations.

### 3. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR 2019

As part of efforts to protect women's rights, experience from 2019 demonstrated the clear value of recreational activities and the psychosocial support and counselling in Women Friendly Spaces, which resulted in enhanced family and community cohesion and helped to relieve stress on women in two temporary camps in Sanamxay Attapeu province. The women also gained knowledge on gender-based violence and learned how to seek help and support from relevant sectors. They also felt more confident in expressing and sharing their thoughts publicly. The camp authorities and affected people living in temporary camps requested UNFPA to continue to support the Women's Friendly Spaces and consider expanding these facilities to the other three temporary camps. However, more work is still required to ensure that Government officials and volunteers who operate the Women's Friendly Spaces have sufficient knowledge of gender-based violence and the required strong counselling skills.

Experience also showed that the multi-sectoral nature of child protection calls for more than coordination, requiring collaborative efforts with clear roles and responsibilities defined. This may be seen for example in the Justice for Children programme where the Justice and Social Welfare sectors, international NGOs and CSOs collaboratively worked together to deliver timely services for children in contact with the law and children with disabilities is needed.

More broadly, work in 2019 showed how technological innovations can be harnessed to contribute to better results delivery. For example, the use of mobile technology has allowed for enhanced, regular communication among sectors for timely reporting and coordination. The expansion of legal services remains constrained by human and financial factors, such as the high costs of running legal aid facilities, a still insufficient number of qualified lawyers and judges, and limited understanding of access to justice issues among disadvantaged groups including women, non Lao-Tai ethnic groups and persons with disabilities. Advocacy on citizens' rights and obligations at the community level is also made possible through a network of community radios and youth programmes through the National Radio.

In terms of regional issues, Lao PDR is strategically located at the heart of the resource-rich Indochinese Peninsula, bordered by five countries. Its long borders, rugged geography, and proximity to larger, more economically developed neighbours, make Lao PDR an attractive country for transnational organized criminals

<sup>1</sup> <https://laofficialgazette.gov.la/index.php?r=site%2Fsearchtip&s=Law+on+Making+Legislation>

engaged in the illicit trade and trafficking of drugs, weapons, money, wildlife, timber, and humans. These challenges are expected to increase with ongoing regional integration measures. Enhanced border security should therefore, compliment integration measures, to ensure that Lao PDR can reap the benefits of increased legal trade without the negative impacts caused by Transnational Organized Crime. Protecting the lives and security of the public, linked to state's obligation to defend and uphold human rights, can only be ensured through effective enforcement of laws and regulations and taking adequate steps to prevent and combat crime.

## 4. MIDTERM REFLECTION AND WAY FORWARD

As noted under the UPR, Government has made significant progress in law-making and capacity building for justice professionals, especially under the Legal Sector Master Plan.

Challenges remain however, including the need for further awareness and understanding of legal issues within the sector and administration. Among citizens, more advocacy work remains to be done to ensure people understand the significance of rule of law. Access to justice, inclusiveness and participation and fair and universal application of the law (equality before the law) requires political leadership, cultural shifts, establishment of ethical legal institutions, transparent ethical practices, and accountable processes and personnel. In tandem with the consistent application of the first Penal Code, the justice system requires greater transparency and continued support in order for Lao PDR to achieve its goal of becoming a Rule of Law state. Evidence-based policy-making and data collection is also an on-going challenge due to inadequate collection and access to sufficiently disaggregated data.

Greater capacity building efforts are required to strengthen the governmental system in order to ensure the full implementation of the Government's goal on the establishment of the rule of Law State with participants from all sectors of the society to increase the likelihood of sustainability.

The third cycle of the UPR should draw on lessons from the second cycle that revealed the need to establish a national mechanism for a well-elaborated action plan to follow up on actual implementation. More specifically, the implementation of recommendations from the UPR will benefit from an enhanced monitoring and reporting system that coordinates, tracks and records progress on a regular basis. The terms of reference of three bodies<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> In Lao PDR, there are three bodies that are responsible for drafting State Party report for treaty bodies, where each has a separate ToR: i) the National Commission on the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children: chaired by Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for CEDAW, CRC, OPSC, and OPAC reporting; ii) the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly Persons: set up in 1995, chaired by a senior official of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, responsible for CRPD reporting; and iii) the National Steering Committee on Human Rights (NSCHR), chaired by Minister to Prime Minister's Office, hosted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for CAT, HRC, CESCR, CERD, UPR and Special Procedures reporting.

which are responsible for drafting State party reports for treaty bodies, can be further disseminated amongst relevant Ministries to enhance understanding about their roles and responsibilities. The overall process can be further strengthened by engaging civil society more closely in monitoring and reporting of progress related to treaty bodies and treaty obligations, which itself would increase inclusion, participation and accountability.

Continued joint efforts in 2019 brought substantial progress and achievements in strengthening national capacity to ensure the availability of, and access to, services for children and families, especially at community level. Multiple capacity building trainings were conducted targeting national and sub-national government officials in various areas, including justice for children, children with disabilities, victim identification, referrals, and counselling skills. In line with efforts to strengthen the child protection system, the continuation of capacity building of service providers and improvement of access to the community-based child protection services, will be key priorities of the National Plan of Action on Child Protection (NPACP), which will be developed by the MoLSW in 2020.

UNICEF's Situation Analysis and the Child Protection System Assessment provided valuable information on service gaps in child protection provisions, which fed into the Child Protection Mid-term Review. The Mid-term Review concluded that strengthening child protection systems should be the main strategy to help protect children in a manner consistent with their rights, which will contribute to meeting the overall national targets on strengthening the human capital in Lao PDR, as well as SDGs, particularly towards ending violence. Partners agreed that the adoption of a new vision for the child protection system and its supporting action plan is critical to generating the will and resources required to activate components of the system which have thus far been constrained in its efforts to effectively address child protection needs. One of the ways forward include widening coordination efforts and strengthening trainings to scale-up the interventions, reach targets and strengthen capacities that will be key for improving self-reliance and aiding further development strategies.

UNFPA supported strengthening the capacity of government officials and volunteers running Women's Friendly Spaces to ensure the quality of services delivered to flood affected people, with a special focus on women and girls. A plan to expand these spaces to other camps is planned to ensure affected populations have access to essential psychological-support and counselling services.

# JOINT COMMUNICATIONS



In 2019, the United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) continued its work to raise the profile of the United Nations in Lao PDR. The UNCG based its work on the UN in Lao PDR Joint Communications Strategy 2017-2021, the UN Guide to Communicating as One, the Lao PDR – United Nations Partnership Framework 2017-2021 and the Vientiane Declaration for Effective Development. The global UN Development System reform in 2019, aimed at further strengthening coherence of the agencies' work to support the countries' progress towards sustainable development, has influenced the UNCG work, increasing the potential for Communicating as One and developing inter-agency cooperation. Following the global release of the new branding for the UN Country Teams, this branding was adopted by the UN in Lao PDR with the development of the relevant designs.

To convey the message of the reform, the UN Day in 2019 was marked with an online campaign showcasing the variety of the UN activities in Lao PDR, carried out with wide and active involvement of the UNCG members, including World Habitat Day, International Day of Girl Child, Disaster Risk Reduction Day, Adolescent Research Day, launch of State of the World's Children 2019 report, World Food Day and Poverty Eradication Day and Week. The campaign also included social media voices of the Lao staff from each of the resident agencies on their motivation to work towards sustainable development of Lao PDR and reached more than 100,500 Facebook and Twitter users.

To further increase visibility of the UN agencies' work in Lao PDR, a separate UN booth was organized for the first time at the Development Exhibition on the sidelines of the annual Round Table Implementation Meeting, held in 2019 in Luang Prabang province. The One UN booth, featuring contributions from 12 agencies, was visited by both the RTIM participants and general public, including more than 100 school students. The RTIM itself was supported by the UNCG in terms of communication and contribution to design. The event was not livestreamed in 2019, as opposed to 2017 and 2018, but the social media coverage of the event reached more than 26,000 people. Apart from the above-mentioned involvement, the UNCG continued to support the joint communications and advocacy on the outcomes of the UN-Lao PDR Partnership Framework and beyond through a wide variety of activities:

- **Decent livelihoods / Social protection**

With a smooth and sustainable LDC graduation being a priority for Lao PDR, this has been reflected in the UN communications in 2019, including the joint Op-ed by the UN RC and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR and support to coverage of a series of related events throughout the year with both media communication and design. The UNCG was also involved in communication support to activities promoting decent work and vocational skills development, including support of the celebration of the ILO Centenary and 55th anniversary of Lao PDR membership organized together with the Government.

With UXO being a cross-cutting issue affecting livelihoods

of the population, the UNCG, as before, actively promoted the importance of achieving the National SDG18, Lives Safe from UXO, throughout its communications, and in particular on the International Day for UXO/Mine Awareness and World Humanitarian Day.

- **Climate Change, Disaster Management and Environment**

With the Government of Lao PDR adopting the Green Growth Strategy and issuing the Climate Change decree in 2019,<sup>1</sup> followed by the country's participation in the UN Climate Action Summit, Lao PDR's voice on environmental sustainability and climate action has been increasingly vocal at the global level. Aligned with that, reinforcing attention to environmental wellbeing and responsible lifestyles has remained principal to many UNCG efforts in 2019. The UN agencies focused on engaging individuals and, especially, youth, to contribute to environmental sustainability, by such initiatives as "Me, My Body, My Planet, My Future" campaign, Arbor Day and study of the public waste management. The latter focused on developing innovative solutions, in line with the global UN Innovation Toolkit presented to the UNCT with the UNCG efforts. The Government has been supporting the call to reduce single-use plastics consumption, with the 2019 RTIM following the 2018 initiative of making the event "less plastic".

- **Education**

A bright reminder of the right of every child in Lao PDR for education was delivered by the Lao youth advocate Nickar speaking at the UN General Assembly on World Children's Day. In line with this, the UNCG members have continued to advocate for improved access to education for the Lao youth, including communication support to the Lao Generation 2030 Forum and marking the 30 years' anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- **Health, Water and Sanitation**

The UN Communication Group supported activities linked to further improvement of access to health services and choices for all on a number of occasions, including an Op-ed dedicated to the International Conference on Population and Development, advancing the national health insurance by the Government, as well as numerous events, such as World AIDS Day, World Population Day, World Rabies Day, World Youth Day and more. On the agency level, messages to control the dengue outbreak and the African Swine Fever outbreak were widely disseminated.

- **Food Security and Nutrition**

A number of communication activities were realized around food security and nutrition on both inter-agency

<sup>1</sup> [https://data.laos.opendvelopmentmekong.net/laws\\_record/decrees-on-climate-change-lao-pdr-2019#:~:text=The%20decree%20determines%20the%20principles,properties%2C%20environment%2C%20biodiversity%2C%20and](https://data.laos.opendvelopmentmekong.net/laws_record/decrees-on-climate-change-lao-pdr-2019#:~:text=The%20decree%20determines%20the%20principles,properties%2C%20environment%2C%20biodiversity%2C%20and)

and agency levels, including coverage of assistance to the population affected by floods, visits of the heads of FAO, WFP and IFAD to Lao PDR, school meals program, as well as numerous other events dedicated to agriculture and nutrition, such as the National Nutrition Forum and Lao Organic Agriculture Forum.

- **Institution Building**

In line with the Government's endorsement of a comprehensive list of national SDGs indicators in 2019, the UN communications highlighted the country's efforts on SDGs integration and increased ownership by relevant Government institutions.

A number of activities aimed at strengthening national and local institutions in Lao PDR in many areas, such as the rule of law and financial services, were also promoted with the communication efforts of the UNCG members.

- **Access to Justice**

The UN Communication Group was involved in communication coverage of the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty to Lao PDR, including a livestream of the press conference concluding the mission. The Human Rights Day was marked with an Op-ed stressing the potential of youth as constructive agents of change.

The UNCG members actively advocated for the elimination of gender-based violence, taking the lead in the 16 Days of Acting Together to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Lao PDR campaign (reaching over 500,000 Lao people on social media) and sharing the UN statement on zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. The UNCG members also supported the International Volunteer Day 2019, which had a particular focus on inclusiveness and the message of "Generation Equality". The figure of Noi, created in 2016, continued to be used by the UNCG to advocate for the rights and needs of adolescent Lao girls to unleash their full potential by 2030.

- **Communications in Numbers**

During 2019, more than 80 articles covering the UN work published in seven different national outlets reached an estimated 70,000 people in Lao PDR, with many more stories in various outlets originating from different agencies. National television channels broadcasted at least 4 event reports and stories with the UNCG involvement. The UN in Lao PDR's digital platforms experienced a substantial audience increase in 2019:

**Website:** 113,424 pageviews (total number of visitors) (106,852 pageviews in 2018 and 63,093 in 2017). Average time spent on page: 2:47 min (compared to 3:10 min in 2018 and 3:26 min in 2017); over 1:00 min considered a good average for content publishing sites). Bounce rate

(single-page visits, the higher the better, since people find what they need quickly): 64% (compared to 62% in 2018 and 60% in 2017). Top pages by visits: Vacancies, Home page, SDGs.

**Facebook page:** 13,813 page likes (up from 10,643 page likes in 2018 and 7,384 in 2017). The highest reach: 198,019 views, out of which 12,872 organic, obtained with a boosted vacancies' announcement with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (in 2018 the highest reach of 168,248 (7,000 organic) obtained with a boosted Climate Action video post; in 2017 the highest reach of 491,100 (4,227 organic) obtained with a boosted film on SDGs). Most likes: 10,611 from Laos (7,707 in 2018; 5,021 in 2017), with the most prevalent segments of males aged 25-34 (22% of the audience), followed by females aged 18-24 (21%) and 25-34 (20%), and males 18-24 (16%). The gender proportion of followers was equal in 2019, changing from 51% male followers in 2018.

**Twitter account:** 1,231 followers, up from 1,013 in 2018 and 696 in 2017. Top tweet: 19,533 impressions for the tweet on supporting farmers affected by 2018 floods (in 2018 - 2,678 impressions for a tweet announcing the CERF funding for Khammouane province; in 2017 – 7,478 impressions for the Women's invisible burden report launch tweet).

**Exposure page:** 2 new stories in 2019 (compared to 5 new stories in 2018 and no new stories in 2017). Top viewed story published in 2019 is "Feeding villagers after a disaster", viewed 24,547 times.

- **Way Forward**

In 2019 the UNCG experienced changes arising from the UN Reform and delinking of the UN Resident Coordinator's function from UNDP, which also involved delinking of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office communications from UNDP. The UNCG continued to actively welcome new members and interact for setting up of joint activities, with 12 agencies being represented in the UNCG by the end of 2019.

The upscaling and success of the UNCG work in 2020 will, as before, depend on the concerted efforts of the UNCG members, further increase of initiative ownership and utilizing potential synergies for joint communication and advocacy on the common priorities.

The UNCG will continue to make every effort to position the United Nations in Lao PDR as an open, approachable organization that engages youth and encourages contributions to the national goals by people across the country. This can be particularly linked to marking the UN 75th anniversary, by having an active dialogue with the Lao general public about the issues of their interest and concern.

The UNCG will aim at increasing Lao public engagement and delivering proactive, relevant and creative activities to promote a coherent image of One UN and support the Lao PDR – UN partnership for sustainable development.

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# COMMON BUSINESS OPERATIONS



The UNPF sets out an ambitious set of development objectives to be achieved by 2021. Achieving these will require not only investing in the right strategic areas and in the right ways, but also working to improve the efficiency of the UN's support to make the best possible use of available resources. To this end, at the global level the UN General Assembly has called for the UN System to work towards "more cost-efficient support services, by reducing the duplication of functions and administrative and transaction costs through the consolidation of support services at the country level; and the requirement for integrated support across the UN System for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." This ongoing global demand for harmonization and reform of the UN System requires the organization to strengthen and prioritize its strategic focus, coordination, results-orientation, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of business operations.

To take this forward in Lao PDR, agencies, funds and programmes from across the UN development system have been working to jointly identify and implement impactful and innovative common business operations solutions. The UN Lao PDR Business Operations Strategy (BOS) sets out a shared vision and common strategic priorities for the UNCT in Lao PDR for 2017 – 2021 in five key areas of business operations: procurement; human resources; information and communication technologies; finance; and logistics and facility services, including common premises.

Through this, during 2019, the Operations Management Team (OMT) and its sub-groups achieved estimated cost savings of over USD 70,000, bringing cumulative savings for 2017, 2018 and 2019 to almost USD 0.5m.

One particular cost saving achievement under the BOS was the successful negotiation of a Long-Term Agreement (LTA) for Fuel Tax Exemption. Within Vientiane alone, as the primary base for Agencies, Funds and Programmes of the UN in Lao PDR relies on approximately 80 vehicles to support its operations. Beyond Vientiane, the UN system has more than 100 vehicles operating in Lao PDR, including all projects. Data on fuel consumption by the largest UN AFPs, including UNDP, WFP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UNODC, FAO and ADB, indicate that a total of 8,339 liters of Gasoline and 13,920 liters of Diesel were used in 2019.

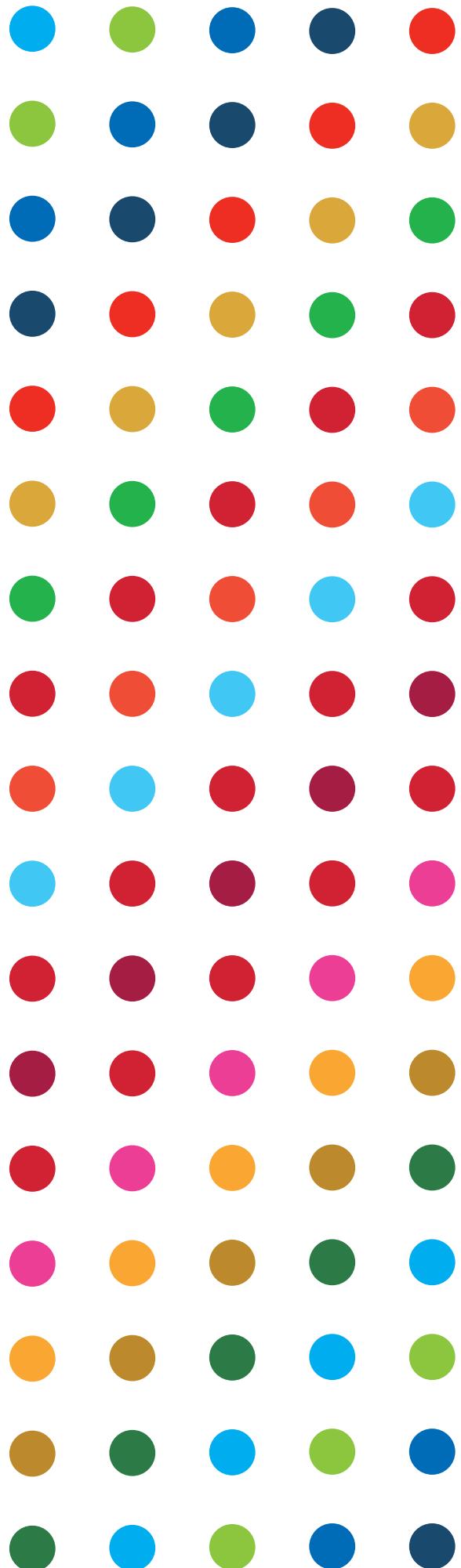
In response to high expenditure on fuel, in 2015, the six UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes with the largest number of vehicles including UNDP, WFP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and UNODC, jointly developed and successfully negotiated a Long-term Agreement (LTA) on fuel tax exemption with Government. At the time, baseline annual cost savings were USD 4,095. The LTA subsequently set a target for annual cost savings of USD 16,000 per year, which would result in total cost savings of USD 80,000 by 2021. During 2019, the agreement was expanded to include ADB and FAO. As of now, total savings for fuel tax exemption exceeded the annual target, reaching over USD 30,000.

In Lao PDR, there are limited number of internet suppliers, and a relatively high cost of internet services, creating another significant area of expenditure for UN operations. A study on broadband pricing in 196 countries in 2017 revealed that the cost of being online in Lao PDR ranks among the highest in the Asia-Pacific region, second only to Brunei. UN AFPs in Lao PDR rely on stable internet connections in order to operate. In an effort to manage the costs of ensuring the fast, reliable internet access necessary to support UN operations, a new LTA was agreed in 2019. With this latest LTA, the price per 1Mbps for the primary ISP decreased by 67 per cent and 49 per cent for secondary ISP compared to the previous contract. As a result, the total cost savings in 2019 under this LTA are estimated at over USD 42,000.

To guide future efforts, in 2019, the OMT also conducted a client satisfaction survey to assess the level of satisfaction among end-users. Based on lessons learned from the previous survey, the 2019 UN client satisfaction survey focused on more targeted responses with a high level of participation from UN AFPs' staff to ensure end-users of the services were well covered. Results from the survey reveal the highest level of satisfaction linked to the finance area, followed by ITC, Logistics/Facilities, HR, and Procurement. Respondents also provided valuable feedback for further improvement of operations services as well as suggestions for future areas of joint operational services that will feed into the 2020 BOS Annual Work Plan and development of the next BOS cycle.

## INDICATIVE FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Outcomes of the Lao PDR -- UN Partnership Framework	2017 Delivery	2018 Delivery	2019 Delivery	2020 Planned commit ments	2020 Funding Gap	2021 Planned Commit ments	2021 Funding Gap
	(in US\$)	(in US\$)	(in US\$)	(in US\$)	(in US\$)	(in US\$)	(in US\$)
<b>Outcome 1</b> Decent Livelihoods	9,324,804	8,350,421	7,023,824	10,076,371	225,975	7,401,858	1,338,581
<b>Outcome 2</b> Social Protection	181,519	863,909	1,023,453	1,169,310	-	1,832,940	-
<b>Outcome 3</b> Climate Change, Disaster Management and Environment	5,531,375	9,185,960	9,891,267	14,411,864	5,638,429	7,427,846	-
<b>Outcome 4</b> Education	9,413,118	11,432,105	11,452,809	11,907,226	2,746,806	5,827,045	2,953,738
<b>Outcome 5</b> Health, Water and Sanitation	8,824,471	13,975,285	20,723,837	23,459,912	2,510,152	12,600,703	2,416,917
<b>Outcome 6</b> Food Security and Nutrition	5,867,458	12,859,500	14,510,561	14,132,274	-	15,286,711	-
<b>Outcome 7</b> Institution Building	2,725,623	3,765,614	3,489,607	5,132,500	1,415,275	2,439,738	583,947
<b>Outcome 8</b> Access to Justice	1,817,451	1,668,363	2,251,498	4,269,143	2,692,143	1,620,073	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43,685,818</b>	<b>62,101,157</b>	<b>70,366,857</b>	<b>84,558,600</b>	<b>15,228,780</b>	<b>54,436,913</b>	



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