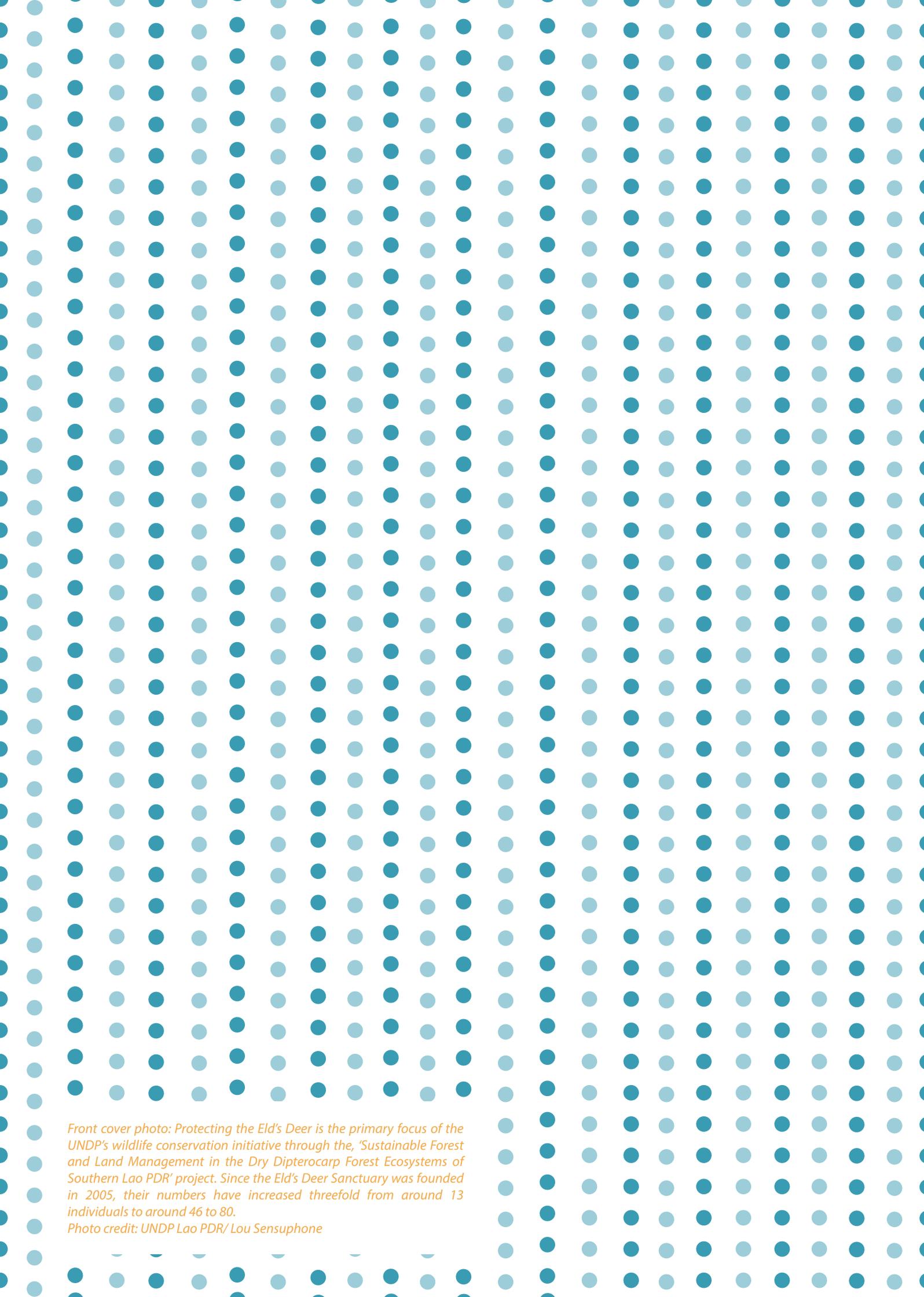




2016 PROGRESS REPORT

United Nations Development Assistance Framework in Lao PDR

The United Nations in Lao PDR, 2017



Front cover photo: Protecting the Eld's Deer is the primary focus of the UNDP's wildlife conservation initiative through the, 'Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR' project. Since the Eld's Deer Sanctuary was founded in 2005, their numbers have increased threefold from around 13 individuals to around 46 to 80.

Photo credit: UNDP Lao PDR/ Lou Sensuphone



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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

UN System in Lao PDR

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
ILO	International Labor Organization
ITC	International Trade Center
IOM	International Organization for Migration
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
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
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
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



This report covers key development trends and results achieved under the UN Development Assistance Framework 2012-2016, as well as challenges, lessons learned and way forward. It also reports on progress on communications and operations and includes an indicative financial overview.



2016 was a year of dynamic transition and progress for Lao PDR. The 10th Party Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party on 18-22 January resulted in the election of the 11 members of the Politburo and the 69 members of the Central Committee (of which 1 and 7 women, respectively). The Congress takes place once every five years. Former Vice-President Bounhang Vorachit was elected as Secretary-General of the Party and appointed as President, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Thongloun Sisoulith became the new Prime Minister. With a turnover of 73 percent, the National Assembly elections in March resulted in the appointment of 149 members (of which are 41 women).

The first constitutional amendments since 2003 led to a more distinct separation of powers between the different administrative levels through the establishment of Provincial People's Assemblies, which were elected at the same time as the National Assembly.

In April, the National Assembly approved the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP 2016-2020) and its results-based Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, with the overall priority of

graduating from Least Developed Country status. With 60 percent of its indicators enabling to track progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the new plan, which was developed with UN support, underscores the Government's commitment to localizing and achieving the Agenda 2030. However, while improvements have been noted, national capacities for results-based management remain limited, and key data is often unavailable or unreliable.

The round table process continued to support effective development cooperation and coordination between the Government and its partners. The Round Table Implementation Meeting on 24-25 November provided dynamic space for dialogue between Government, Development Partners, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders, promoting an inclusive partnership approach for the achievement of the national priorities, with a strong implementation focus, in particular on four priority areas: Sustainable Development Goals; food and nutrition security; green growth, climate change and disaster preparedness; and the Country Action Plan for the Vientiane Partnership Declaration 2016-2025, which was endorsed at the Round Table Implementation Meeting.

Lao PDR remains party to seven out of nine core human rights treaties. While the reports on the Child Rights Convention and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have been submitted, the other five reports are outstanding. The Government has indicated strong commitment to enhance its treaty body reporting in the coming period.

In terms of economic development, Lao PDR continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in the East Asia and Pacific region, with GDP growth averaging 7 percent over the past years. However, inequalities continue to increase, and most of the growth is based on natural resources, particularly hydropower, mining and agro-forestry. The country's reliance on natural resources has not only resulted in the rapid loss of forest cover, but also of wildlife and biodiversity. The country has thus taken a number of important steps towards the preservation of forest cover, wildlife and biodiversity.

Lao PDR continued to experience the impacts of climate-related events, with rural communities most affected by the unpredictable weather patterns. The first half of 2016 saw an unprecedented cold spell, and during the year there were heavy rains from typhoons and lengthy dry spells. These events resulted in frost, flooding and drought conditions, causing loss of crops, demise of livestock, flash floods, destruction of roads, temporary isolation of communities and disease outbreaks. Given the weak monitoring, enforcement and early warning systems, the country continues to suffer a high level of vulnerability to both internal and external shocks, including those from climate impacts.

2016 was also marked by Lao PDR's successful hosting of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in Vientiane on 6-8 September, for which UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited the country. Inter alia, the UN Secretary-General and the Prime Minister announced a national SDG 18 on removing the Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) obstacle to national development; the Government - as first ASEAN member state - handed over the instruments of ratification for the Paris Agreement; and a Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework for 2017-2021 was signed.

The new Partnership Framework replaces the UN Development Assistance Framework 2011-2016. It supports the 8th NSEDP, through three pillars: (1) Inclusive Growth, Livelihoods and Resilience; (2) Human Development; and (3) Governance, Rule of Law and Participation in National Decision-Making. The Partnership Framework for 2017-2021 is synchronized with the Government's planning cycle to allow for full alignment. Building on the Partnership Framework, a large majority of UN Agencies, including FAO, UNDP,

UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO have agreed with the Government on agency-specific Country Programmes and strategies.

The support of national partners as well as international partners such as Australia, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the United States has been crucial for the partnership between Lao PDR and the UN, which remained first and foremost a provider of technical cooperation and a facilitator of policy dialogue.

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1. EQUITABLE & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH





The government promotes more equitable and sustainable growth for poor people in Lao PDR



Key Development Trends

Lao PDR continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia and Pacific region, with GDP growth averaging 7 percent over the past years. In line with this trend, 6.9-7 percent growth have been projected for the fiscal year 2015/16. Lao products and services are becoming increasingly accepted by domestic and international consumers, creating additional jobs and incomes. At the same time, inequalities continue to increase, and most of the growth remains based on natural resources, particularly hydropower, mining and agro-forestry.

The Government, through the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP 2016-2020), has confirmed its commitment to graduate from Least Developed Country status by 2020, reduce poverty and achieve progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In April, the National Assembly approved the NSEDP, including its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework - of which 60 percent of indicators are aligned with the SDG indicators. The Government is currently considering the selection of national SDG indicators beyond those in the NSEDP. In addition to the 17 global SDGs, the country has adopted an 18th national SDG on removing the unexploded ordnance obstacle to national development.

The Prime Minister's decree on Millennium Development Goals was revised to provide the legal basis for SDG implementation. The Prime Minister chairs an inter-ministerial SDG Steering Committee to oversee and advise on the SDG implementation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as the bridge between the local and international players; the Ministry of Planning and Investment mainstreams the SDGs into national planning; and the Lao Statistics Bureau supports monitoring to track progress.

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The Round Table Implementation Meeting on 24-25 November brought together Government, international development partners, civil society and private sector to take stock of progress made during the year towards the objectives of the 8th NSEDP, including the outcomes of the 2015 High-Level Round Table Meeting; and to set common priorities for 2017, with focused outcome statements on Green Growth, Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness; Food and Nutrition Security; Integrating and Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and development effectiveness. All partners endorsed an Action Plan on Partnerships for Effective Development Cooperation. The Round Table Implementation Meeting was followed by a debrief of the UN Resident Coordinator and 14 key development partners with the Prime Minister, including a joint statement of partners. The results of the round table have been translated into an instruction of the Prime Minister to line ministries.

Recognizing the importance to leverage domestic resources including domestic private sector investment to support graduation from Least Developed Country status, the Prime Minister unveiled in September a Strategic Plan for the Development of the Financial System (2016-2025) and Vision 2030. In addition to strengthening the banking sector and developing capital markets, the plan calls for extending the outreach of the financial system to rural areas and to integrate and supervise semi-formal institutions like Village Funds that have an extensive outreach to rural and poor households, particularly women. In October, the Bank of Lao PDR shared with Government agencies and Development Partners its draft Roadmap for Financial Inclusion 2016-2021 with the goal to improve household welfare, increase economic efficiency and support growth by reducing the percentage of adults who are excluded from the financial sector from 25 percent to 15 percent, and increase those with access to more than one formal financial product from 28 percent to 42 percent by 2020. The roadmap is expected to be approved in early 2017.

Results

The UN Team supported the development of the 8th NSEDP for 2016-2020, with particular focus on ensuring its results-orientation, measurability and linkage to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, for the first time, the national plan is underpinned by a results-based Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, with 60 percent of indicators enabling the Government to track progress towards the SDGs. A Monitoring and Evaluation handbook was drafted to support the 8th NSEDP monitoring. The UN Team also facilitated a proposal for national SDG indicators beyond those in the 8th NSEDP, which are currently under consideration by the Government.

“The UN Team supported the development of the 8th NSEDP for 2016-2020, with particular focus on ensuring its results-orientation, measurability and linkage to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

UNDP continued to co-chair the round table process, the national platform for structured development dialogue and action for Government and development partners towards the national priorities as set out in the 8th NSEDP. Building on the progress achieved by the Sector Working Groups, and the recommendations of previous round table meetings, the Round Table Implementation Meeting in November took stock of progress made towards the national priorities in 2016, and discussed the priorities for 2017, in particular around the areas of Green Growth, Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness; Food and Nutrition Security; Integrating and Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and development effectiveness. Outcome statements were delivered by Deputy Ministers around each of these four areas. A Country Action Plan for the Vientiane Partnership Declaration 2016-2025, with 14 indicators to measure progress on development effectiveness, was endorsed at the Round Table Implementation Meeting. With around 300 participants, including Government, international community, civil society and private sector, the Round Table Implementation Meeting was broadly perceived as a success.

The meeting was followed by a debrief of the UN Resident Coordinator and 14 key development partners with the Prime Minister, with a joint statement by partners to the Government, which was delivered by the UN Resident Coordinator. The key recommendations of the meeting have been transformed into an instruction by the Prime Minister to the line ministries.

In addition to policy dialogue, the UN continued to promote evidence-based policy making to enhance

development results. Responding to the Agenda 2030's call for quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data, UN agencies continued to support the Government in strengthening national statistics systems, in particular to ensure the availability of disaggregated data for monitoring of 8th NSEDP, SDGs and sectoral plans.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the National Economic Research Institute to develop the National Socio-Economic Research Framework, which is important for policy makers to formulate evidence-informed policies, and design strategies and programmes to achieve the 8th NSEDP and the Strategy 2025, in particular graduation from Least Developed Country status. With support of UNDP and other agencies, a comprehensive assessment of national institutional mechanisms for tracking the SDGs has been finalized in November.

With lead support from UNFPA, together with ESCAP, ILO, UNICEF, World Bank, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Handicap International and the Government of China, the 2015 Population and Housing Census was successfully launched in October. It provides a wealth of disaggregated information to facilitate national planning and decision-making, including in the areas of poverty alleviation, health, education, drinking water, sanitation, improved infrastructure, and gender equality and women's empowerment.

UNICEF together with the Lao Statistics Bureau and the Ministry of Health completed and disseminated a Food and Nutrition Security Survey, which provided up-to-date information on food and nutrition security in the five provinces of Luangnamtha, Oudomxay, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu. The survey served as an important baseline for the updated 2016 – 2020 National Plan of Action on Nutrition and provided estimates for provincial level trend analysis for sub-national planning and monitoring.

A study on Violence against Women was released in March and has been used by the Government to increase awareness in this area. UNFPA also supported research and provided policy advocacy with particular attention on adolescent girls. The first Adolescent Research Day was held by the National Institute of Public Health, resulting in the identification of research gaps and establishment of a research network. The campaign on adolescent girls, using animation character of "Noi" was successful launched by the Government with UNFPA support, resulting in greater attention within the Government and development partners on the issues faced by adolescent girls.

With support from UNICEF, the Government conducted the first national Violence against Children Survey

which provided new data on the scale and scope of violence that children experienced. The survey looked at experiences of physical, emotional and sexual violence of those under 18. The results will inform policies, programmes and actions. This information was also fed into the development of the state party report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Launched in June with UNDP support, the Development Finance and Aid Assessment provides an overall picture of development financing and a set of policy recommendations. UNDP's 5th National Human Development Report was launched in December. It supplements the 8th NSEDP in analyzing progress towards graduation from Least Developed Country status, exploring benefits and challenges, and providing key policy recommendations, which UNDP will support the Government in following up on in 2017.

A number of other key surveys to inform evidence-based decision-making have been launched in 2016, with data expected in the course of 2017. In order to establish the baselines and measure progress on the SDGs, the Lao Statistics Bureau and key ministries with support of UNICEF and other UN agencies and partners launched the Lao Social Indicator Survey II, using the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) platform and modules. This national household survey will generate disaggregated data by wealth quintiles, sex, residence, age and ethnicity for all 18 provinces for most of the social sectors. A broad partnership has been established to support the survey, including financial support from the European Union, UNFPA, USAID, WFP, WHO, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Luxembourg and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

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UNIDO is supporting the Ministry of Industry and Commerce in conducting a Lao Manufacturing Survey, with data expected in early 2017.

The second Labour Force Survey has been launched. In the course of 2017, it will update information on the country's labour market based on current international standards and provide information on informal economy, labour migration, occupational safety and health, persons involved in activities of production for own-use consumption by households, as well as other current major policy concerns in the country's decent work agenda. The survey will also contribute to monitoring the SDG decent work targets.

The UN Team also continued its support on promoting decent work, quality investments and compliance with international standards to promote trade. For instance, UNDP continued to support enhancing of regulatory clarity, procedures and coordination for ensuring quality investments, including review of National Investment Strategy and completion of Provincial Investment Strategy for Savannakhet Province. The Government's achievements over the last four years with the UNDP/UNEP-funded Poverty Environment Initiative have been recognized by the global donors during a visit to Lao PDR in 2016. The donors have indicated commitment to funding a third global phase.

In targeted disadvantaged rural ethnic villagers, ILO continued to support the Government in providing outreach skills development for income generation and rural employment opportunities. With the ILO's technical support, 433 residents of Sekong province - one of the poorest provinces of Lao PDR - improved their knowledge and skills on entrepreneurship (with a particular focus on women-entrepreneurs), mushroom cultivation, fishpond construction, farming of fish and raising chicken, motorcycle repair, routine road maintenance and improvement of coffee production. One of the examples showcasing the impact of rural skills development on income generation was the case of 35 rural villagers. These villagers could earn 500,000 – 1,200,000 LAK per month after receiving a training on motorcycle repair services. The selection of one person per rural village for the above-mentioned training eliminated the necessity for villagers to travel 30 km or more to the town center to get their motorcycles fixed. The rural skills development will be further scaled up to link with the national skills standard certification.

A Labour Market Information Unit has been established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and a Lao National Standard Classification of Occupations has been developed as one of its cornerstones.

UNIDO continued to develop capacities on trade, in particular around standards, metrology, testing and quality. Constraints related to sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade strengthens have been removed, furthering the integration of Lao PDR into the multilateral trading system. A number of institutions such as the Lao Metrology Center, the Food and Drug Quality Control Center, and the Lao Coffee Association Lab are ready for international accreditation. Together with the Standard Library, a number of national standards for products such as shampoo, biodiesel, technically specified rubber, green tea, cassava flour, plywood sheets and electricity poles have been established, thus contributing to enhancing trade, investment, consumer protection and job creation.



In order to establish the baselines and measure progress on the SDGs, the Lao Statistics Bureau and key ministries with support of UNICEF and other UN agencies and partners launched the Lao Social Indicator Survey II which will generate disaggregated data by wealth quintiles, sex, residence, age and ethnicity for all 18 provinces for most of the social sectors.



The UN Joint Programme of ILO, ITC, UNCTAD and UNIDO on Enhancing Sustainable Tourism, Clean Production and Export contributed to enhance food safety, service quality and environmental standards within the tourism sector through the introduction of a voluntary National Quality Certification Mark in Luang Prabang province. Successfully launched in mid-2014, the certification has been provided to twelve hotels and five restaurants in Luang Prabang, with 15 certification processes ongoing. In this context, over 100 hotels and restaurants are aware of international standard requirements in the field of Food and Health Safety, and Occupation and Health Safety. 500 professionals have been trained in these areas by the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality. The certification has expanded to Vientiane and Champassak, contributing to income generation, job creation and investment.

UNIDO's support to the Lao Cleaner Production Center enhanced the application of Resource Efficiency and Cleaner Production concepts and practices in targeted export-oriented manufacturing and service sectors. The Resource Efficiency and Clean Production curriculum has been introduced to the National University of Laos with another under preparation for Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang.

UNCDF supported the Bank of Lao PDR in drafting a Roadmap for Financial Inclusion 2016-2021. The roadmap complements the Government Financial Sector Strategy 2016-2025 by taking a pro-consumer perspective, with a focus to resolve the binding constraints of poor households, micro-entrepreneurs and women to save, access credit and insurance, make and receive payments. It is expected that Roadmap for Financial Inclusion 2016-2021 will be approved in early 2017. UNCDF will support the Bank of Lao PDR in implementing this Roadmap, with the drafting of a comprehensive action plan with a clear Monitoring and Evaluation framework and resourcing.

The UNCDF supported programme of the Bank of Lao PDR on "Making Access to Finance more Inclusive for Poor People" has provided access to financial services to 46,504 people by September 2016. Of particular importance is the rise of Digital Financial Services which are a critical element to extend the outreach of financial sector in rural areas in Government strategy for the financial sector: The BCEL Bank's Community Money Express, whereby shop-owners in villages in contract with BCEL perform basic banking transactions for BCEL clients and non-clients, attained national coverage in 2016: the 100+ service points have doubled the distribution network of the bank. In this way, US\$ 650,000 are moved each month. The average transaction size of US\$ 183 clearly shows usage by poor households. 4,785 unique users were recorded in the fourth quarter of 2016. Unitel announced in December at the ITC Expo in Vientiane the launch of U-Money in early 2017. With support from UNCDF, Unitel will offer an electronic wallet for payments and People-to-People transactions, using its distribution outlets in each district of Lao PDR as cash-in/cash-out points. Unitel aims for 95,000 registered users within six months.

Financial literacy has increased: 42,536 primary and secondary school students from Vientiane Capital improved their knowledge about financial literacy and have a savings account serviced weekly on the school premises under the SmartKids project implemented by the Microfinance Institution EMI with support from UNCDF; 1,706 teachers also use a SmartKids savings account. The Lao Microfinance Association initiated a capacity building programme on business planning and general financial literacy for micro-entrepreneurs through eight Micro-Finance Institutions.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Government and other national stakeholders' engagement in and contribution to development programmes continues to be a prerequisite for their sustainability. At the same time, partnership and cooperation between UN agencies and development partners need to be further enhanced and new ways of working together to be explored, to enhance synergies, avoid duplications and provide integrated solutions to the complex challenges the country is facing.

Capacity development on results-based planning, management and monitoring for constituents needs to be strengthened and systematized to ensure effective management and coordination among different departments and between national institutions.

Limited funding is impacting the UN agencies' ability to support the country. Increased harmonization among UN agencies, for instance through joint programmes and joint programming, would strengthen the ability to mobilize funding and achieve greater impact.



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2. PUBLIC SERVICES, RIGHTS & PARTICIPATION



The poor and vulnerable benefit from the improved delivery of public services, and effective protection of their rights and greater participation in transparent decision making



Key development Trends

The “Master Plan for Law Development to 2020,” officially adopted by the Government on 11 September 2009, lays out a comprehensive sectoral reform agenda to support the country on its way of becoming a state fully governed by the rule of law, improving the protection of people’s rights, in particular the poor and vulnerable. Many of the activities envisaged under the Legal Sector Master Plan have been, or are in the process of being, implemented.

Approximately 109 laws adopted by the National Assembly, courts and prosecutors’ offices have been restructured and new ones established; plans are underway to establish an administrative court; and Village Mediation Units have been set up in most villages. For the first time in the justice sector, efforts are underway to draft a legal aid decree based on empirical evidence. The Lao Bar Association, despite several administrative barriers, is continuing to work on an expansion and strengthening of the legal profession in country and plays a lead role in amending the law on lawyers.

Following the completion of the 2nd Universal Periodical Review (UPR), the Government has adopted 116 recommendations from a total of 196 recommendations it has received. Lessons from the first UPR cycle reveal the need to have a well elaborated action plan to follow up on the implementation of recommendations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated the process to draft an action plan.

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The “Master Plan for Law Development to 2020” lays out a comprehensive sectoral reform agenda to support the country on its way of becoming a state fully governed by the rule of law.

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To improve protection of the most vulnerable, the Government of Lao PDR promulgated its first legislation on the prevention and prosecution of human trafficking, and concluded negotiations with the Governments of Thailand for a new Memorandum of Understanding for the return of victims. Moreover, cooperation among border control authorities and other responsible agencies in Lao PDR and neighbouring countries has improved, to better address transnational crimes related to human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, as well as drugs, environmental crimes, money laundering and corruption.

A Prime Minister's Decree on Labour Dispute Resolution was endorsed by the high-level meeting of the tripartite committee and later at the Cabinet meeting in November.

Results

Effective support was provided by UNDP to ensure that new National Assembly members – including members of the newly established People's Provincial Assemblies – are able to perform their duties and obligations as representatives of the people. To enhance people's participation in decision-making, UNDP Supported capacity building of National Assembly Constituency Offices in various provinces on citizen's reporting mechanisms. National Assembly - Constituent dialogue and interactions at local and national levels were promoted through outreach missions and public consultations.

As a means to improve public administration effectiveness, UNDP supported the Ministry of Home Affairs in legislation drafting and law-making. For example, the development of citizens-related regulations, such as the Decree on Citizens Affairs and the Decree on Ethnic Affairs, was supported. Various tools were developed to assess the One Door Service Centers in order to improve the quality of public services. In addition to this, the design of various manuals helped to increase communication and dialogue with citizens on laws and regulations related to public administration.

With UNCDF and UNDP joint support, the District Development Fund continues to support decentralization by strengthening public financial management and service delivery at the local level. The District Development Fund has provided the 53 district administrations of seven provinces, covering 36 percent of the country, with discretionary, incentive-driven and performance-based block grants for capital investment projects and other public service delivery interventions.



With UNCDF and UNDP joint support, the District Development Fund continues to support decentralization by strengthening public financial management and service delivery at the local level.



A total of 2,645 officials (including 455 women) from the district and provincial administrations as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs now have a better understanding of public financial management. The officials carried out a total of 662 small scale capital investment projects and service delivery interventions amounted at US\$ 2.9 million, including 84 small scale capital investment projects amounting to US\$ 2.1 million and 578 service delivery interventions amounting to US\$ 800,000. Impact was achieved at three levels: demonstration and realization of the Sam-Sang (three-level development) approach, whereas the provincial administration serves as strategic unit, the district administration as integrated implementation unit and the village as development activity unit; development of sub-national public administrative capacity; and the improvement of community-level public services and development of livelihoods.

The Government is currently in the process of codifying the Penal Code. UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC and WHO formed a task force to provide technical advice to the Government Drafting Committee in this regard. This marks a critical juncture in the legal sector as the code is expected to introduce new legal provisions giving rise to significant changes in the legal landscape. Particularly important are the international obligations which need to be incorporated into domestic laws.

The UNDP-supported eight community radios helped 295,000 Laotians in remote areas of five target provinces gain access to information through various radio programmes, broadcasted in 11 ethnic languages, thus increasing opportunities for these people to participate in community life and decision-making.

Volunteers from ethnic communities, including youth, students, local groups, and local government contributed to the radio production and broadcasting. Inter-agency partnerships were enhanced, for instance the community radios benefited from the expertise of two national and one international UN Volunteers. The community radios served as means for advocacy and knowledge-sharing on key development issues. With support of IOM and UNODC, radio programmes were broadcasted on issues related to human trafficking and safe migration in three districts that share borders with neighbouring countries. At the end of 2016, UNDP partnered with Canada Fund for Local Initiatives for a 6-month pilot project on environmental awareness and advocacy. Radio programmes range across a variety of development issues that cater to the information needs of rural ethnic populations. The most popular programmes are on agriculture and family farming, health, gender, and culture. The number of ethnic youth volunteers participating in the Community Radio stations has increased from 55 people in 2015 to 82 in 2016, including 38 women.

Complementing the above, IOM continued to partner with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to supply safe migration information to remote and rural communities. The training and village-level awareness raising, directly influenced the decision-making of almost 10,000 potential migrants. In 2016, activities focussed on Luang Prabang and Vientiane Provinces through engagement with students, teachers, village leadership, and staff from police security, Labour and Social Welfare, Lao Women's Union, and the Lao Youth Union.

IOM also continued to provide return and reintegration assistance for trafficked and other vulnerable Lao women, men and children. IOM provided clothing, medical, psychosocial and transport support to these returnees at the Vientiane Transit Centre.

UNODC provided assistance to the drafting committee in developing a comprehensive Anti-Human Trafficking Law in line with the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Trafficking in Persons Protocol, contributing to the promulgation of the Trafficking in Person Law in 2016. Before the new law was passed, the Government had used various criminal statutes to prosecute cases and did not specify the nature of cases.

Moreover, UNODC assisted in strengthening the capacities of relevant institutions in preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption and money laundering offences. UNODC has also provided technical assistance to improve border management, particularly in terms of preventing transnational

crimes, including drugs, environmental crime and smuggling of migrant and human trafficking. Capacity building, including trainings, workshops and provision of equipment, has been provided to police officers of counter narcotics, immigration, anti-human trafficking, customs officers and forest inspection officers.

ILO continued supporting the tripartite constituents in developing and revising legislation and capacity building for improving public services. A particular achievement is the finalization of the Prime Minister's Decree on Labour Dispute Resolution. The draft decree was discussed and endorsed in the high-level meeting of the tripartite committee and later at the Cabinet meeting in November 2016. There was a high-level discussion between the Government and representatives of employers and workers on establishment of a national tripartite committee as a platform for continuous dialogue on labour related issues in the country.

“The UNDP-supported eight community radios helped 295,000 Laotians in remote areas of five target provinces gain access to information through various radio programmes, broadcasted in 11 ethnic languages.”

In an effort to develop the capacity of the country labour inspectorate, ILO supported the Government in revising the Ministerial Agreement on Labour Inspection, which was endorsed in December. The national labour inspection plan is available. The expected outcomes include, among other, the enhanced capacity of labour inspectors, an increase in the number of employees covered by social security, and improvement of data collection on labour units. A campaign was conducted to promote adherence of labour units with the minimum wage requirements as stipulated by the 2014 Lao Labour Law. Four female labour inspectors were assigned to join the core group of inspectors who benefitted from targeted capacity building. 30 percent of members of this group are now female, in line with the Ministerial Agreement stipulating that at least 30 percent of all inspectors shall be female.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Regarding the UNDP's support for implementation of Legal Sector Master Plan, the timeframe for activities is ambitious. For example, delays in capacity building of Village Mediation Units can affect timeliness of subsequent activities. Future support should at least be considered for four years in order to complete the full scope of work.

Prioritization by the Government is important to enhance the development cooperation effectiveness. Often, Government officials are tasked with a variety of responsibilities and manage competing work schedules.

Partnership and cooperation between UN agencies and development partners need to be further explored and strengthened.





3. EQUITABLE EDUCATION & TRAINING



Under serviced communities and people in education priority areas benefit from equitable quality education and training that is relevant to the labour market



Key development Trends

Following approval of the Education Sector Development Plan 2016-2020 in late 2015, the Government initiated its implementation in 2016, to ensure all citizens have equitable access to quality education and sports, and to help Lao PDR become eligible to graduate from Least Developed Country status. The Education Sector Development Plan is aligned to the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Education Sector Working Group has played a key role in facilitating the necessary coordination for the implementation of the Education Sector Development Plan between and among Ministry of Education and Sports and development partners, including UN agencies. As a key step to the quality reform proposed in the plan, a comprehensive primary curriculum revision for grade 1-5 was advanced.

Lao PDR's 2016 chairmanship of ASEAN fostered advancement of the SDG 4 Education 2030 agenda. In June, a high-level national workshop for SDG 4 localization was led by the Ministry of Education and

Sports. The ASEAN Declaration on Out-of-School Children and Youth was adopted to promote equity in access and participation. Lao PDR has taken a leadership role in the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics under the ASEAN Education Framework. For cross-sectoral linkages and integration of adolescents' agenda into SDG 4, a research network was established called Sustainable Development Goals For Adolescents. With the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community, Lao PDR is now required to better meet the demand for medium-skilled and high-skilled workers. UN agencies played important roles in supporting these critical regional initiatives.

Following the country's achievement of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of universal access to primary education with gender parity in 2015, Lao PDR marked a steady progress in 2016 in enhancing primary education with a net enrolment rate of 98.8 percent (boys 99.0; girls 98.5). Between 2011 and 2016, both repetition and dropout rates reduced significantly, from 12.2 percent (boys 13.2; girls 11.2) to 4.8 percent (boys 5.5; girls 4.1), and from 7.8 percent (boys 8.2; girls 7.5) to 4.7 percent (boys 5.0; girls 4.5), respectively.

Despite these achievements, 50 percent of 3 to 5-year-old children are yet to have access to Early Childhood Education in 2016, with significant disparities between urban and rural, and rich and poor. The low Early Childhood Education coverage could explain the high repetition rate in grade 1 at 11.5 percent (boys 12.6; girls 10.4). Consequently, the primary survival rate, notwithstanding its steady progress, remained low at 79.6 percent (boys 78.7; girls 80.7), presenting a concern in education quality. This echoes the alarming results of the available learning assessments for Lao PDR, including the Early Grade Reading Assessment in 2011 and the Assessment of Learning Outcomes in 2012, which revealed serious challenges in students' learning. Only 60 percent of primary schools have functioning water and sanitation. Whilst the lower-secondary gross enrolment rate reached at 82.2 percent (boys 84.3; girls 80.0), the rate for upper-secondary remained at 47.8 percent (boys 50.4; girls 45.2), indicating a challenge in post-compulsory education, with girls lagging behind. Inequity in education also remained visible in literacy among females and ethnic groups.

Key bottlenecks remained in limited institutional and human capacity of Ministry of Education and Sports at all levels, gaps between policy and practice, weak coordination among different Departments, and between national and sub-national level, and limited and inefficient education finance.

Lao PDR continued to reform the Technical and Vocational Education and Training and skills development system to narrow the gaps between demand for and quality supply of skilled workers. Investment and cooperation across public institutions, between public and private as well as among development partners have been strengthened. The expansion of skills development was further extended to benefit young people in rural areas. However, challenges remain in linking skills development with employment and income generation opportunities as well as productivity and poverty reduction.

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50 percent of 3 to 5-year-old children are yet to have access to Early Childhood Education in 2016, with significant disparities between urban and rural, and rich and poor.

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Results

UN agencies continued to collaborate closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports and other development partners in the education sector to further strengthen the joint efforts to meet the national targets. As a result of joint support from UNICEF and UNESCO, the education sector planning and management is now more evidence-based and the SDG 4 agenda better integrated. Due to UNICEF's support, both access and quality of Early Childhood Education is improved, especially in remote and disadvantaged districts. The concerted efforts of UN agencies helped further enhance the quality of primary education, including in the areas of curriculum reform (UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF) as well as teacher education (UNESCO and UNICEF). A greater number of schools realized healthy learning environments as a result of joint support by UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA. Gaps between education and training, and the demand in labour market were narrowed with support from ILO and IOM, thus contributing to poverty reduction.

Education Sector Planning and Management

UNICEF, in partnership with the Global Partnership for Education and coordination through the Education Sector Working Group, assisted the Ministry of Education and Sports in developing the Implementation Matrix for the Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020). The Implementation Matrix has informed the Ministry's costed annual work plans to meet the sector targets. UNICEF also supported the Lao EduInfo to enable evidence-based sector management, in which disaggregated, updated annual Education Management Information System data were made available for use at national, provincial and district levels. The Ministry's institutional capacity in sector planning and management was also strengthened through preparation of the Institutional Development Plan for Institute for Education Administration Development with cost projection aligned to the Education Sector Development Plan, supported by a partnership between UNICEF and UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning. With UNICEF's support, the Instructional Guideline for annual sector planning and reporting was developed and approved by Ministry of Education and Sports at the Annual Education Administration Conference in June.

For the implementation of SDG 4, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly supported helped in building a common understanding of the SDG 4 targets and proposed indicators among national and sub-national stakeholders, including civil society through a dedicated workshop. It was agreed to use the existing Education Sector Working Group mechanism for coordination and monitoring of the SDG 4 targets under the overall national SDG Framework.

In June, the 1st SDG 4 national workshop was led by Ministry of Education and Sports, engaging key national and sub-national stakeholders, including civil society. The workshop resulted in a common understanding on the SDG4 targets and proposed indicators, which were agreed to be supported by the existing Education Sector Working Group mechanism for coordination and monitoring under the overall national SDG Framework, which the UN Team supports.

Early Childhood Education

UNICEF continued with its focused efforts towards enhancing equitable access to quality Early Childhood Education. In 2016 alone, 402 children in remote and poor communities benefited from the Community-Based School Readiness Programme, which was implemented in 18 targeted national centres with UNICEF's support. UNICEF also assisted with the construction of ten pre-primary schools with water and sanitation facilities in rural districts in two provinces, benefiting 379 children.

1,407 children in 62 pre-primary schools benefited from a better quality of teaching, following UNICEF's support in building teachers capacity, provision of Early Childhood Development toolkits, and regular monitoring and coaching. 74 percent of the UNICEF-supported Early Childhood Education programmes in four districts marked improvement in the Government's Early Childhood Education Environmental Rating Scale, which was also developed with UNICEF's assistance.

To promote a holistic, cross-sectoral Early Childhood Development approach, UNICEF helped produce a set of seven age-appropriate story books aligned to the Ministry's Early Childhood Education curriculum. More than 15,000 children benefited from these books, as they were distributed to 256 pre-schools and 432 primary schools (grade 1). 329 early childhood educators now know how to use the story books to contribute to children's development. These story books are linked with the UNICEF-supported TV series "My Village", and cross-sectoral key messages on Early Childhood Development, covering issues related to education, nutrition, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, and protection.

Primary Education

UN agencies provided intensive support to the ongoing revision of the state curriculum for primary schools. For instance, UNFPA provided financial and technical support to develop age-appropriate comprehensive education on sexuality. In 2016, this was integrated into the grade 1 student textbooks and teacher guides with the aim to increase their knowledge on concepts such as child rights, respect, gender, affection and love, as well as body and health.

“UN agencies provided intensive support to the ongoing revision of the state curriculum for primary schools.”

WFP in partnership with FAO sought to enhance curriculum development on nutrition and school agriculture, ensuring that children have a platform for learning in the class rooms and through the established school gardens.

UNICEF supported the primary curriculum revision, focusing on learning assessment and pedagogical support. UNICEF helped to review student learning outcomes, the student assessment system, and the pedagogical supervision system. These reviews informed the ongoing revisions and assessment of the state curriculum for primary schools, teacher education and pedagogical support frameworks, which will help ensure the alignment of policy, learning standards, curriculum and materials, teacher education and classroom practices.

36 District staff, including 21 Pedagogical Advisors from four target districts have increased their capacity with UNICEF support. Approximately, 1,000 primary teachers in four target districts received in-service professional support through training and district pedagogical supervision outreach, benefitting around 20,000 students.

As a result of partnership between UNICEF, the Lao Government, the Australian Government and the European Union, all 447,256 students from grades 3, 4 and 5 received a set of textbooks in accordance with the national standard - one textbook per student per subject.

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UNICEF also supported Water Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools through the construction of facilities and the provision of hygiene education in primary schools. As a result, more than 10,000 primary school children, half of them girls, gained access to gender sensitive and accessible school latrines equipped with handwashing stations, and improved source of water in 102 schools in 3 Provinces. 5,452 primary school children in 49 primary schools in Saravan and two schools in Vientiane Capital received hygiene education and practiced four daily routine behaviours.

Under the Hygiene Action led by Pupils in Schools intervention: 1) wash hands with soap and water in a group before the school meal, 2) use latrines and clean after use, 3) drink filtered water in the class rooms and 4) clean school compound. School Environmental Health Clubs in 15 primary schools in Saravan were established with training of teachers.

WFP continued to provide school meals reaching around 16 percent of all pre-and primary students in Lao PDR in 30 of the most educationally disadvantaged districts in the Northern and Southern Provinces. Following the 2014 Government policy on promoting school lunches, WFP supported school lunches, partially based on the vegetables and greens produced through the WFP-supported school gardens. In 2016, WFP supported more than 500 schools with lunch and 940 with mid-morning snacks. In 2017, the remaining 940 schools will be moved over on a lunch programme. At the policy level, WFP continued to play a key role in the technical working group for school meals under the Education Sector Working Group for coordination and policy support. A road map is under development for handing over school meals to communities and Government, and supporting nationwide implementation of the school meals programme.

The concept of lunch programme was further expanded throughout 2016, which included a package of support for the school communities integrating other partners' investments. WFP and UNICEF agreed on increased collaboration based on the findings of the impact review, which confirmed the positive effects of combining water sanitation and hygiene initiatives with school meals for children and the establishment of school gardens. Other elements in the package of support included hygiene, hand washing and tooth brushing activities, support to fish ponds, and literacy activities.

“WFP continued to provide school meals reaching around 16 percent of all pre-and primary students in Lao PDR in 30 of the most educationally disadvantaged districts in the Northern and Southern Provinces.”

Secondary Education

ILO continued supporting the Government in adapting the “Know About Business” curriculum to the tourism sector, focusing on schools in Luang Prabang – a “hot spot” for tourists from across the world. In 2016, the delivery of the last set of modules (6-9) was localized to the Lao context, finalized and validated by the Ministry of Education and Sports and distributed to secondary schools in Luang Prabang. The complete course of module 1-9 are now officially integrated into the upper-secondary school curriculum throughout Luang Prabang province, with at least 68 hours allocated for this subject. In 2016, at least 40 teachers nationwide learned how to deliver this specific curriculum and at least 60 secondary school teachers from 36 schools across Luang Prabang gained knowledge on facilitating the students' learning of “Know About Business”. The curriculum equips learners with entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, which will enhance their employment opportunities and help establish or improve their business. In the long-term, this is expected to cultivate entrepreneurial culture, and increase the productivity and competitiveness among current and future entrepreneurs.

UNFPA continued supporting capacity building of teachers by providing means - such as training, teacher guidebook and information, education and communication materials - to integrate Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health into the formal and informal education curricula. In Oudomxay and Phongsaly, 182 teachers from secondary and non-formal education now know how to use the Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health teacher's guidebook. In Luang Namtha, 50 teachers from secondary schools and TVET have further improved their knowledge on sexual reproductive health through a refresher training.

In addition, with support from UNFPA, monitoring tools were revised and 34 Monitoring and Evaluation focal points were trained in observation and supportive supervision techniques.

UNFPA also supported the conduct of an assessment of the implementation and outcomes of the teacher guidebook in three districts in Luang Namtha province to inform project adaptation and scale-up. In total, 1,585 students from nine upper and lower secondary schools, six villages with Non-Formal Education, the teacher training institute and the vocational training institute in Luang Namtha completed the survey. Data analysis is foreseen in January 2017.

Teacher Education

To strengthen the capacity of teachers in developing basic literacy skills in early years of primary education, UNESCO rolled out a series of in-service teacher training on the Lao language subject for Grades 1-3 in every province, reaching 2,000 primary school teachers in 2016. A Supplementary Teacher's Guide was developed as a key training material designed to support teachers in the areas they found difficult to teach, and to supplement the existing Teacher's Guide developed by Research Institute for Educational Science of the Ministry of Education and Sports. In addition, 72 provincial trainers from each province benefitted from UNESCO's support and acquired skills on imparting language pedagogy and teaching methodologies to target teachers. A Training Manual was also developed to guide provincial trainers step by step in facilitating the in-service teacher training in their respective province, with a view to improving the teaching standards of the Lao language subject.

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Non-formal Education & Technical and Vocational Education and Training

With UNICEF's support, 2,582 children benefitted from the primary equivalency education program in hard-to-reach communities in three provinces. All of the 93 mobile teachers' capacity in multi-grade teaching technique was strengthened through training and monitoring support.

ILO continued supporting the Government in establishing a mutually recognized qualifications mechanism in the construction sector with Thailand. In addition, with the assistance of ILO, the Lao National Chamber of Commerce launched the results of the employer needs assessment to inform the public and the Government on the perspective of employers regarding skills and competencies in major sectors. The results of the assessment provided the necessary information to improve the matching between skills demand and supply; enhance the knowledge base of the Lao workers to increase their employability and productivity; and strengthen the competitiveness of enterprises, their technological complexity and sustainability in production, outputs and processes.

IOM worked to strengthen the linkages between skills development, successful migration outcomes and poverty reduction for migrants, to improved employment opportunities and conditions, both in Thailand and upon return to Lao PDR, and in turn contribute to poverty reduction in origin communities. IOM tested a pilot training and work placement programme for disadvantaged women from remote locations who received limited schooling.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Gaps between policy and practice remained a critical challenge in the education sector. For effective implementation of policies and strategies, a systematic and coordinated approach, along with clear accountability of each stakeholder, needs to be further strengthened through better coordination among different Departments at the Ministry of Education and Sports, and between national and sub-national levels. This should be complemented by reinforced coordination with and among development partners. The Lao PDR-UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021, which is aligned with the 8th NSEDP, the SDGs and the Education Sector Development Plan will be instrumental in facilitating this effort.

It will also be essential to strengthen the UN's joint efforts in linkage with the existing Sector Working Group as a sector-wide platform for coordination. Inter-sectoral collaboration and partnerships should increase for cross-cutting interventions to take place, including in Early Childhood Development and skills and Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Evidence-based sector planning and monitoring needs to be further strengthened, focusing not only on generating updated data but also on the use of the data.

For effective and nationally owned implementation of the Education Sector Development Plan and to achieve progress towards SDG 4 in a sustainable manner, there is a need for an effective and functional monitoring system, which needs to be better integrated and used in the Ministry of Education and Sports' sector plans and actions. Additional key

disaggregated indicators need to be monitored regularly beyond inputs and access, including those on learning processes and outcomes, global citizenship and sustainable development.

It will also be necessary to deepen analyses for actions on inequities in access, participation and learning. This could be done through generating more disaggregated data, including on gender, language and socio-economic status. Such analyses will be useful for improving education finance.

Capacity building of teachers, school principals and their pedagogical supervisors needs to remain on the forefront, as these are proven to be critical factors for education quality improvement. Such investments call upon concerted efforts from different partners, and UN agencies will continue to strengthen their joint efforts through the Lao PDR-UN Partnership Framework.





4. EQUITABLE HEALTH & SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES

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**People in Lao PDR
benefit from more
equitable, promotive,
preventive, curative and
rehabilitative health and
social welfare services**



Key Development Trends

The transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) resulted in new targets for the maternal mortality ratio, as well as the new-born and under-five mortality rate for the next 15 years. Lao PDR aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio to 160 per 100 000 by 2020, as indicated in the 8th Health Sector Development Plan. The SDGs call to end all preventable deaths of new-borns and children below five years of age. In this regard, Lao PDR aims to reduce neonatal mortality and mortality below five years of age to 12 per 1000 live births and 25 per 1000 live births, respectively. A National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health for 2016-2025 has been endorsed.

The Health Sector Working Group at the policy level agreed to take forward the priorities discussed at the 2016 Round Table Implementation Meeting, in particular around the focus areas of Green Growth and Climate Change; SDGs; Vientiane Declaration and Action Plan; Food Security and Nutrition.

Improvements can be seen in terms of access to water and sanitation, as the economy continues to do well, positively impacting programmes aimed at reducing disease burdens of diarrhoea, cholera, hepatitis A, neglected tropical diseases and others diseases that are related to water, sanitation and hygiene. This will also indirectly contribute to improving the nutrition status of the children in the country. 76 percent of Lao people have access to improved source of water and 71 percent have access to improved sanitation. An overarching Water, Sanitation and Hygiene policy has been drafted and is in the process of endorsement.

To enhance universal access to quality services, the Government aims to strengthen service delivery and support a National Health Insurance scheme by using funds raised from tobacco tax to provide social health insurance. This will require a focused approach to invest in human resources, i.e. to train doctors, nurses, dentists, midwives and other health professionals.

Two percent of profit tax from the Tobacco Initiative will be used for the establishment of the Tobacco Control Fund, which will be used for social health insurance and the enforcement mechanism related to the implementation of tobacco control regulation on graphic health warning, smoke-free environment setting and bans on tobacco advertisement, promotion and sponsorship.

Following the first confirmed case of circulating vaccine derived polio virus type1 that was identified in October 2015, nine rounds of Oral Polio Vaccine were conducted. Two external outbreak response assessments took place in May and September, recommending the improvement of Acute Flaccid Paralysis surveillance. A total of 11 confirmed circulating vaccine derived polio virus type1 were found in Borikhamxay, Xaisomboun and Vientiane Province. Amidst the polio outbreak, Lao PDR validated the completion of the switch from trivalent to bivalent Oral Polio Vaccine. This switch is in line with the WHO's Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018, which calls for transition in the vaccines used to eradicate polio.

Other vaccine-preventable disease cases for pertussis and diphtheria were reported in some rural communities with low vaccine coverage and the country will continue to focus on the routine immunization for infants and children under five. Another area of concern was the dengue cluster that was first detected in Soukhoma District of Champassak Province in April, which peaked at the end of May with a total of 198 cases and 3 deaths. To date, a total of 5,373 cases with 10 deaths were reported nationwide including 1,325 cases with 7 deaths from Champassak Province as of 7 December.

“Following the first confirmed case of circulating vaccine derived polio virus type1 that was identified in October 2015, nine rounds of Oral Polio Vaccine were conducted.”

Results

UN agencies have renewed their commitment to extend support to the health sector, aligned with the Health Sector Reform Framework 2025. The achievement of the SDGs and Universal Health Coverage by 2030 remains the driving force for UN agencies' work in the country in alignment with the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED 2016-2020), the Lao PDR-UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021 and the WHO Country Cooperation Strategy for the same period.

The WHO's strategy identifies five priority directions: implementation of priority public health programmes; strengthening of the resilience of the health system; increasing the capacities to ensure health security; improving development effectiveness in line with the Vientiane Partnership Declaration; and active partnership within the Greater Mekong sub-regional initiatives.

As part of the Health Sector Reform phase II (2016-2020), WHO focused on strengthening primary health care and the development of targeted service delivery packages, in particular at the sub-national level. Integrated maternal and child health will be used as entry points, including family planning counselling, antenatal checks, immunization activities and outreach services for vulnerable communities living in hard-to-reach areas.

The National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health for 2016-2025, developed with support from UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, has been endorsed. New technical guidelines included the Early Essential Newborn Care pocket guide, Hospital Care for Children (second version), and the National Referral Guidelines and Clinical Handbook for Prevention of Unsafe Abortion.

As infectious diseases remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Lao PDR, WHO continues to support the activities of Department of Communicable Diseases Control and the National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology for the national surveillance system to ensure adequate response to protect the health of the people. The recent polio outbreak shows the need to continue this investment to improve the surveillance. At the same time, global trade and travel may result in the spread of infectious diseases as we have seen in the cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus, Ebola virus disease, Avian Influenza and most recently Zika virus disease which affected 22 countries in this region.

The International Health Regulation of 2005, the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Disease and Public Health Emergencies and the Joint External Evaluation will support Lao PDR to build capacity to detect and respond to emerging infectious disease threats and public health emergencies by enhancing surveillance and laboratory capacity.

To mitigate the impacts of climate change on the health system, WHO is working with UNDP to support the government on increasing the resilience of public health infrastructure and water supply system, improving public health services for climate change adaptation, and coping with climate change induced impacts brought about by climate variability.

In 2016, the Government committed to be part of the Family Planning 2020 Movement. The commitment includes: increasing the modern contraceptive prevalence rate from 42 to 65 percent; reducing unmet need for family planning from 20 to 13 percent; and expanding family planning coverage and the contraceptive method mix. In terms of policy, the commitment made was to adopt supporting policies to allow full delivery of family planning services, develop a national Information, Education and Communication strategy on family planning and increase the Government's budget allocation for contraceptive procurement.

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Health to implement the Strategy on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Strategy in a number of areas to strengthen capacity and improve quality of sexual and reproductive health services, including midwifery education and practice; maternal death surveillance and response; family planning; logistics management system of commodities and medicines; and community-based interventions to improve reproductive health in remote areas.

The midwifery-related work in 2016 focused on improving quality of midwifery teaching through the capacity building of teachers and school administrators to improve management and quality of midwifery education programmes.

The Midwifery Improvement Plan 2016-2020 was finalized and endorsed by the Government. It focuses on improving the quality of midwifery education and practice through strengthening of midwifery educator's skills and knowledge.

In collaboration with WHO, UNFPA has provided support to the Department of Health Care and Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion to ensure that the Technical and Steering Committees of Maternal Death Surveillance and Response are fully functioning.



The National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health for 2016-2025, developed with support from UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, has been endorsed.



A family planning training toolkit was developed, including materials and tools for training of health care providers. Together with the Clinton Health Access Initiative, the logistics management system was strengthened in selected pilot provinces through the reinforcement of supply chain management, using the mSupply system. Moreover, as a result of technical and organizational support from UNFPA, the central committee for supply chain management can successfully conduct bi-annual projections of reproductive health commodities, including contraceptives.

Interventions at sub-national level focused on remote areas in target provinces where access to reproductive health care remains low. Community leaders are now better able to provide support to village health volunteers; and community-based distributors are better able to supply contraceptives to women in remote villages. Leaders now have enhanced capacity to raise awareness in their community with regard to sexual and reproductive health information and referral services and establish emergency birth preparedness plans. Community radio programmes with reproductive health messages were broadcasted in local ethnic languages (as outlined in Chapter 2), to raise awareness of existing services, family planning methods and other relevant topics to improve reproductive health.

IOM supported the Ministry of Health's efforts to eliminate the spread of drug resistant malaria, specifically by tackling a key driver of the current malaria outbreak in Lao PDR, the limited access of mobile and migrant populations in the South of Lao PDR to malaria prevention, testing, and treatment.

With UNICEF's support, an estimated 39,000 people in remote rural areas have gained access to improved source of water in the provinces of Xieng Khouang, Saravan and Phongsaly in 2016. 10,318 primary school children, including 5,145 girls, in 102 primary schools in the provinces of Oudomxay, Saravan and Savannakhet directly benefit from the water, sanitation and hygiene services in schools, which includes the provision of gender segregated and accessible school latrines for boys, girls and disabled children equipped with handwashing stations, and access to improved source of water.

An additional 5,452 school children in 51 primary schools practice daily hand washing with soap and water in group before the school meal, use latrines and clean after use, drink filtered water in the class rooms and clean school compound as daily routine behaviours in Saravan Province under the Hygiene Action Led by Pupils in Schools initiatives.

UNICEF has initiated a district-wide approach of scaling up sanitation, considering the whole district as one unit. As a result, Lao PDR is making significant progress in sanitation coverage with the two entire districts, Thapabhath and Paksan districts of Borikhamxay Province as the first in the country declared open defecation free. Over 81,500 rural people including 40,635 girls and women in two provinces (Borikhamxay and Saravan) now live in open defecation free societies. However, there are still huge gaps between access to and use of facilities in rural communities.

With support from WHO, multi-sectoral policy and strategic documents such as the National Environmental Health Strategic Action Plan for 2016-2020, the Regulation on Healthcare Waste Management, basic environmental health standards for healthcare facilities, and the Occupational Health and Safety Decree of the Prime Minister have been developed in a consultative manner. Officials at central, provincial and hospital levels now have a better understanding on healthcare water management. A model hospital for sound healthcare waste management has been established.

WHO also supported the Government in introducing water quality surveillance and water safety plan audits through the development of guidance documents and training manuals, and the provision of rapid sampling and testing equipment to the Ministry of Health, central Nam Saat and ten provincial health departments. Training of trainers on water safety was conducted in 11 provincial and district offices of Nam Saat. Water Safety Plans for community-managed water supplies have been developed and implemented in 44 rural villages.

UN partners (UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO) continue to provide support through the joint Programme on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, by improving Emergency Obstetric Care and Early Essential Newborn Care, strengthening of health systems and capacity building in these areas and fostering the integration of services for a continuum of care along the life cycle. The programme thus contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Universal Health Coverage.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Despite some tangible successes in recent years as a result of socio-economic development, Lao children remain among the most undernourished in South-East Asia, with a 36 percent stunting rate among the under 5-year olds. The sustainability of results achieved for children through immunization, Vitamin A supplementation and deworming support remains fragile.



UN partners (UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO) continue to provide support through the joint Programme on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, by improving Emergency Obstetric Care and Early Essential Newborn Care, strengthening of health systems and capacity building in these areas and fostering the integration of services for a continuum of care along the life cycle.



To improve the health of the children and people of Lao PDR, there is a need to continue to invest in health service delivery, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions and behavioral change communication - integrated and sustainable solutions to address food security and nutrition.

As Lao PDR moves towards graduation from Least Developed Country status by 2020, financial assistance for development will gradually reduce, including financial support to procure contraceptives. UNFPA has been almost the sole provider of contraceptives to the national family planning programme. In the past five years, and with continued advocacy, the Government has increasingly contributed funds to procure these commodities. Despite this commitment to family planning, financial inputs to procure commodities remains insufficient.

As can be seen in the example of Cambodia, advocacy using cost-benefits analysis data has resulted in increased Government investments in this area that eventually led to full national ownership - the Government of Cambodia is the only provider of family planning commodities. Therefore, UNFPA has started working with the National Economic Research Institute, the Government think tank, on policy issues, to analyse the costs and benefits of the family planning programme. An advocacy paper will be produced based on the evidence that came from the government's programme and investments. Preliminary result of analysis showed that for every US Dollar invested in family planning, there is a five US Dollar return, with 145,000 unwanted pregnancies, 120 maternal deaths, and 82,000 abortions averted.





5. IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY & NUTRITION



**Vulnerable people are
more food secure and have
better nutrition**



Key Development Trends

The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) recognizes food insecurity and malnutrition as key issues for development. The UN multi-sectoral response to food security and nutrition includes advocacy, technical assistance and provision of assistance to communities.

The Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, with UN support, led the implementation of the multi-sectoral National Nutrition Strategy 2016-2025 and Plan of Action 2016-2020. Nutrition-related targets and goals were integrated in the sectoral plans, such as health, agriculture, and education, and these targets were articulated in the new donor supported programmes. The Government's food security policy is focused mainly on commercial development of selected commodities, detailed in the Agriculture sector's Strategy and Plan finalized in 2015/16. Specific action and implementation plans have been developed for rice and for livestock and fisheries.

The 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Survey, including the 2016 National Lao Child Anthropometry Assessment Survey, showed an 8 percent decline in child stunting from 44 to 35.6 percent between 2011 and 2016. The sub-national Food Security and Nutrition Survey showed that anaemia in women of reproductive age was reduced from 36 to 23 percent between 2011 and 2016 in the five provinces surveyed.

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The 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Survey, including the 2016 National Lao Child Anthropometry Assessment Survey, showed an 8 percent decline in child stunting from 44 to 35.6 percent between 2011 and 2016.

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Results

Support to policy and strategy development

The UN successfully advocated for and provided technical support to the integration of nutrition objectives and priority actions into the 8th NSEDP and the National Nutrition Strategy's Plan of Action and its monitoring and evaluation framework. To ensure the national priorities are addressed in a coordinated manner, the UN continued to invest in strengthening the capacity of the National Nutrition Committee and its Secretariat, as well as the Nutrition Center of the Ministry of Health in the areas of nutrition data analysis and use, planning, budgeting, communication, and monitoring and evaluation. UN organizations led the development of joint advocacy, coordinated technical support and programming, supported the food security and nutrition stakeholder mapping and the second National Nutrition Forum.

The advocacy of UN and development partners for strengthening the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes resulted in commitment by the Ministry of Health to upgrade the current Code Agreement to a Decree by end of 2017.

At the sectoral level, UN advocacy for increased resource allocation to priority nutrition activities contributed to ongoing support from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Ministry of Education and Sports to finance procurement of a portion of essential nutrition commodities, such as deworming tablets and ready-to-use therapeutic food, and other expenses that help to improve food security and health as well as reduce stunting and wasting levels across the country.

Institutional Capacity Development

Throughout the year, WFP and other UN agencies placed an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of the Government at the national level and enhancing food security during emergencies by supporting the finalization of a National Disaster Response Plan, which is expected to be approved in 2017.

WFP, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, conducted a comprehensive food security assessment to support the Government in its efforts to improve the food security situation across Lao PDR. In addition to assessing the food consumption scores, levels of nutrition and understanding coping strategies, the study also analysed the underlying causes for food insecurity.

The 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Survey implemented by the Government with support from the UN, European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, including the 2016 National Lao Child Anthropometry Assessment Survey, showed an 8 percent decline in child stunting from 44 to 35.6 percent between 2011 and 2016. The sub-national Food Security and Nutrition Survey showed that anaemia in women of reproductive age was reduced from 36 to 23 percent between 2011 and 2016 in the five provinces surveyed.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to develop and implement an interim guidance note on Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition. As a result, health workers in targeted provinces have improved skills and competencies to treat and manage children with acute malnutrition and health centres have increased capacity to support community case finding.



The sub-national Food Security and Nutrition Survey showed that anaemia in women of reproductive age was reduced from 36 to 23 percent between 2011 and 2016 in the five provinces surveyed.



Further UN support was provided on the validation of the four priority agricultural interventions foreseen under the convergence approach in the Plan of Action in Lao PDR: diversified crop production and agriculture-linked nutrition education; small livestock production including fisheries and aquaculture; post-harvest handling and food processing/preservation; and food and income generating activities related to Non-Timber Forest Products.

These four interventions were piloted in trial locations in Luang Namtha, Oudomxay and Sayabouly provinces under Government programmes with financial and technical support from FAO and IFAD with facilitation from district-level agricultural officers. The format comprised short Training-of-Trainers sessions involving more than 50 government staff and farmers, followed by season-long or short nutrition-sensitive Farmers Field Schools sessions in which around 650 farmers were involved. In Luang Namtha, a baseline survey was done of key agricultural and nutrition indicators in the target villages, which will be followed by an endline survey in 2017. Institutional support was also provided for the development of school gardens in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and related provincial/district authorities, with trials supported in two provinces by FAO.

For the broader aspect of food security, support was provided to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to develop institutional capacities through the use of specialized food security planning tools and methodologies to enhance analysis and practice in.

Coordination Mechanisms

2016 saw a further consolidation of the coordination mechanisms, both at agency, central and provincial levels, for the implementation of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition. The second National Nutrition Forum produced an Outcome Statement reaffirming commitment to strengthening sub-national level coordination mechanisms in order to accelerate implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action. Provincial nutrition coordination mechanisms were established in most provinces and the UN supported the design of operational guidelines for multi-sectoral coordination.

Within agencies, coordination among sectors such as water, sanitation and hygiene promotion, health and nutrition was strengthened. As a driver of stunting, the goal of eliminating open defecation remains a key challenge that requires ongoing joint advocacy from UN organisations in the future.

UN agencies also continued to cooperate with the Ministry of Health in supporting the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative on scaling up nutrition-sensitive agricultural initiatives in poor mountainous areas to contribute to improved food security and reduced malnutrition and poverty as well as to develop sustainable food-security solutions through the SUN business network.

Other Activities

UN continued to invest in reducing malnutrition among school-aged children. WFP in partnership with Ministry of Education and Sports and Ministry of Health has provided meals to 150,000 students as part of the school feeding programme, which reflects 17 percent of all primary education students in Lao DPR. UNICEF supported the expansion of home fortification of young children's meals with micronutrient powders. Children living in rural and remote areas were reached via integrated health outreach services, where a total of 1.3 million micronutrient powder sachets were distributed in the target areas, contributing to the significant reduction in stunting.

The UN agencies also collaborated on providing comprehensive health and nutrition services and advice. For instance, UNICEF and WFP continued to support the Government in improving health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children during their first 1,000 days of life. WFP provided nutrition education in partnership with civil society and government counterparts, reaching 19,000 women and 24,000 children.

Nutrition advice was also provided to caregivers of children under five years of age on adequate complementary feeding practices, on dietary diversification, and on care practices during pregnancy, postpartum and in early childhood. Information, education and communication materials for promoting recommended infant and young child feeding practices were revised and improved with up to date information and key messages. Health workers and health volunteers improved their interpersonal communication skills and knowledge about Infant and Young Child Feeding through training.

To achieve greater food security and resilience, UN agencies worked in assisting the government to be prepared to handle climate-related disasters. WFP together with UNOCHA conducted a simulation exercise to test the coordination system of the Government and the international organizations, in which key disaster management stakeholders participated (UN agencies, INGOs, various ministries and donors). Several recommendations were made to improve the disaster management framework in Lao PDR.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, provincial departments and IFAD, WFP actively contributed to rural livelihood development by supporting local communities through creating 130 community assets, increasing agricultural production and access to markets, enhancing resilience, and preventing food insecurity, reaching 53,000 beneficiaries.

Communities, including the elderly, women and people with disabilities, were consulted in identifying which asset would be of most benefit to the community, ensuring ownership and participation.

Results in the areas of farming and livestock management contributed to building food and nutrition security: i) support continued to the Department of Livestock and Fisheries leading to finalization and publication of the Strategic Implementation Plan for the development of management of fisheries and aquaculture in Lao PDR, including investment opportunities and a framework for capacity development at the local level; ii) support was provided to Training-of-Trainers on pesticide risk reduction for 45 district and provincial staff from 21 districts of 8 provinces, for 19 Government extension staff from 4 southern provinces. Existing training materials were revised for distribution to extension workers in 17 provinces, focusing on reducing pesticide exposure risk and eliminating the use of WHO-Class I/Highly-Hazardous Pesticides in agricultural production activities while phasing in the use of Integrated Pest Management. Three hundred and fifty farmers, (including 150 women) in four provinces increased their knowledge on Pesticide Risk Reduction, resulting in dedicated Community Action Plans. An additional 120 farmers benefited from further brief capacity building.

In a separate initiative, over 500 farmers (including around 200 women) in four lowland rice-growing provinces participated in season-long farmer field school sessions to develop capacity for increasing land productivity and profitability while reducing agrochemical inputs and associated costs, under FAO's Save and Grow model for sustainable intensification of crop production.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The governmental reforms of recent years have reduced the levels of malnutrition and increased food security in the country. However, the key challenge for the Government and UN agencies remains to collaboratively ensure that these reforms are decisively transformed into investments in food-related public infrastructure, services, and positive nutritional behaviour change outcomes for the most vulnerable and food-insecure populations.



In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, provincial departments and IFAD, WFP actively contributed to rural livelihood development by supporting local communities through creating 130 community assets, increasing agricultural production and access to markets, enhancing resilience, and preventing food insecurity, reaching 53,000 beneficiaries.



The Government's multi-sectoral convergence approach has been greatly strengthened as three major sectors have worked together in a coordinated and targeted approach involving health, agriculture and education. There has also been active participation by all relevant UN agencies in the UN Network for Scaling up Nutrition to provide coordinated, timely and informative reports to the National Nutrition Committee. Further efforts on addressing the systemic issues of capacity development included strengthening institutional capacity and local governance as well as service delivery mechanisms, and enhancing community resilience, risk management and adaptation to challenges affecting food security and livelihoods, such as climate change.

As a reflection of the continuing importance on continued collaboration the Government places on malnutrition and food insecurity, the SDG 2 targets

have been incorporated into its 8th NSEDP, while SDG 17 has been a basis for discussions among sectoral groups.

The UN agencies will continue supporting the Government's efforts in improving food security and nutrition through increased agricultural productivity and diversification and support to smallholder farmers; strengthening the government institutional and systems capacities for improving nutrition specific service delivery platforms; supporting evidence generation to inform policy development; supporting behavioural change to reduce child malnutrition; strengthening the role of women in nutrition to improve food security; and expansion of participatory approaches to reach the most isolated and disadvantaged populations.



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ພະຍາດເອດແມ່ນຫຍັງ?

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HIV+

AIDS

ໂຕຢາກຂອງຄົນທີ່ຕິດເຊື້ອ HIV ແລະ AIDS ມີລັກຊະນະບໍ່ແຕກຕ່າງ
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6. HIV PREVENTION, TREATMENT & SUPPORT

Key populations at higher risk of HIV infection benefit from increased coverage and quality of integrated prevention and treatment, care and support services



Key Development Trends

The prevalence of HIV among adults in Lao PDR aged 15-49 years old remains low, at 0.3 percent. There are approximately 11,000 people living with HIV, with an estimated 1,000 new infections each year. To reduce the number of yearly new HIV infections, the focus of the HIV response has been on key populations. Key populations include men who have sex with men, sex workers and clients, people who inject drugs through sharing contaminated injecting equipment and tuberculosis patients. Experts estimated that HIV prevalence among these groups is up to ten times higher than in the general population.

Global migration and mobility within ASEAN is adding to this concern. Currently, the large infrastructure development and dam construction projects bring thousands of foreign workers into the country and make Lao PDR more vulnerable to the HIV epidemic. HIV specialists are also concerned that new HIV infections will be increasing among the low-risk female and male population, especially sex workers' clients, migrants and their partners.

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Currently, the large infrastructure development and dam construction projects bring thousands of foreign workers into the country and make Lao PDR more vulnerable to the HIV epidemic.

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Results

Joint advocacy continued throughout the year. For example, continuous advocacy efforts were made to bring antiretroviral drugs closer to people living with HIV, to develop a transition plan for domestic funding of antiretroviral treatment, and to remove stigma and discrimination in health settings. WHO and UNAIDS have advocated with government partners on the use of the WHO's new "Test and Treat" guideline. In the context of the review of the penal code, UNAIDS together with its co-sponsors WHO, UNDP and UNODC advocated with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and National Commission for Drug Control to remove the legal barriers to access HIV services among key populations. A proposal to remove these legal barriers has been reviewed by the Penal Code Review Task Force for endorsement by the National Assembly.

Through joint advocacy, the Government has approved the scaling up of the community drug treatment to additional provinces in 2017. Moreover, the public health approach, promoting harm reduction, is now included in the National Master Plan for Drug Control 2016-2020. UNAIDS and WHO supported the Ministry of Health and the National HIV/AIDS Control programme to implement their political commitments under the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS. The Lao Government has adopted a Fast Track Target to reduce the number of new HIV infections to below 300 new cases per year by the year 2020 and to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. UNODC has initiated the promotion of a community drug treatment center focusing on treatment of amphetamine users in Sisattanak hospital in Vientiane capital.

UNAIDS provided support to the National HIV/AIDS Programme by identifying innovative approaches for accessing key affected populations. Concurrently, WHO worked closely with the Centre for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmissible Infections on the integration of HIV/AIDS data to health information platform. UN agencies will continue to support testing, prevention, treatment and care of HIV patients as well as the removal of barriers to accessing HIV services.

In terms of programme quality improvement for HIV/AIDS services, UNAIDS together with WHO and partners facilitated and conducted a series of country programme reviews on Sexually Transmissible Infections and HIV peer education. UNAIDS and WHO contributed to the high-level advocacy at Ministry levels and Country Coordination Mechanism for funding support of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the Government's contribution.

UNFPA integrated HIV/AIDS in the overall adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and services. In 2016, Ministry of Education and Sports with support from UNFPA conducted an advocacy workshop for policy makers at provincial level. As a result, the Lao Youth Union would be responsible for coordination of adolescent sexual and reproductive health outreach activities while health and education would provide technical inputs to the outreach activities with oversight from Vientiane Youth Centre and Promotion of Family Health Association. Capacity building efforts included training a team of core outreach workers at district level from the three sectors (health, education and youth).

In addition, information, education and communications package was procured to support outreach activities in five districts reaching a total of 1,550 young people from secondary schools. Furthermore, adolescent sexual and reproductive health services were promoted by the outreach workers to five district hospitals where youth-friendly services are now offered. With support by UNFPA, Vientiane Youth Center could provide sexual and reproductive health services for 7,159 young people. In addition, 786 young people received HIV/AIDS counselling and could take HIV tests at the Vientiane Youth Center.

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Joint advocacy continued throughout the year. For example, continuous advocacy efforts were made to bring antiretroviral drugs closer to people living with HIV, to develop a transition plan for domestic funding of antiretroviral treatment, and to remove stigma and discrimination in health settings.

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Lessons Learned and Way Forward

To end the HIV epidemic by 2030, UNAIDS co-sponsors will need to increase their support:

Advocate for mainstreaming of HIV issues into government and development partners' programs:

Knowledge on HIV/AIDS, prevention and response should be incorporated into programmes related to gender equality, human rights, workplace education, health system strengthening, social safety nets, and maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health.

Advocate for sufficient resources to implement the National HIV Action Plan 2016-2020:

Funding for the HIV/AIDS response is currently not sustainable, with almost 100 percent funded by external sources. Declining external support is having a considerable impact on HIV/AIDS programmes in Lao PDR. Thus, domestic resource allocation needs to increase.

Strengthen the enabling environment for effective HIV response:

Promote tolerance approach by the law enforcement officers working with vulnerable populations. Continue advocating for private partnership in the HIV/AIDS

response and explore the possibility for development of a sub-law on HIV/AIDS and improve programming response including community-led HIV prevention, treatment and care and support.

Mobilize resources from private investors collaborating with the Government on large infrastructure development projects, including mining, dam and road construction:

Private sector participation in the HIV response will lessen the impact of such development projects on the socio-economic fabric of the surrounding areas. Collaboration with neighboring countries is necessary to address the issue of HIV in the context of migration. To reduce the funding gap in HIV response, the Ministry of Health and other partners will need to work with big investors who bring thousands of migrant workers to their sites.

In addition to the above, more support on monitoring the outreach work targeting adolescents is required. While outreach workers are being trained on outreach and adolescent sexual and reproductive health contents, they need to better understand and apply monitoring and evaluation tools.





7. SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT





The government ensures sustainable natural resources management through improved governance, and community participation



Key Development Trends

Lao PDR continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia, with GDP growth averaging seven percent over the past years. This economic growth is based on extractive use of natural resources, particularly through hydropower, mining and agro-forestry. The extensive use of natural resources has resulted in significant loss of forest cover, biodiversity and wildlife, and contributed to disaster impacts, and these trends have continued into 2016. Deforestation, industrial activities, large scale farming practices with high water demand, and the use of pesticides, are some issues that contribute to deplete finite water resource which requires proper management. The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPlan) lists the target of reaching 70 percent forest cover by 2020.

Lao PDR has been implicated as a trans-shipment point for illegal wildlife trade, which prompted a compliance mission from the Secretariat for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The resulting CITES report raised issues such as the trade of ivory, trade of live animals and illegal wildlife breeding farms and pointed to a weak regulatory, legal and enforcement framework; lack of robust scientific data for decision-making; and inadequate public awareness and communication.

Results

In relation to tenure of land and forest resources, FAO supported a collaborative study undertaken with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to provide a baseline overview of land tenure in Lao PDR, with a particular focus on community participation in forest management and within the context of the current legal framework and the enabling environment for sustainable forest management. Training and media communication materials on land and resource related governance issues were developed and applied, to bridge the gap between policy and implementation of existing land laws. The training materials reflected how a variety of instruments such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests can foster improved management of land and natural resources, especially through knowledge and understanding at community/ village, district and provincial levels.

Support was also provided to the Department of Forestry to strengthen its national forest monitoring system through the Forest Inventory and Planning Division, using CollectEarth, a customized Open Source Geographic Information System application.

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UNDP and FAO support continued on mainstreaming biodiversity in agricultural and land management policies, plans and programmes with capacity development for farmers and communities.

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In addition, forestry staff in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Houaphan, and Bokeo have gained new skills on the use of remote sensing approaches to monitor forest cover. The resulting forest cover data were used as the basis for forestry sector planning and in particular REDD+ interventions at provincial level, and were analyzed by the Forest Inventory and Planning Division to confirm how they could be used towards national forest monitoring in the future.

UNDP launched a programme for sustainable forestry and land management in five districts in Savannakhet, the largest southern province. The communities in the five target districts have already been engaged for improving awareness of sustainable forest practices and promoting non-extractive uses of the forest. FAO supported the Department of Forest Inspection and a national civil society organisation in the development of Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade with community-based interventions in two districts of Khammouane province, designed to empower local people and increase awareness about the legal and governance aspects of forestry and timber extraction.

UNDP and FAO support continued on mainstreaming biodiversity in agricultural and land management policies, plans and programmes with capacity development for farmers and communities, such as the one in farmer field schools which has been facilitated by female extension staff and lead farmers. The preparation and distribution of key tools such as the guide for production of oyster mushrooms will ensure sustainability of training and production. Oyster mushroom cultivation activities have resulted in the production of more than 12 tons of mushrooms from 101,000 bags and generated income of more than US\$ 20,300 for both male and female farmers. As a result, the families have spent much less time in the forest which contributed to more sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products. Farmers have provided training to each other and the new farmers guide will support the knowledge transfer and capacity development.

Conservation and management of wild tea has been promoted in tea gardens and in upland fields. Other agro-biodiversity products have successfully been integrated into production systems for the communities in the two northern provinces of Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang and contribute to food and nutrition security in these rural populations. Policy dialogue has continued to ensure that agro-biodiversity issues are mainstreamed into planning processes. The Agro-biodiversity Sub-Sector Working Group, supported and co-established by UNDP/FAO, has served as a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for discussing issues of pesticide management and the National Agrobiodiversity Programme in 2016. In addition, provincial Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans were finalized for Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces.

UNODC and UNDP along with other development partners have worked closely with the Government on framing a response to findings of a compliance mission by the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This resulted in the Government announcement at the CITES Standing Committee and Conference of Parties on its decision to close tiger breeding farms and to include illegal wildlife trade as a criminal offence in the ongoing revision of the Penal Code.

UNIDO technical support initiated a draft policy for green, low carbon industries that directly contributes to the country's energy efficiency, clean production and environmental protection by reducing greenhouse gas emission. UNIDO and FAO have supported the country in implementing the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which has been included in the Environment Protection Law.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The support provided by the UN agencies was aligned with the Government's emphasis on the sustainability of the natural resources sector and reducing its vulnerabilities, under the third outcome of the 8th NSEDP. Institutional capacities in these areas are in great need of development, from policy through to the operational levels. Development of institutional plans of action and standard operating procedures are critical in guiding agencies in the conservation and restoration of the country's natural resource base and in responding to threats. In practice, the capacities of frontline agencies to foster sustainable management of resources such as forests has been growing partly as a function of the assistance provided by the UN system.

In addition to the identification of resources and capacity development, accurate data and baseline information is still required for some areas. UN support could focus on these areas while ensuring the Government has full ownership in the process. Information and opportunity sharing among UN agencies could be a good way of verifying baseline and targets as well as synchronizing strengths and specialties.



UNIDO and FAO have supported the country in implementing the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which has been included in the Environment Protection Law.





8. ADAPTATION & MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE & NATURAL DISASTER VULNERABILITIES



The government and communities better adapt to and mitigate climate change and reduce natural disaster vulnerabilities in priority sectors



Key Development Trends

Lao PDR continued to experience the impacts of climate-related events, with rural communities most affected by the unpredictable weather patterns. The first half of 2016 saw an unprecedented cold spell, and during the year there were heavy rains from typhoons and lengthy dry spells. These events resulted in frost, flooding and drought conditions, causing loss of crops, demise of livestock, flash floods, destruction of roads, temporary isolation of communities and disease outbreaks. Given the weak monitoring, enforcement and early warning systems, the country continues to suffer a high level of vulnerability to both internal and external shocks, including those from climate impacts.

Climate change has direct and indirect impacts on the biological, psychological and social health of individuals and communities. Women, children and rural communities are the most affected. The adverse effects of climate change, specifically prolonged drought and flooding, limits access to clean water, intake of nutritional food, and access to social services and education. This in turn impacts welfare and health. Health impacts of climate change include those caused by extreme weather events such as heat waves, floods,

droughts and storms. Other effects relate to changes in temperature, rainfall and air quality and include an increasing risk of communicable diseases including emerging and re-emerging diseases, food- and water-related diseases, non-communicable diseases and effects on mental health.

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Outcome 3 of the recently approved 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan clearly articulates environmental protection and natural resource management; preparing to cope with disaster risks and impacts from climate change; and reducing the instability of agricultural production caused by disaster impacts as priorities. The Government continued to demonstrate commitment and leadership in climate action by signing the Paris Agreement, and then submitting the ratification instruments to the UN Secretary General in September 2016 on the margins of the ASEAN Summit. Lao PDR was the first ASEAN country to submit its ratification instruments.

Results

Supported by UNDP, the signing of the Paris Agreement, the participation in the Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution underpinned the strong leadership and commitment of the Government on climate action. The Nationally Determined Contribution provided the basis of the Government's submission to the National Assembly of the national instruments for the ratification of the Paris Agreement. These were handed over to the UN Secretary-General in September on the margins of the ASEAN Summit. The first draft of the Disaster and Climate Change Law was supported, with a strong emphasis on gender-sensitivity.

Following UNDP's assistance, a district-level policy framework on climate resilience was strengthened as the District Development Guidelines, which had been finalized and approved in 2015, received official endorsement from the Government through a Ministerial Agreement. This marks a significant step in the climate proofing policies, through the recognition and implementation of the revised guidelines which include climate-resilience as one criterion for the approval of district-level grant financing for small-scale infrastructure. In 2016, 12 infrastructure projects were completed and over 17,000 local persons in Sekong and Saravan Provinces have benefitted from small-scale infrastructure for water supply, irrigation, check dams, flood control, community bridges and earth dykes serving the communities to improve livelihoods, reduce the impact of disasters and increase food and nutrition security. Twelve new climate-resilient sub-projects were approved for implementation in 2017.

Institutional capacities continued to be strengthened at national level and in three provinces to support the implementation of the national Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in the agriculture sector with support from FAO.

“Supported by UNDP, the signing of the Paris Agreement, the participation in the Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution underpinned the strong leadership and commitment of the Government on climate action.”

Good Practice Options in agriculture and food security in the wet and the dry season were validated for disaster-prone areas in the three provinces, and the descriptions were published in Lao language, with guidance on methodologies. The Plan of Action was updated through a consultative process to cover the period 2017-2019, and will be finalized in early 2017.

IOM worked with the Government to develop a National Disaster Management Training Framework. The Training framework provides a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of future disaster management training for all ministries involved in disaster management and risk reduction.

ADB and UNDP supported the establishment of a disaster risk management database called LaoDi. LaoDi will be a repository for disaster information and will support Lao PDR on reporting on important international benchmarks such as the Sendai Framework and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Capacities of national level staff in the Department of Disaster Management and Climate Change in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment were developed for the population of the database. This training was then transferred to staff in the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment in Xayaboury, Luang Prabang and Champassak provinces.

ADB and UNDP initiative also supported a Disaster Risk Management Public Expenditure and Institutional Review. This ground-breaking work included partnership with the Ministry of Finance who provided the national state budgets for four consecutive years for review and analysis. The analysis benefited from multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral engagement and

revealed the top three Ministries for disaster risk management expenditures as Agriculture and Forestry, Public Works and Transport, and Labor and Social Welfare. This work will help inform decision-making on budgetary allocations for disaster-related components.

WHO and UNDP have developed a joint proposal for building resilience of health systems in Lao PDR to climate change covering the period of the next four years – this is based on a concept note approved by the global Environment Facility in 2016. The joint initiative will address specific barriers and root causes (both direct and indirect) that prevent the improvement of the adaptive capacity of the health sector to climate variation and change. The project will aim to remove the identified barriers and increase the adaptive capacity of national health systems and institutions, and sub-national level actors, to respond to and manage long-term climate-sensitive health risks in Lao PDR. The key barriers are summarized as insufficient capacity for climate change adaptation within the relevant government agencies; limited surveillance data inhibiting prevention and response to epidemics; limited ability to prevent and treat climate-sensitive diseases and remain operational during extreme weather events; and insufficient regional knowledge sharing and scale up of successful pilot projects.

UNICEF adopted different strategies to cope with the existing environmental conditions in order to safeguard investments for children and their families. These included higher technical design scrutiny of water systems by considering the climate resilience aspect of service delivery; installation of hand pumps with raised platforms in flood prone communities, including schools, to protect them from floods and conserve energy; and use of closed borehole systems where water tables are deeper and soil is unstable.

On climate change mitigation, Lao PDR has indicated Best Available Techniques / Best Environmental Practices in fossil fuel-fired utility and industrial boiler as priority actions for industry to reduce carbon emissions. A Green Boiler Technology Management curriculum has been introduced and taught at the National University of Lao PDR.

In relation to response to natural disasters, capacity development and logistical support was rendered to the Government for the management of the national emergency caused by the outbreak of the Yellow-Spined Bamboo Locust (*Ceracris kiangsu*), which had first become serious in 2015. A collaborative effort by national agencies and agricultural authorities in the three affected provinces limited crop damage caused by the outbreak, partly supported by resources provided by UN-CERF and FAO. In addition, FAO's

ongoing programme of capacity development support for the detection and control of highly pathogenic avian influenza continued its work in capacity development, and also assisted the Government in responding to an outbreak in Luang Prabang province, which was quickly successfully stamped out.



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Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Natural resources management, climate change and disaster risk reduction are truly cross-sectoral issues and the experience in 2016 has shown expansion in the range of partnerships among government agencies, development partners and communities which has helped to raise awareness and strengthen policy dialogue. This should be continued in earnest with the aim of achievement of the SDGs into the new UN planning cycle in the context of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021.

The ability of national and provincial agencies to respond to outbreaks of diseases and pests has been shown to be deficient in some areas, but the ability and confidence of such agencies has grown fast with the support provided by the UN.





9. REDUCED IMPACT OF UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE



National and local governments and communities have reduced the impact of unexploded ordnance on people in Lao PDR



Key development Trends

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 18 in Vientiane along with the Prime Minister of Lao PDR. This is the first national SDG to be launched in addition to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It targets reductions in the numbers of casualties caused by Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), improvements in socio-economic development in the most affected areas, and better support for victims. The recent move of the UXO sector under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare offers an opportunity to link the achievements in the UXO sector with other important development agendas, not least with the issue of disability.

Results

UNDP's support to the UXO sector in 2016 yielded strong results with the national operator UXO Lao clearing 2,593 hectares of the mostly high-contamination land for agricultural and development use. The sector as a whole, which UNDP supports in partnership with the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action Sector, cleared 3,365 hectares.

While casualties increased slightly from 46 in 2015 to 47 in 2016, the figure remains well below the target of 75 in the Safe Path Forward II UXO Sector Strategy. The capacities of the national institutions have also been augmented with training support in grants management and finance as well as on-the-job support in programme management and strategy. UNDP has assisted the National Regulatory Authority to develop a clear and transparent policy on how to prioritize clearance tasks which is expected to be finalized and made public in 2017.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

UNDP faced challenges in engaging civil society organizations in its work to implement victim assistance activities. This has informed planning for the next cycle of support to the UXO sector.



“More than half of the casualties caused by UXO in Lao PDR in recent years have been children, most often young boys... With SDG 18, we aim to put an end to this horrible trend, once and for all. The socio-economic impact of UXO contamination means that people lack confidence in the safety of their land, which in turn has negative impacts on the income of rural farmers and their families and inhibits the development of the whole country. I welcome the Government’s commitment to free its people from UXO, with a powerful tool like a national SDG which will make sure efforts are coordinated for full impact.”

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaking at inaugurated Lao PDR’s own national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on unexploded ordnance (UXO) as a side event to the ASEAN Summits, with Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith.





10. GENDER EQUALITY & PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

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**People in Lao
PDR benefit from
policies and programmes
which more effectively
promote gender equality and
increased participation and
representation of women
in formal and informal
decision making**



Key Development Trends

In 2016, the Government continued to advance gender equality, one of the focus areas of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), and pre-condition for the country's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sex-disaggregated data will be required to monitor progress against the NSEDP and the SDGs, including gender indicators for all sectors.

The National Development Plan for Gender Equality (2016-2020) and Lao Women's Development Plan (2016-2020) on women's economic empowerment were endorsed; and a new Budget Law, which includes a new element of gender-responsive budgeting, was passed.

On 28 October, the Government announced the merging of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and the National Commission for Mother and Child into the National Commission for Advancement of Women, Mother and Child. This new institution is chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister, with a secretariat at the Lao Women's Union.

Lao PDR has also made significant progress in promoting women in decision-making positions. The

National Assembly election in April resulted in an increase of women members from 25 percent to 27 percent. This indicates that the country is fast moving towards reaching its national target of 30 percent, with one of the highest proportions of women in parliament in the region. 12 percent of ministers - three out of 26 - are currently women.

The Government is currently drafting a new revised Law on Gender Equality, which is foreseen to be submitted to the National Assembly for approval in 2019.

Access to justice has been enhanced and steps have been taken to strengthen the legal framework. Despite the introduction of several vital legislative instruments such as laws targeting violence against women and children, Lao PDR faces many challenges and gaps in their implementation. The Government has indicated its appreciation of Civil Society Organizations' engagement in policy development, recognizing for instance the advantages of the involvement of the Association for Development of Women and Legal Education in the development of the Penal Code and other laws. Non-Profit Associations are invited on a regular basis to join the Government and development partners in technical discussions.

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Results

It continues to be a clear priority for all UN agencies to support the Government's policies and strategies in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in all socio-economic programmes. Results have been achieved in a number of areas.

The UN contributed to ensuring the 8th NSEDP is gender-mainstreamed, with strong sex-disaggregated indicators. In this regard, agencies also continued to support the provision of sex-disaggregated data, for instance through the 2015 Population and Housing Census.

Through its parliamentary support, UNDP helped with the inclusion of gender issues in the law-making process. It also assisted with organizing a discussion, led by the National Assembly Women's Parliamentarian Caucus, on review of the implementation of policies, laws, rules and regulations based on gender equality approaches. One of the results that can be linked to such activities is the amendment of the Budget Law in 2015/2016. The new law provides for formula assignments to gender budgeting, thus promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The UN contributed to the combined 8th and 9th periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was approved by the Government in February.

Violence against women remains a priority issue the UN is helping address. The launch of the National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences was the first of its kind on violence against women, providing both qualitative and quantitative data. The report was produced by the Lao National Commission for Advancement of Women and the Lao Statistics Bureau, with support from UNFPA, UN Women, and WHO. The launch resulted in a firm commitment from the Government to continue its efforts in

implementing the new law and the National Action Plan on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls. UNFPA continued to support the National Commission for Advancement of Women and the Ministry of Health in disseminating the findings of a follow-up national study on violence against women and in particular for the health sector, at the provincial level. With UN Women support, the National Commission for Advancement of Women launched an innovative Violence Costing Study in June. The report provides data and evidence and hence assists the Government and its partners in planning and budgeting for action in different contexts and sectors to respond to violence against women.

Building on this new data and evidence obtained, UNFPA and UN Women continued to support the Government in implementing the National Plan of Action on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children. UNFPA and UN Women partnered with CARE International, the Association for Development of Women and Legal Education and the Gender Development Association in carrying out a campaign to raise awareness on violence against women and girls. The campaign included a high-level statement from the Deputy Prime Minister, a seminar on financing responses on violence against women with more than 100 participants from line ministries, and a seminar with young people at the National University of Laos, benefitting 300 students.

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With support from UNFPA, UN Women and WHO, seven Lao delegates increased their understanding of multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence. They were introduced to the newly revised essential services package guidelines that are mainly focusing on providing health, justice and social services to women who are subject to violence and coordination of sectors responding to the gender-based violence. Based on the results of the discussion, Lao delegates drafted a multi-sector action plan that will be further elaborated and consulted in 2017.

With UNFPA support, in collaboration with the Lao Youth Union, Lao Women's Union, National Commission for Advancement of Women, and Ministry of Planning and Investment, a campaign was launched to increase attention on adolescent girls. The campaign includes an animation video with the main character "Noi", highlighting the challenges faced by adolescent girls in Lao PDR and the importance of investing in adolescent girls for sustainable development. The campaign received support from several line ministries and development partners including INGOs, which spoke out on the needs of adolescent girls.

To contribute to women's economic empowerment, ILO provided technical support to revise the Ministerial agreement on labour inspection, which contributed to the implementation of the labour law to ensure that Lao female workers are equally treated and protected by the law. UN Women initiated qualitative action research on the working and living conditions of women market vendors in Vientiane Capital.

Moreover, ILO continued supporting a pilot on integrated rural employment promotion and livelihood improvement for poverty reduction in Sekong province. The intervention aims at reducing rural poverty through an integrated strategy of productive and decent employment promotion. In the selected demonstration sites people, having been exposed to new technologies and training, are more aware of income generating activities to supplement their subsistence production. 718 families in target communities increased their knowledge in this regard through capacity building activities by provincial and district officials. Villagers reported behavioral change, such as men sharing more household chores, increasing their contribution from five to 35 percent, and women holding more leadership positions in villages, from 16 to 35 percent.

IOM tested a pilot training and work placement programme for disadvantaged women from remote locations who received limited schooling.

WHO supported the National Health Insurance Bureau under the Ministry of Health, which is responsible for



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the health equity funds, community-based health insurance and free maternal and child health services. In 2016, the national health insurance, a tax-based scheme with low co-payment, was launched in four provinces and is expected to expand to five more provinces by early 2017. This is one of the major government policies to improve financial protection, including that of women and the poor, in order to achieve Universal Health Care by 2025.

Through the broadcasting of gender-related programmes by UNDP-supported community radio stations, women in local communities are empowered to create better livelihoods. Targeting women in ethnic groups in particular, the radio programmes provided access to information on issues such as sanitation and hygiene, sustainable agriculture and access to social services. The community radios have also given voices to women in local communities, with a dedicated radio programme on the advancement of women enabling the ethnic women in rural districts to actively engage in the radio programmes.

Amongst the 76 small grants provided to public service agencies by the Capacity Development and Modernization Fund between 2012 and 2016, 13 grants targeted gender promotion-related initiatives, hence contributing to empowerment of women and to promoting women's rights at local level. As an example, a 2016 granted project by the Lao Women's Union in Phongsaly province promoted proper nutrition through raising awareness amongst women about the importance of nutrition.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

UN agencies actively provided technical and financial support to government sectors to review, develop and implement strategies, action plan, policies and laws to promote gender equality in most sectors, such as employment, health, education, agriculture and others, as well as on specific topics like Ending Violence against Women. Many of these documents have been approved and endorsed. However, there is still a need for technical and financial support from UN agencies to expand gender sensitive inputs, not only into documents and strategies but in practice. Gender issues should not feature as separate; they should be integrated and mainstreamed into every program, action, strategy and policy.

The limited capacity of national gender machineries, including for coordination, remains a challenge in the implementation of gender equality programmes and in advancing gender equality.

The recent change within the Government will provide both opportunities and challenges in moving forward the gender equality agenda, in particular the merging of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and the National Commission for Mother and Child into the National Commission for Advancement of Women, Mother and Child.

There is a need for a clear structure and terms of reference for the gender focal points within the UN Agencies. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be promoted by senior management and effectively mainstreamed into all agencies' programmes.

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JOINT COMMUNICATIONS



Looking Back

The UN Communications Group supported the UN Country Team in raising the profile of Government - UN collaboration and raising awareness on common priorities.

UN Day on 24 October was celebrated with an event joining the UN's traditional partners, such as government and development partners, with the wide Lao public – in a first-ever attempt to proliferate the image of the UN as a dynamic, interesting organisation with a human face and a range of interesting stories to tell. UN Day was marked with Digital UN, an event explaining and highlighting the link between sustainable development and new technologies. Over 250 guests engaged with interactive stations displaying a Virtual Reality movie, UN mobile applications, 360 degree photography, innovative community services, stop motion animation, the virtual UN Volunteers platform, and aerial imagery and drone footage – while talking about the Sustainable Development Goals every step of the way. Lao youth and the business community were invited via the UN's social media platforms, and public interest in this event was larger than available space at the cinema theatre the event was organised in.

Another event was Lao PDR's first-ever flashmob, with a climate action message, raising awareness on SDG 13. This event was organised in partnership with the Fanglao Dance Company and CUSO International, and featured a street theatre performance of a Lao legend from the 16th century, Khao Kat Vine, where an old couple sacrifices themselves to save humanity by cutting down a giant vine that shadows the sun, thus threatening the survival of the planet. The performance morphed into a modern dance, with more and more dancers joining in, until about 50 participants surprised passers-by with an engaging choreography on Vientiane's Mekong riverside. The message on climate action was conveyed via banners, postcards and a dedicated page on the UN in Lao PDR website, explaining ways to take personal climate action. The UNCG-produced film on the flashmob was widely shared on social media.

The UN Communications Group held a press briefing for members of the Lao media on SDGs, hosted an SDG talk at the Youth Speak Forum, and raised awareness in public spaces with a playful activity entitled "Fly your airplane to a bright future."

On the UN in Lao PDR website, the UN Communications Group published dedicated pages on each SDG, in the context of Lao PDR. Indeed, these are amongst the most visited pages on the website as users are increasingly searching for SDG content in this first period of the new sustainable development agenda.

“UN Day was marked with Digital UN, an event explaining and highlighting the link between sustainable development and new technologies.”

Visual products were increasingly produced by the UN Communications Group during 2016, including a set of all 18 SDGs as photo prints.

A series of events was supported, including the RHB Bank-led International Humanitarian Day event, and ANZ-initiated event on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people and the celebration of Poverty Eradication Day/World Food Day in Xayaboury Province. The Development Exhibition during the Round Table Implementation Meeting in November in Vientiane Province featured the photo exhibition "Working together for Lao PDR", UNDP's "The bombs below" Virtual Reality film, a 360 degree immersive biosphere photo booth, and UNFPA's Noi, an animated cartoon girl representing all adolescent girls in Lao PDR. The UN Communications Group also supported UN-led events during the ASEAN Summits on 6-8 September in Vientiane, including the launch of national SDG 18 on "Lives safe from UXO" and the signing ceremony of the United Nations-Lao PDR Partnership Framework, both in the presence of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Leading up to the ASEAN Summits, the UN Communications Group made a concerted effort and push to engage international media, including through a series of story pitches, as well as the delivery of media packs to the international media headquarters during the Summits – all of which led to an unprecedented amount of media contacts, and a large number of stories mentioning UN in Lao PDR, including France 24, Reuters, Associated Press and China's CCTV, as well as a range of articles that the UN Communications Group delivered the background for.

During 2016, over 80 articles were published in seven Lao national print media outlets on topics directly related to the UN in Lao PDR's work – and many more with more indirect involvement of UN communications colleagues. Lao National TV featured at least five news reports interviewing UN colleagues.

The UN in Lao PDR's digital platforms experienced a substantial audience increase in 2016:

Website: 4,499 pageviews per month in 2016 (compared to 3,398 in 2015). Average time spent on page 1:44 min, with over 1:00 considered good average for content publishing sites. Top pages: Home, vacancies, SDG overview.

Facebook page: 4,791 page likes, up from 3,810 likes on 1 January 2016. Highest reach: 51,900 announcing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's visit to Lao PDR (highest reach in 2015: 30,205).

Twitter account: 352 followers, up from 65 on 1 January 2016. The Twitter account was activated on 1 September 2015. Top tweet: Digital UN event on UN Day 2016, generating 5,045 impressions (highest impressions in 2015: 665).

Exposure page: Story on Ban Ki-moon's visit viewed 1,083 times. (2015: UN Blue Patuxay photo story viewed 309 times. Since then number of views on the same story has jumped to 813).

The UN Communications Group finalised the UN in Lao PDR's joint Communications Strategy 2017-2021, to support the Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021 and the Vientiane Declaration on Partnerships for Effective Development Cooperation.

Future Strategies

The main takeaway from 2016 in respect to the UN Communications Group's work is that a concerted effort from several UN agencies' communications staff members is needed in order to deliver on creative events. The team will count on increased buy-in from agencies.

The success of 2016's events show how important engaging with the Lao general public is – the more creative, innovative, and easily digestible the events are, the more benefit accrues for a general understanding about the issues the UN is working on, and the Successes of the national programmes the UN is supporting. There is a sense of a general positive attitude, even hunger, to find out more about the United Nations, especially amongst young audiences. This positive momentum should be capitalised on with a string of engaging events and campaigns.

Regarding Lao audiences, a better link to what moves Lao society needs to be established. Increased engagement of Lao national communications staff will be required. 2017 will see the UN Communications Group increasingly join conversations of public interest.

Engaging events and visual content as opposed to the written word will be in the center of attention for 2017.



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COMMON BUSINESS OPERATIONS



In 2016, the UN Agencies continued to enhance cooperation in the area of business operations. Under WFP lead, the Operations Management Team, including its task force members, convened for its first ever Operations Management Team retreat in September 2016. The objective was inter alia to initiate the development of a Business Operations Strategy - the backbone of the 'Operating as One' pillar of the UN Development Group Standard Operating Procedures for Delivering as One - with the aim to further harmonize and simplify the UN's business operations, whilst improving the quality, effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support to deliver the Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework 2017 - 2021.

As a groundwork for the Business Operations Strategy, the Operations Management Team conducted a thorough operational analysis, cost-benefit analysis and prioritization, which has helped bring forward new ideas for more harmonized business operations by eliminating the duplication of processes, leveraging the common buying positions of the UN and maximizing economies of scale. The operational analysis revealed the potential to save around US\$ 2 million, of which US\$ 1 million through new initiatives, over the five-year programme period.

To realize this potential, the OMT agreed to focus the Business Operations Strategy on five strategic results:

- The UN agencies have more efficient and effective common procurement practices.
- The UN agencies are better coordinated in staff recruitment and professional development.
- The UN agencies benefit from the improved and cost-effective ICT services.
- The UN agencies have better coordinated and cost-effective common financial operations.
- The UN agencies share a better coordinated and cost-effective common logistics and facility services, including through the UN House expansion.

The examples of some new initiatives under the above-mentioned strategic results include common long-term agreement for customs clearance (projected savings over US\$ 100,000); fleet-sharing (over US\$ 150,000); common long-term agreement for internet (over US\$ 200,000); expansion of UN House (over US\$ 250,000); and having a common bank for currency exchange (over US\$ 300,000).

The six largest UN agencies - FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO - launched a fleet-sharing pilot as part of a broader global effort to introduce an inter-agency use of UN cars and to ensure transportation of UN staff is better coordinated, cost-effective, safer and more environmentally friendly. The new system

tracks fleet movement in real-time, while the back-office processes allow an in-depth analysis of fleet use and performance, highlighting high-risk events such as harsh acceleration, harsh breaking and accidents. The team has been active in shaping the global pilot, providing recommendations on further system enhancement, for instance, integration of a cost-recovery mechanism among the UN agencies. A comparative analysis of the kilometers driven/month before and after the fleet-sharing estimated the monthly reduction by more than 10 percent. The pilot has been extended into the first half of 2017 to collect more data for the cost-benefit analysis of a potential full-scale fleet sharing.

The Operations Management Team has extended the Long-Term Agreements with a travel agent and with the Lao State Fuel Company, enabling the UN Agencies to continue with efficient travel arrangements and purchasing tax-exempt fuel. New Long-Term Agreements on internet services and ICT solutions with internet service providers have been signed, resulting in a significant cost avoidance projected for all participating UN Agencies.

An assessment of the UN Medical Services Division in New York recommended to continue the UN Dispensary, providing options for complementary funding models for the associated costs. Following the Operations Management Team's recommendations, it was decided to introduce cost-recovery as of 2017, subject to subsequent reimbursement from the respective insurance. This will help reduce the cost burden on the UN Agencies.

“As a groundwork for the Business Operations Strategy, the operational analysis revealed the potential to save around US\$ 2 million, of which US\$ 1 million through new initiatives, over the five-year programme period.”

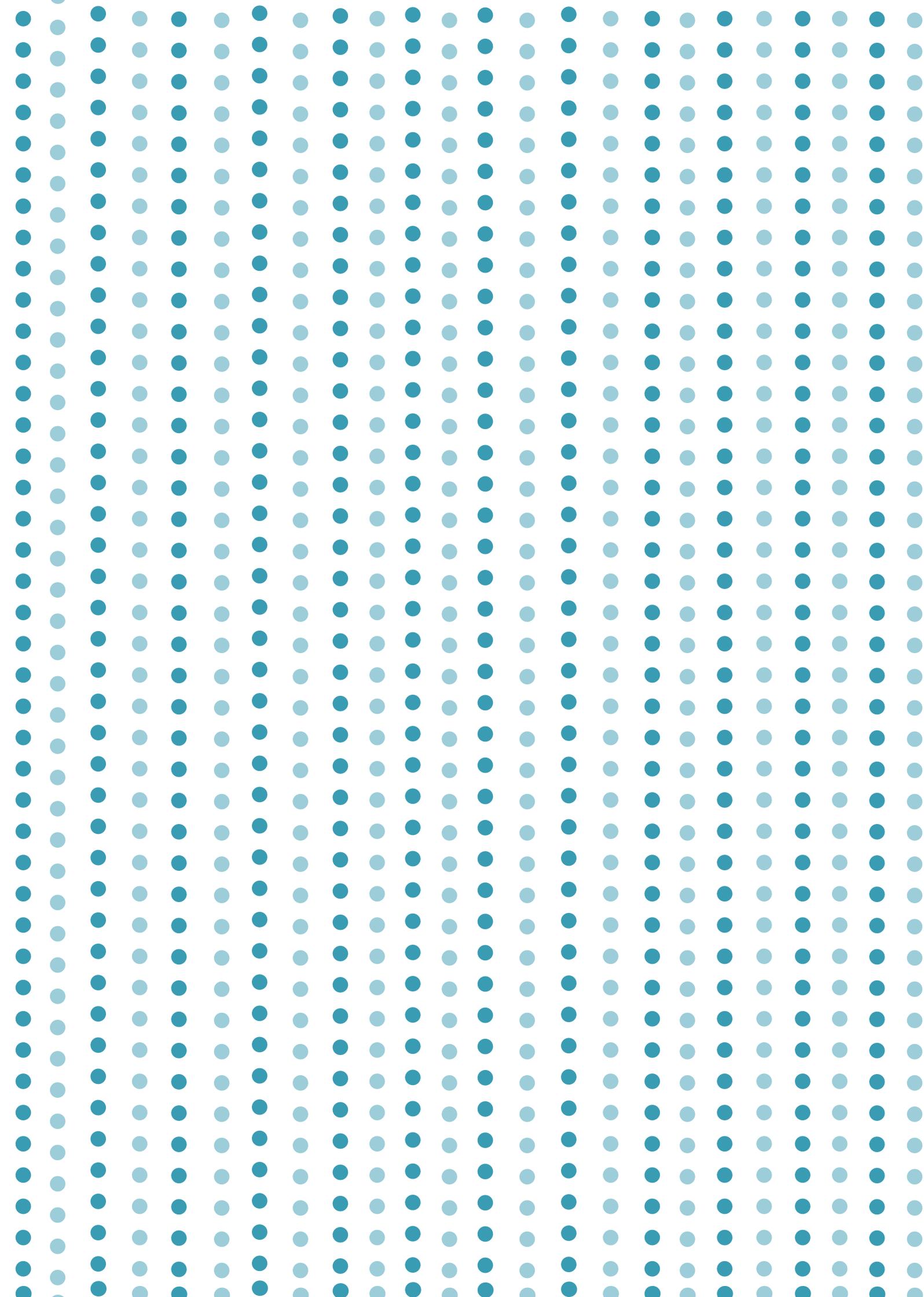


INDICATIVE FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



Results Areas	Estimated Funds delivered in 2016 (in US\$)	Estimated Funds available for 2017 (in US\$)
1 - Equitable and Sustainable Growth	5,090,676	6,506,961
2 - Public Services, Rights and Participation	5,426,354	4,194,194
3 - Equitable Education and Training	6,212,137	3,064,000
4 - Equitable Health and Social Welfare Services	11,633,206	11,621,000
5 - Improved Food Security and Nutrition	24,725,067	26,496,760
6 - HIV Prevention, Treatment and Support	1,237,000	1,914,000
7 - Sustainable Natural Resources Management	1,999,313	6,074,661
8 - Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change and Natural Disaster Vulnerabilities	4,818,429	6,762,595
9 - Reduced impact of Unexploded Ordnance	5,513,603	4,144,814
10 - Gender Equality and Participation of Women	35,700	750,000
Other cross-cutting	1,379,709	872,000
Total	68,071,194	72,400,985

1. Outcome 10 on Gender Equality and Participation of Women is cross-cutting. Many of the programmes that contribute to gender equality and participation of women are reflected under different primary outcomes.



Our mission is to help the Government of Lao PDR & the most vulnerable to fight poverty by ensuring a sustainable & rights-based approach to development which promotes human rights, gender equality & good governance.



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