



2015 PROGRESS REPORT

United Nations Development
Assistance Framework
in Lao PDR

March 2016, Vientiane, Lao PDR

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
UXOs	Unexploded Ordnance

UN System in Lao PDR

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
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
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

The 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.



2015 was not only an important year globally, it was also a special one for Lao PDR, which celebrated 40 years of peace and stability since the establishment of the Republic. An 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan was developed around the Sustainable Development Goals and the Least Developed Country graduation criteria. Cascading from the national plan, line ministries have prepared sectoral plans in areas such as education, health and agriculture. The 'convergence approach' in addressing the country's food and nutrition security challenges has made concrete progress, including the launch of the National Nutrition Strategy and a mapping of ongoing and future support in the area. The government's wish to meet the Least Developed Country graduation criteria during the 2015 review and become pre-eligible was not realized, pushing back the graduation date.

Co-chaired by the Government and the UN, a high-level round table meeting brought together Government, international development partners, civil society and private sector in November to discuss collaboration towards the objectives of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. A new national development cooperation policy, the Vientiane Partnership Declaration, was adopted at the round table, bringing together the aid effectiveness principles of Paris and new principles of inclusive partnerships, domestic resource mobilization and South-South Cooperation.

Throughout the year, the country prepared itself for the 2016 ASEAN chairmanship and for integration into the ASEAN Economic Community, which entered into force on 31 December 2015. The 10 ASEAN countries are expected to benefit from free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and freer flow of capital.

As highlighted by recent World Bank and ADB reports, while the economy continued to grow at a fast pace of around 7.5%, poverty reduction and consumption lag behind GDP and inequalities are increasing, in particular within urban, and between urban and rural areas. However, the gap in access to basic public services has narrowed over the years.

The National Assembly has approved important legislation. Amended for the first time since 2003, the Constitution together with the new Law on Provincial People's Assemblies is expected to lead to a more distinct separation of powers between the different administrative levels. In preparation for the upcoming elections in March 2016, the Law on Election of Members of the National Assembly has been amended to include the election of Provincial People's Assemblies. A Law on Human Trafficking was approved and the drafting of the Penal Code continued throughout the year. Lao PDR went through the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, accepting 116 out of 196 human rights recommendations provided by the other member states. In 2016, Lao PDR is due to finalize the periodic report on its ratification of the Child Rights Convention.

On 1 January 2016, Lao PDR took over the chair of ASEAN, which will culminate in the ASEAN summit currently scheduled for 6-8 September, with high-level participants such as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and US President Barack Obama expected.

A new leadership emerged from the 10th Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party on 18-22 January 2016. A new Central Party Committee consisting of 69 Members and seven Alternates were elected as a result of the week-long Congress. Members will serve five-year terms. Elections to the National Assembly and provincial assembly are foreseen in March 2016.

The support of national partners as well as international partners such as Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Norway, 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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EQUITABLE &
SUSTAINABLE
GROWTH

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



Key Development Trends

In 2015, the Government developed its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan, aiming to (1) Facilitate eligibility for graduation from LDC status by 2020; (2) Consolidate regional and international integration in the context of the launching of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015; and (3) Take further steps towards industrialization and modernization and to enhance the well-being of the people and the prosperity of the country in order to achieve upper-middle-income country status by 2030. The government's wish to meet the LDC graduation criteria during the 2015 review was not realized, pushing back the earliest possible graduation date to 2024.

Co-chaired by UNDP Administrator Ms. Helen Clark, Regional UN Development Group chair Mr. Haoliang Xu and the Government, a high-level round table meeting brought together Government, international development partners, civil society and private sector in November to discuss collaboration towards the objectives of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. A new national development cooperation policy, the Vientiane Partnership Declaration, was adopted at the round table.

Throughout the year, the country prepared itself for the 2016 ASEAN chairmanship and for integration into the ASEAN Economic Community, which entered into force on 31 December 2015. The 10 ASEAN countries are expected to benefit from free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and freer flow of capital. Key freedoms, for instance related

to labour and trade, remain to be resolved. Estimates indicate the AEC will bring an additional 130,000 jobs to Lao PDR, and an increase in industry and service sector jobs.

As highlighted by recent World Bank and ADB reports, while the economy continued to grow at a fast pace of around 7.5%, poverty reduction and consumption lag behind GDP and inequalities are increasing, in particular within urban, and between urban and rural areas. However, the gap in access to basic public services has narrowed over the years.

Results

The UN Team provided extensive support in design of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, ensuring results-focus and facilitating technical inputs from development partners. In this regard, the UN Team supported the generation of evidence to inform development of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and sectoral plans of line ministries in view of global and regional development trends. At the request of the government, UNDP has consistently deployed its expertise to enhance understanding of the requirements for Least Developed Country graduation – the core objective of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan - amongst senior officials and to ensure analytical rigor of the upcoming National Human Development Report, which focuses on the implications of graduation from Least Developed Country status. The UN also continued to support to the round table process, including the co-chairing of various Sector Working Groups and assisting in the preparations for the High-level Round Table meeting in November.

In order to help the Government localize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals, the UN Team initiated a comprehensive assessment to analyse gaps in baselines, data and systems and to identify indicators and capacity development needs to measure progress towards the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework mentioned above will thus capture the localized goals and will be approved by the National Assembly in April 2016.

Additional studies and research, conducted in 2015, include the Population Situation Analysis, a study on Population and Development, and the Lao National Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences. Based on the findings, a participatory forum for dialogue was held among various ministries and stakeholders to discuss the revision of the National Population and Development Policy, in order to increase the focus on youth issues. Line ministries agreed that there is a need for an independent overarching national youth policy with strengthened sectoral coordination.

Moreover, UNFPA and UNICEF supported the 5th Population and Housing Census, including the development of capacities of mid-level staff at Lao Statistics Bureau on data processing, editing and management. Provisional census results released in December indicated a population of 6.5 million. UNICEF supported the National Economic Research Institute to finalize and disseminate the National Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis using Lao Social Indicator Survey to inform about deprivations and disparities among children for advocacy and policy dialogue. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of child poverty and child deprivation, as it considers several dimensions simultaneously.

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UNICEF established a strategic partnership with the Lao Front for National Construction to facilitate access to remote, hard-to-reach areas and to reach out to the poor and vulnerable people with improved delivery of public services to address child poverty.

UNICEF also supported the Lao Statistics Bureau to develop and launch the provincial database in Saravane province (<http://www.devinformo.org/saravaneinfo>) for planning and monitoring of the Provincial Socio-Economic Development Plan. In addition, a study on Violence against Children and Sub-national Food and Nutrition Security Survey informed policy, evidence-based planning and strengthening of National Monitoring and Evaluation System.

As a core member of the secretariat, the UN provided technical and advocacy support to the drafting of the new Vientiane Partnership Declaration, resulting in the adoption of principles that recognize the role of civil society and private sector in development. UNDP also initiated a number of dialogues with the private sector, resulting in their first ever intervention during a high-level round table meeting.

The ILO continued supporting the Government and social partners in promoting decent work. The capacity of officials from tripartite constituents and from nine provincial employment promotion centers have been developed, in particular on counseling, employers' relations, communication strategies, job center operation as well as labour market information collection. Linked to this, the 5th National Job Fair attracted more than 1,200 job seekers and students with comprehensive and up-to-date information on studies, counselling, training and career openings, introducing the government job center services to the public.

The capacity of local officials was strengthened to promote integrated rural employment strategies for poverty reduction in Sekong province through planning, monitoring, and management. Villagers are now better aware of ways how to improve village assets, rural skills, and value chains and to create better working conditions.

The list of light and hazardous work for minors was revised and the Government conducted a child labour study with specific focus on agricultural sector in the southern provinces.

With the strategic engagement with the Ministries of Finance and of Planning and Investment, UNICEF organized a study visit to Malaysia for key government officials to gain practical knowledge on Outcome-Based Planning and Budgeting. The aim is to support the alignment of public budget allocations with the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPlan), and in particular social sectors such as health and education.

The Bank of Lao PDR initiated the drafting of the Lao Financial Inclusion Roadmap 2016-2020, using UNCDF's "Making Access Possible", a diagnostic and programmatic framework to expand access to financial services. A wide range of partners convened around an evidence-based and holistic country diagnostic, spanning over demand, supply and regulation. The roadmap is expected to be endorsed by the Government in mid-2016.

The Bank of Lao PDR, with UNCDF support, provided access to financial services to 28,000 people. A total of 773 users piloted the agent-banking service /BCEL Community Money Express', with shop-owners in villages in

contract with BCEL performing basic banking transactions for clients and non-clients. The Bank of Lao PDR is committed to develop Digital Financial Services, including Mobile Money to extend the outreach of formal financial services to rural areas.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The availability of high quality technical assistance and high quality analyses were critical factors in ensuring that key issues were sufficiently incorporated into the 8th NSEDP.

The over-commitment of national partners to carry out multiple surveys at the same time, as well as the lack of human resource planning had a significant impact on the timely conduct of the census. Coordination of the UN agencies should be increased to maximize the use of resources, while avoiding duplication and minimizing the burden on national counterparts.

Capacity development on results-based planning, management and monitoring needs to be systematized to ensure effective management and coordination among different Government departments and ministries.

While there has been impressive economic growth during the last decade, human development objectives related to child mortality, stunting and gender equality are lagging behind. A better balancing of economic growth and social development indicators is essential for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The limited availability to raw data affected the further analysis and potentially use to support the national development agenda.

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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

2015 has seen progress on promoting rights and creating larger space for people's participation. Several policy fora provided the opportunities for exchange on issues such as the penal code and the Universal Period Review. The first ever consultation on people's participation under the Governance Sector Working Group, co-chaired by UNDP, provided the opportunity for civil society, National Assembly, Government and Development Partners to debate and propose ways to improve the space for people's participation. This has resulted in an acknowledgement of the important role of civil society at the recently held high-level round table meeting and measures taken to improve some of the ongoing challenges they face.

The National Assembly approved important legislation. Amended for the first time since 2003, the Constitution together with the new Law on Provincial People's Assemblies are expected to address the evolving administrative and legal framework's needs and give more distinct separation of powers at different levels of the country.

In preparation for the upcoming elections in early 2016, the Law on Election of Members of the National Assembly has been amended to include the election of Provincial People's Assemblies. 149 members of the National Assembly are expected to be elected - an increase of 17 members from the 7th Legislature - with the aim to increase female representatives to 30 percent. For the inaugural elections at the local level, 448 members are expected to be elected, of which 178 are female, from both provincial and

district levels. Similarly, amendments to the Law on Government and the Law on Local Administration and a new Law on City and Municipality are intended to clarify mandates, roles and responsibilities between levels of government and administration.

A new Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children was promulgated. A Prime Minister's Agreement on Child Mediation, implementation guidelines for the new Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures, and an Adoption Manual to support implementation of the 2014 Adoption Decree were developed.

With respect to human rights, Lao PDR accepted 116 out of 196 recommendations provided as part of the Universal Periodic Review.

Results

Important reforms continued across different sectors to further improve the quality of public services provision as well as the mechanism to protect people's rights and enhance their participation in decision-making. Through the UNDP and UNCDF-supported implementation of the District Development Fund, during 2015 370 local government officials - 72 of which women - were capacitated for meaningful, participatory planning and budgeting, and the identification of local public needs. Consequently, 37 capital investment projects and 211 other public service interventions were put into practice. 373,948 households have directly benefited.

The District Development Fund also contributed to enhancing greater participation and transparent service delivery through a comparative performance assessment of four districts in Sekong province and through two innovations; the District Service Delivery Monitoring System and the District Service Users Feedback System. Two citizens' surveys were completed in December 2015 and the results will be shared in early 2016.

In terms of justice services delivery, several evidence-generating initiatives were carried out by UNDP and partner ministries. For instance, the people's justice survey findings, once finalized, will constitute the basis to measure the impact of reforms initiated by the Legal Sector Master Plan. In an effort to increase access to legal information, the first-ever Ministry of Justice website was officially launched in November. The website is expected to serve as a one-stop platform that provides all relevant legal information.

Also with UNDP support, a law-making manual was developed based on the Law on Law-Making of 2012. The manual supports Lao PDR in following essential principles in law-making, including transparency and inclusive participation. The drafting of the penal code is an example that highlights the benefits of public consultations in law-making. Recommendations from UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC and other partners on the incorporation of international legal obligations, environmental crimes, cybercrimes, public health, and juvenile justice have been largely incorporated into the latest penal code draft.

As follow-up to the Universal Periodic Review, UNDP supported the Government in hosting the first ever seminar on Human Rights Mechanisms with participation of human rights experts from various countries, resulting in recommendations to improve existing mechanisms. UNDP also supported the development of an action plan that will systematically improve monitoring of and follow up to the accepted recommendations.

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More than 288,000 people from eight districts in five provinces are benefiting from information broadcast through Community Radios in eight different ethnic languages. Two new stations have been established in 2015, one in Salavan and one in Xayabouly province. The number of women volunteers participating in the Community Radio stations has increased from 77 in 2014 to 113 in 2015.

The ILO continued supporting the tripartite constituents in capacity building for improving public services. Particular achievements include support to drafting the Prime Minister's Decree on Labour Dispute Resolution. The ILO also supported a Needs Analysis of the labour inspectorate, as a result of which a labour inspection training strategy and methodologies were developed, master trainers were trained and the development of a labour inspectorate policy was initiated. As part of this support, implementing regulations, guidelines on the 2014 Labour Law and separate implementation guidelines for employers were developed.

UNICEF continued to support key institutions in enhancing evidence generation to inform the future direction and development of the child protection system, and to influence child protection policy and practice. Key achievements with extensive technical support from UNICEF include a new Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children, which was promulgated in January 2015, finalization of comprehensive assessments of the child and family welfare and justice systems, an ICT Landscape Survey for Digital Birth Registration, and data analysis for the national study on violence against children, demonstrating increased political commitment of the Government to address this critical issue. The government now places violence against children as a priority issue and launched a national communication initiative on 31 May as part of the global #ENDviolence initiative to raise awareness about the different forms of violence and their impact on the health and wellbeing of children. With UNICEF support, the Government has begun a review of social work practice to suggest ways in which the Government can strengthen social work functions at different levels of the child protection system and within the social welfare sector over the short and long-term. A para-professional training manual on social work for children and families has been drafted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National University of Laos.

UNDP has facilitated several policy fora with participation of civil society on topics related to penal code, Universal Period Review and other issues. UNDP also facilitated the first ever consultation on people's participation under the governance sector working group where NGOs alongside National Assembly, Government and Development Partners were able to debate ways to improve the space for people's participation. This has resulted in the Government's increasing acknowledgement of the role of civil society and measures taken to improve some of the ongoing challenges they face.

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Lessons Learned and Way Forward

It is planned that from 2016 the District Development Fund will be upgraded to expand its support to provincial administrations in their strategic planning role under Sam Sang and to the Provincial People's Councils to be established, and to enable incremental co-financing from the state budget. It will be critical to consider UN support in a more holistic manner, showing linkages between different interventions in the area of Governance and beyond and, importantly, in the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

The UN will continue supporting the dissemination of newly approved laws and policies and build the capacity of concerned professionals and institutions to effectively implement these laws and policies, moving from data and research into practice. UNICEF will expand advocacy and communications to increase public awareness and strengthen political commitment to address violence against children.





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

Education is a fundamental human right and an unrivaled investment in ensuring that future generations reach their maximum potential and are able to contribute effectively to a rapidly changing society. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020), which was endorsed at the high level meeting in November, the Government aims to ensure opportunities for all Lao citizens to have equitable access to quality education and sports and to benefit from socio-economic development for Lao PDR to be eligible to graduate from least developed country status.

In 2015, good progress has been made in enhancing the primary education net enrolment rate to 98.5% with a Gender Parity Index for gross primary education enrolment at 0.97 nation-wide¹ and as such, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target on enrolment has been met. Even though the primary education survival rate to grade has increased by more than 7%, this rate remains the lowest in the region at 78.3%² and has not reached the MDG target on completion of primary education³. The low survival rate is linked to high repetition and drop-out rates, especially in the early years of primary education. The low survival rate is also a consequence of lack of school readiness of children. Even though early childhood education enrolment of 5-year-old children increased to 60.7% in 2014, the children in remote rural areas and from the lowest wealth quintile are not benefitting from these services. Other causes for dropping out include incomplete schools and weak learning environment, the limited capacity of teachers, irregular teacher attendance, poor quality of teaching and learning, the

1 Ministry of Education and Sports, Education Management Information System (EMIS)

2 EMIS and Education for All National Report, June 2015

3 Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020)

direct and opportunity costs of schooling for families, mismatch between the school year and the agricultural calendar and insufficient funding for investments in education quality⁴. Of nearly 9,000 primary schools in the country, half of them still lack access to functional Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities and services. It is evident that health, nutrition and learning outcomes will be affected if children do not have access to and use WASH facilities in schools. Children can be considered as change agents who can bring the sanitation and hygiene practices that they learn from schools to their parents and communities.

Overall, secondary education Gross Enrolment Rate has increased to 64.6% in 2014/15, but education gross graduation rates are much lower than the Gross Enrolment Rate indicating a significant drop-out during the secondary cycle⁵. Further progress in secondary enrolment and graduation will require primary education survival rates to improve.

Technical and vocational education and training is provided at the primary, upper secondary and post-secondary level⁶. Even though enrolments in technical and vocational education and training have increased over the past two years, Lao PDR continues to suffer a severe shortage of skilled workers mainly as a result from poor quality of basic education. This is a key issue for further ASEAN integration.

Results

In 2015, UN partners continued to collaborate closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports and development partners in the Lao education sector to further strengthen inclusive and equitable quality basic education and vocational training. ILO focused on strengthening business skills of secondary school students and national skills standard development, UNESCO assisted in strengthening teacher education, UNFPA promoted (adolescent) sexual reproductive health in formal and non-formal education, UNICEF focused on strengthening early childhood education, primary education as well as education sector management and planning, and the World Food Programme provided support for feeding programmes in schools.

Education Sector Management and Planning

In 2015, UNICEF was the managing entity of the Global Partnership for Education grant received on behalf of the Government for the national Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020), which was developed with support from UNICEF.

Early Childhood Education

UNESCO supported the development of the first-ever degree-level pre-service teacher education curriculum in early childhood education, heralding the beginning of formal professional preparation of Early Childhood Educators. In addition to the Dongkhamxang Teacher Training College which was targeted in the academic year 2012/2013, the initiative was expanded to Luang Namtha and Saravan Teacher Training Colleges in the academic year 2014/2015, reaching over 200 teacher-students altogether. Upon completion, these graduates are expected to join teaching at the pre-school level, which would fulfill the much needed supply of trained workforce in Early Childhood Education and contribute to improving the quality of education.

In addition to the 27 Community-Based School Readiness centers supported by UNICEF since 2012/13, another 18 centers were set up in 2015 demonstrating the impact of quality Early Childhood Education on children's

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4 UNPF Country Analysis Report: Lao PDR (2017-2021)

5 EMIS

6 TVET is specified as a sub-sector of the education system in the revised 2007 Education Law.

learning and development in the educationally most disadvantaged districts in Lao PDR. Over 2016, UNICEF will provide support for the revision of the pre-primary curriculum to smoothen the transition from pre-primary to primary schools.

Primary Education

To improve and facilitate access to education, WFP continued to provide school meals as a mean to pull children from the most remote and poor areas to attend primary education. In total 17.5 percent of all primary school children received WFP provided school meals. These 150,000 children benefited from either a nutritious mid-morning snack or a school lunch partially based on vegetables and greens produced through the WFP supported school gardens. On a policy level, the technical working group for school meals under the auspices of the Education Sector Working Group was established formally by ministerial decree in 2015. This enables WFP and other actors engaged in school nutrition related activities to have a strong dialogue with Government, in particular around transition towards community ownership and sustainability of the school nutrition activities.

At the national and sub-national levels UNICEF provided support for the achievement of the national Education Quality Standards. A package of support to four educationally disadvantaged districts in four provinces included strengthening the capacity of district education staff and school directors in education planning and management, the provision of district and school block grants and technical support to district early childhood and primary education officers. UNICEF continued to bring technical expertise and substantive prior experience in school planning and management to further strengthen school-based management in disadvantaged geographical areas.

In partnership with the Australian Embassy, UNICEF initiated the printing of high-quality textbooks nation-wide for all 870,893 students in grades 3 to 5, of which 416,627 were girls. The textbook distribution will allow the Ministry of Education and Sports to meet its national standard of one textbook per student. In addition, an internet-based information system for textbook production planning has been set up to enhance textbook distribution and monitoring, which is currently being rolled out nationwide.

UNICEF also supported water, sanitation and hygiene in schools through the construction of facilities and the provision of hygiene education. As a result, 26,400 primary school children gained access to quality and gender-sensitive school latrines with water and hand washing facilities in 194 primary schools across five provinces in 2015⁷. In addition, school staff and children received the skills to enhance their personal hygiene and to maintain the facilities. More than 7,442 children from 68 primary schools have access to and use of group hand-washing facilities through the Hygiene Action led by Pupils in Schools initiatives in Saravane Province. Pupils practice daily group hand-washing with soap and water before school meal or afternoon break, use and clean toilets, filtered water to drink, and clean classrooms and schools compound.

UNICEF continued to work in partnership with UNESCO / International Institute for Education Planning, in the development and delivery of an accredited course on education planning and management for central and provincial education authorities.

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In addition to the 27 Community-Based School Readiness centers supported by UNICEF since 2012/13, another 18 centers were set up in 2015 demonstrating the impact of quality Early Childhood Education on children's learning and development in the educationally most disadvantaged districts in Lao PDR.

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7 Saravane, Savannaket, Oudomxay, Bokeo and Khamouanne Provinces

The Assessment of Learning Achievement III has shown poor academic performance of children in early years of primary education and it results from poor teaching of Lao language. To promote basic literacy skills among early grade students (Grade 1-3) and enhance their level of overall learning achievement, UNESCO supported the development of supplementary training materials focusing on teaching the Lao language to Grades 1 to 3 students. A cadre of approximately 80 trainers have received a training of trainers to impart in-service training programmes targeting primary teachers of selected schools nationwide, with a view to improving teaching standards of the Lao language. A series of cascade pedagogical training for in-service teachers on teaching basic literacy skills will take place in 2016 to reach approximately 2,500 primary teachers.

UNFPA was able to advocate for comprehensive sexuality education in primary school setting. Comprehensive sexuality education has been seen as important by the Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure young people's access to Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health information. This is now included in the Education Sector Development Plan and comprehensive sexuality education is expected to be integrated in the primary curriculum, which will be revised in 2016.

Secondary Education

WFP provided take-home rations for informal boarding students in secondary school to facilitate access to education for the poorest students attending school far from their villages.

UNFPA supported incorporating Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health into the formal education curriculum. A total of 20 core trainers from the national level and an additional 20 trainers from the provincial level (Savannakhet and Luang Namtha) participated in a training of trainers on teaching of Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health using the teacher's guidebook. These core trainers conducted a training for 210 teachers and as a result 18 out of 160 participating secondary schools now teach Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health benefitting 13,456 students, of which 10,734 girls.

ILO continued supporting the government in its effort to roll out the Know About Business teaching in senior secondary school level. The Know About Business class will enhance the students' understanding of entrepreneurship as well as help them develop entrepreneurial attitude and skills to foster a more entrepreneurial culture, as well as increase the productivity and competitiveness among current and future entrepreneurs. In 2015, around 100 teachers have been trained nationwide to deliver this curriculum. More than 5,000 Secondary school level 5 students throughout Louangprabang province have benefited from the introduction of the entrepreneurship learning through the integration of the Know About Business into the secondary school curriculum.

Teacher Education

The national code of conduct defining moral and professional ethics for teachers was endorsed in August. It will lay the grounds for strengthening ethical quality and for promoting professionalism of teachers. The code was developed and contextualized through a participatory approach by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sports, teacher education institutions, and at school level, with support from UNESCO. The code of conduct will provide a guiding framework for teacher management.

“Comprehensive sexuality education has been seen as important by the Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure young people's access to Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health information.”

UNESCO continued to promote inclusive education to address marginalization of some groups of children and support the country for the attainment of education for all goals. While Lao PDR has succeeded in achieving physical inclusion of children by increasing enrollment in schools, many barriers remain that continue to exclude children from participating in the learning process. To address this, in addition to training workshops on inclusive education policies and pedagogical practices, UNESCO supported the translation and adaptation of four specialized booklets of UNESCO's Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-friendly Environments.

Despite its success in achieving gender parity, there are gender gaps and inequalities in education. Often learning materials themselves become the source of such gaps. UNESCO supported gender analysis of primary and secondary school textbooks and associated teaching learning materials which, among others, involved capacity development of curriculum developers and textbook writers from the Research Institute for Educational Sciences in gender analysis. As a result of the support, over 100 curriculum and textbook developers have been trained in gender analysis.

Non Formal Education & Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNFPA supported incorporating Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health into non-formal education curriculum targeting 180 villages participating in the non-formal education programme in two provinces (Luang Namtha and Savannakhet) and in one technical vocational training centre.

During 2015, more than 50 trainees were successfully certified in the construction and automotive industries at level 3-4, based on skill standards and a testing system developed through the Lao-Korean Skills Development Institution.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The UN will continue to focus on strengthening inclusive, equitable quality and relevant education to ensure all children and youth will be able to complete the basic education cycle and find employment to reach their full potential.

To improve education sector planning and management, a greater focus on the use of educational data across central, provincial and district levels is needed. Education monitoring should go beyond inputs and access and it should include data related to process and learning outcomes. Focal Groups and the Technical Working Group embedded within the Education Sector Working Group provide a key opportunity to better coordinate and align support by Development Partners for the education sector.

There is a need to strengthen Early Childhood Education providers' skills to interact effectively and confidently with families to further enhance early childhood care and education. Nutrition, health and WASH should be integrated into pre-school programmes which aim to provide holistic Early Childhood Development services.

In the area of primary education, the capacity building of District Education Services Bureau and school staff through mentoring and coaching is considered most effective and is an essential part of the organization structure improvement. Capacity strengthening of the school principals is an important factor for providing access to quality of education. The provision of school meals, in particular the school lunches continues to be a pull factor in the poor and remote areas. Nonetheless, the high drop out and repetition

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While Lao PDR has succeeded in achieving physical inclusion of children by increasing enrollment in schools, many barriers remain that continue to exclude children from participating in the learning process.

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rates in some areas remains a challenge to be tackled by all actors involved in education. Despite different interests among stakeholders in the revision of the curriculum of primary education, continuous engagement and discussion are important to ensure that support to the Ministry of Education and Sports is coordinated and aligned with the needs of the country.

The overall results of the gender analysis of primary and secondary school textbooks revealed that there were gender biases in all the textbooks reviewed. The Lao textbooks have not adequately reflected the range of female and male roles and occupations in the real world, with particularly limited roles of girls and women. Gender-biased images remain strongly present in primary school textbooks. In the next round of textbook adoptions or revisions, gender perspectives should be given due consideration.

More Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health training should be provided to new secondary teachers to make sure that each institute has sufficient teachers to teach this important subject.

Active participation of various teacher groups in the development of teacher code of conduct has ensured a sense of ownership and a greater acceptance of the code. There is a need to conduct evaluation of the newly developed curriculum for pre-school teachers on a regular basis to improve the quality of the course.

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4... EQUITABLE HEALTH & SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES



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

Key Development Trends

Based on a joint estimate by UNFPA, UNICEF, World Bank and WHO, the maternal mortality ratio in Lao PDR declined to 197 per 100,000 live births in 2015, achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target, although it remains high when compared to other countries in the region. Joint UN estimates also showed a 59 percent decline in the under-five mortality rate from 162 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 67 in 2015. Although this decline was insufficient to meet the global MDG 4 target for child mortality of 54/1,000, it surpassed the national target of 80 deaths/per 1,000 live births.

Lao PDR met the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target on Water and Sanitation⁸. 76 percent (86 percent urban and 69 percent rural) people have access to improved source of water, and 71 percent (94 percent urban and 56 percent rural) people have access to improved sanitation. Over the past 15 years, the Government has made impressive strides to improve the water and sanitation situation. Nevertheless, 1.7 million people (819,000 children), still lack access to an improved source of water; and 2 million people (981,000 children) lack basic sanitation and hygiene. There is a huge disparity between the urban and rural children.

The prevalence of stunting remains high, which is linked to poor sanitation and hygiene. Low coverage of improved sanitary latrines, open defecation (around 29 percent of the population not using a toilet), and poor handwashing practices lead to frequent diarrhea incidences with rural areas experiencing the diarrhea prevalence two times higher than the urban. A



8 UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme
2015 updates

significant issue remains with only 18 percent of child being disposed of in a sanitary manner. Poor diet and diarrhea are underlying causes of high level of stunting, at 44 percent.

People in rural communities without roads are twice as likely to not use improved water as people in urban communities, and 5 times more likely to not use improved sanitation. Ethnicity and location in rural areas determines access and use of improved sanitation facilities. While 71 percent of Lao-Tai groups have toilets, only 29 percent of Sino-Tibetan and Mon-Khmer groups reported use of safe sanitation in the 2012 Lao Social Indicator Survey. 43 percent of Hmong-Mien had improved sanitation.

Water collection is mainly the responsibility of women and girls. In 79 percent of households without water on the premises, females collect the water. This trend is more pronounced amongst poor rural families and families whose heads have little or no education. The women and girls of ethnic groups living in mountainous areas are the most burdened in this respect.

The Government increased domestic disbursements for vaccines to US\$ 975,346 in 2015, 66 percent more than in 2014 (US\$ 639,512) and seven times more than in 2013. For the first time, the country disbursed national budget (US\$ 237,636) to nutrition commodities procurement, including iron folic acid, Mebendazole and Vitamin A. In addition, there was no out stock of vaccines at the central level due to improvements in supply forecasting and budgeting.

Since the first case of vaccine derived polio virus type1 was identified on 6 October, a total of seven confirmed cases have been reported as of 15 January 2016. Following the recommendations of the WHO's International Health Regulations Emergency Committee, the Prime Minister's Office declared the current polio outbreak a national public health emergency on 13 January 2016. This declaration is to alert all sectors, government, private, and communities to make every effort to implement successfully the planned mass vaccination campaigns. UNICEF, WHO and other international partners have provided timely technical and funding support to the government-led national response to the Polio Outbreak.

While the Government has committed to spend 9 percent of its budget on health, out-of-pocket spending for health remains high, at around 50 percent of total health expenditure. The first National Health Accounts for Lao PDR 2010–2011; 2011–2012 was produced and published in 2015. A Health Financing Strategy is awaiting approval by the Government.

As part of the ongoing health sector reform, progress was made towards health information system development, planning and civil registration. A District Health Information System was introduced across the country, which includes a Universal Health Coverage Monitoring Framework and Dashboard that aligns to the health MDGs and will be adapted to the health related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Results

During 2015, the Ministry of Health introduced a Maternal Death Surveillance and Response system, focused on timely data collection and follow-up action. Since 2011, WHO and UNFPA have assisted this process with the development of policy, guidelines and scale-up of the provincial

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implementation. Further consolidation in 2016 will strengthen the capacity of the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response Committee and set up the permanent secretariat. In 2015, the first report on maternal deaths was finalized based on more than 100 reported maternal deaths between 2011 and 2013.

The Ministry of Health endorsed the National Strategy and Action Plan for integrated services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health 2016-2025, developed with support of UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO. New technical guidelines were developed, including the Early Essential Newborn Care pocket guide, Hospital Care for Children second version, and the National Referral Guidelines and Clinical Handbook for Safe Abortion, which reflect the national adaptation of WHO's global guidelines.

Services for children under five years have been scaled up to cover 117 districts in the country. However, there is evidence of inequity in term of accessing health services due to geographical location, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Coverage of Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health services remains low among ethnic groups, those who live in remote, mountainous areas and among the lowest quintile of income. UN agencies continue to support the Ministry of Health in building capacities of skilled birth attendants, nurses, managers, public health workers and others.

The joint UN Programme on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health continued to support activities in four selected provinces of Luangnamtha, Oudomsay, Phongsaly and Savannakhet. UNICEF and WHO supported the Ministry of Health in controlling a diphtheria outbreak which started in July 2015. There were 414 suspected cases identified in five provinces (Vientiane, Khoummaune, Savannakhet, Vientiane Capital, and Huaphan) and five deaths reported. The spread was contained in September due to concerted efforts of the Government, with support from UNICEF and WHO through supplementary immunization activities in those affected provinces.

UNFPA contributed to enhancing enabling environment for Sexual Reproductive Health as well as Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. Extensive work was carried out in developing a midwifery cadre in the past five years, including capacity development of the regional and central training schools and training of Community Midwives. In particular, the programme supported the implementation of the national integrated Maternal, Newborn and Child Health services strategy in 4 target districts (Nong, Sepone, Vilabuly and Thapangthong) in Savannakhet province and other 3 provinces in the north (Oudomxay, Phongsaly and Louangnamtha). It gave priority to the most remote and vulnerable populations by: expanding the scope and coverage of community-based family planning services, in line with the integrated maternal, neonatal and child health services package; training health-care providers; empowering and mobilizing communities, including through data collection; developing integrated information, education and communication materials; and supporting partnerships for resource mobilization, joint planning and the implementation of district and provincial health plans for the integrated package of maternal, neonatal and child health services.

UNICEF and sector partners have successfully concentrated efforts in triggering community-led sanitation in recent years and could report some 160 Open Defecation free communities, mainly in the affected provinces in the South. Currently the national figure for open defecation has dropped to 23 percent. But greatest progress is among the 3rd and 4th quintiles - not the poorest quintiles.

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In 2015, UNICEF supported 40,050 rural people, including 19,300 children, to access and use improved water sources. Additional 6,000 rural inhabitants (including 2,900 children) have access to and use of sanitation facilities through demand responsive approach of community led total sanitation. Two villages have been declared free of open defecation.

With UNICEF technical and financial support, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with other line ministries organised the first WASH Joint Sector Review. Thirteen golden indicators were agreed upon and seven proposed for the inclusion in the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. The draft WASH Policy and Strategy (urban and rural) is available for discussion at sub-national and national level.

A key achievement was securing government commitment to the Family Planning 2020 movement. This was a result of advocacy by UNFPA at ministerial level involving key ministries such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Planning and Investment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, using evidence from surveys and data from programme implementation. Part of the evidence came from the Family Planning Situation Analysis of Lao PDR conducted in early 2015. The findings have also been used to develop Family Planning interventions and strategies for both government and UNFPA.

The annual Stock Availability Survey showed that over 90 percent of facilities are aware they should be providing methods of contraception in accordance with national policy, with the exception of female condoms. Stock out issues remained due to logistics management, however, this year's report also highlighted programme issues, with awareness of policy not necessarily translating into action. Despite high awareness of the requirement to provide services, many service delivery points do not regularly provide the methods required. The stock out level remains high, with 11 percent of all facilities having stock out at the time of survey.

For the midwifery programme, at the system level, UNFPA supported the strengthening of institutions to ensure that the nine schools of Health Sciences are able to run midwifery courses, and to ensure that maternal deaths are not just reviewed but findings are used to improve practice through a Maternal Death Surveillance and Response. At sub-national level, the funds ensured that midwives are trained and deployed at health center level where it is needed; and that target health centers are equipped and staff trained to deal with basic emergency obstetric problems.

A Midwifery Improvement Plan for 2016-2020 was developed. The overall goal of the plan is to improve maternal and newborn health, specifically reducing maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality through effective universal access to health services.

With support from UNFPA, the Trilateral South-South Cooperation work plan between Lao PDR, Thailand International Cooperation Agency and UNFPA was developed. Khon Kaen University in Thailand was selected to develop and conduct a 6-month midwife teacher's course. Thailand will provide support from 2016-2018.

The Skilled Birth Attendants Evaluation 2014 identified the need for improving teaching quality and increasing knowledge and capacity of the midwifery teachers both in the teaching institution and clinical settings, specifically in the area of clinical midwifery practice, knowledge and pedagogics.

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UNICEF and WHO supported the Ministry of Health to develop the first National eHealth Strategy as part of the health sector reform.

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In 2015, WHO and UNICEF provided technical assistance to the national immunization programme to develop the Comprehensive Multi Year Plan 2016-2020 to address high risk communities in the country. Major achievements were made in line with the global vaccine action plan, the global and regional measles elimination goal and the polio-end game plan. In October, Lao PDR notified the global community of a Polio Outbreak through the International Health Regulations mechanism. This resulted in an emergency surge response from UNICEF and WHO along with international partners' including US Centre for Disease Control. The Government has moved quickly to meet its obligations under the International Health Regulations and in line with the Global Standard Operating Procedures for this event.

To prevent future outbreaks, a major emphasis has focused on supporting the Ministry of Health to strengthen its routine immunization activities. The integrated delivery of health outreach services, including immunization in the remote areas and currently underserved populations has been promoted.

UNICEF and WHO supported the Ministry of Health to develop the first National eHealth Strategy as part of the health sector reform. With support from UNICEF, the information and communication technology (ICT) enabled communication approaches and platforms has been tested in Sing district of Luangnamtha province. This included (1) real-time monitoring of health outreach services using mobile phones and interactive voice recording technology; and (2) use of SD cards to facilitate the dissemination of critical information and support behavior change communication at the community level. The ICT-based model for outreach monitoring has been developed to fill the current data gap in the health outreach implementation monitoring and provide timely and actionable data to health managers at all levels.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

National capacity for emergency response and contingency plans for major communicable diseases have been strengthened. However health system resilience remains weak in addressing sudden events such as the ongoing polio outbreak response. Highest level of government commitment was proven to be necessary to mobilize national rapid and effective response, in line with technical and funding assistance from international community through the Global Polio Elimination Initiative.

In addition, despite the dramatic decrease of maternal and child mortality in Lao PDR, the levels of maternal and child mortality are still very high compared with neighboring countries. The primary services for improving maternal and child health need to be strengthened further. The antenatal care coverage of pregnant women and immunization coverage of children are still low and the MDG target for child mortality remains part of the unfinished business moving forward with the SDGs.

Particular efforts should be made to improve the health care coverage and achieve better health outcomes, in terms of: providing upstream support with a sub-national focus on unfinished MDG and moving toward SDG, strengthening health systems and emergency surveillance and response; improving coordination and promoting synergy among various project-based implementation programmes; increasing national domestic health expenditure and social health protection; strengthening management of health services and medical supplies; enhancing information systems to

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National capacity for emergency response and contingency plans for major communicable diseases have been strengthened.

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support monitoring of the health sector programmes, the UN Development Assistance Framework 2012-2016 and development of an action-oriented and measurable Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021 in line with the national priorities set in the 8th Health Sector plan 2016-2020; promotion of evidence-based planning and prioritization of resources; linking health sector reform with decentralization, public finances and administration reform to clarify accountability at the national and subnational levels.; and expanding the method mix for family planning with the introduction of long acting reversible contraceptive method in respect of their traditional beliefs and preference.





5

**IMPROVED FOOD
SECURITY & NUTRITION**



Vulnerable people are more food secure and have better nutrition

Key Development Trends

By 2015, several of the Millennium Development Goals were either achieved or on track, with halving of the poverty rate, and significant improvements in education, maternal health and water and sanitation.

Lao PDR developed and finalised its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan which, following UN targeted advocacy and technical support, includes specific food security and nutrition indicators and greater emphasis on multi-sectoral response to nutrition.

In May, the Government launched a National Zero Hunger Challenge, including all its work to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition. A Zero Hunger Challenge Roadmap was developed jointly with the Government to show how existing strategies and plans addressed the five objectives.

The Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, with UN support, led the development 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, and articulated in the new donor supported programmes.

The 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Survey implemented by the Government of Lao PDR with support from the UN, European Union and Swiss Development Cooperation showed between a 7 and a 13 percent decline in child stunting since 2011 in four out of the five surveyed provinces which are the focus for multi-sectoral, convergent areas. The same survey also showed a 4.4 percent decline in child anemia compared to the levels registered in 2011.

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 National Socio-Economic Development Plan and the National Nutrition Strategy's Plan of Action and its monitoring and evaluation framework. This support included inclusive consultation to reflect new requirements and address gaps and additional requirements.

The UN continued to invest in strengthening the capacity of new nutrition institutions such as the National Nutrition Committee and its Secretariat and the Nutrition Center of the Ministry of Health in the area of nutrition data analysis and use, planning, budgeting, communication, and monitoring and evaluation. UN organizations led the development of joint advocacy and coordinated technical support and programming, including through the European Union and UNICEF co-convened quarterly Informal Development Partners Group on Food on Nutrition Security, which among other things supported a food security and nutrition survey mapping and a First National Nutrition Forum, which was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister who is also the chair of the National Nutrition Committee. Integration of Nutrition indicators into administrative data collection systems such as the Health Management Information System and the District Health Information System resulted in improved use of nutrition data for policy development and programming, and helped maintain the Government's and development partners' attention on nutrition specific priority interventions such as micronutrient supplementation, infant and young child feeding and management of acute malnutrition.

At the sectoral level, FAO provided support to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in the completion of a multi-sectoral analysis and consultation across the sector which resulted in the publication of a policy white paper on the role of agriculture in food security and nutrition. Support was also provided to the Government in the development of a multi-sectoral Strategic Action Plan for Rice, and the development of investment plans for the rice and livestock sectors.

Further support was provided on the preparation of methodology and costing of the four priority agricultural interventions foreseen under the convergence approach in the Plan of Action, including through a programme of 14 nutrition-sensitive Farmer Field Schools.

UNICEF supported the completion of two operational delivery models for home fortification of young children's meals with micronutrient powders. External assessment showed that the public health distribution model achieved significant coverage of 70 – 99 percent of the target population, and was effective at reaching children and families living in rural remote areas with micronutrient powders. Nutrition advice was provided on adequate complementary feeding practices, on dietary diversification, and on care practices during pregnancy, postpartum and in early childhood. The findings and recommendations of the review informed the Ministry of Health micronutrient powders-related programme scale-up and policy development.

UN advocacy for increased resource allocation to priority nutrition activities contributed to an increased domestic budget disbursement. In 2015, US\$237,636 were allocated – a first time allocation of domestic budget -

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External assessment showed that the public health distribution model achieved significant coverage of 70 – 99 percent of the target population, and was effective at reaching children and families living in rural remote areas with micronutrient powders.

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for essential nutrition commodities, and the allocation for the health sector increased significantly to scale up nutrition interventions, such as infant and young child feeding, micronutrient supplementation and deworming.

Institutional capacity development

FAO facilitated capacity development to enhance skills and knowledge in food security and nutrition in the agriculture sector, including the use of specialised tools and methodologies to enhance analysis and practice. A manual with specialised planning tools and methodologies was completed, in preparation for training roll-out at provincial level.

WFP started a landscape analysis to support the Government in its efforts to assess the feasibility of rice fortification. In addition to assessing its feasibility and sustainability, the objectives of the study are to determine the most appropriate delivery options and its integration in the rice supply chain, estimate the production costs and impact of fortification on public health, and identify key partners.

WFP funded a study to review the Government's Strategic Grain Reserve in the country, which showed that a well-designed Strategic Grain Reserve can play an important role in enhancing food security. The most effective approach for Lao PDR of a combination of rice stockpile and cash reserves was presented to key stakeholders and this will be pursued with the Department of State Reserves.

WFP continued to support the Government in improving health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children under two years of age by providing nutrition education in partnership with NGOs. In 75 percent of target villages, nutrition training to caretakers was provided in the past year, reaching a total of 2,319 men and 3,465 women.

Coordination mechanisms

2015 saw a further consolidation of the coordination mechanisms, both at central and provincial levels, for the implementation of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition. The third and last of the three convergence micro-planning were completed in LuangNamtha.

UN organizations agreed on the establishment of a UN Scaling Up Nutrition country network and identified UNICEF to chair the group in the framework of the UN expert group on food security and nutrition. With UNICEF support, national Infant and Young Child Feeding training and monitoring capacities were established and the package was implemented in 26 districts in 6 provinces with the highest undernutrition rates, mobilising 41 provincial and district authorities and building the capacity of health workers and Lao Women's Union to promote positive nutrition practices and care-seeking during pregnancy, postpartum and in the first years of child's life. Implementation was reinforced through the nation-wide dissemination of 3,000 copies of the National Infant and Young Child Feeding Guidelines.

A new partnership involving UN organizations, World Bank, European Union, USAID and the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Network was established for the development and implementation of a National Nutrition Social and Behavior Change Communication Strategy and Plan of Action on Nutrition 2016-2020.

“With WFP support, the Mother and Child Health and Nutrition programme was able to increase the coverage of its prevention programme to include 91.5 percent of children between six and 23 months in 1,067 targeted villages...”

Activities

In the areas of farming and livestock management, FAO contributed to building food security and nutrition through continued support to the Department of Livestock and Fisheries, leading to the completion of the Strategic Implementation Plan for the development of management of fisheries and aquaculture, including investment opportunities and a framework for capacity development at the local level; and farmer trainings on Pesticide Risk Reduction in 9 villages in 5 districts of 3 provinces, with 264 farmers (including 67 women) participating and formulating Pesticide Risk Reduction Community Action Plans. Existing training materials were revised for distribution to extension workers in 9 provinces. In addition, more than 350 farmers in 11 districts in 4 lowland rice growing provinces (Savanankhet, Champasack, Xiengkhouang & Sayabouly) participated in season-long Farmers Field Schools on Sustainable Intensification of Rice Production to increase productivity while reducing pesticides and costs.

As a direct result of UN support, Lao PDR's 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and strategy development now systematically incorporate agro-biodiversity conservation. Several Agrobiodiversity Initiatives have been initiated to support food security and nutrition in two Northern provinces while also supporting the development of livelihoods through reinvestment in agrobiodiversity production and identification of markets. These initiatives have also facilitated and encouraged the participation of women. For example, trials of local rice varieties found those that perform well under local conditions and have prolonged resistance to droughts and floods. 27,000 people in targeted provinces have benefited, with the seasonal profit from rice production increasing by 78 percent. The distribution of resistant rice varieties has now reached over 100 hectares of farmland in the targeted provinces.

With WFP support, the Mother and Child Health and Nutrition programme was able to increase the coverage of its prevention programme to include 91.5 percent of children between six and 23 months in 1,067 targeted villages in Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, and Sekong provinces. In order to determine the impact of ready to use supplementary food, an impact evaluation showed a 9 percent reduction of underweight in children between 0-23 months, a 5.5 percent reduction in stunting and a 1 percent reduction in wasting, compared to the 2012 baseline.

WFP Rural Development Activities reached 628 households in Sekong and Luang Namtha provinces during 2015. The results of such activities show an increase from 54.1 to 61.11 percent on the number of households with an acceptable Food Consumption Score.

In August, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry together with WFP conducted a joint Food Security Assessment in four provinces (Xayaboury, Xieng Khuang, Luang Prabang and Houaphanh) to assess the impact of unseasonal dry weather, followed by local flooding, and reports of locust and rodents on food insecurity, which concluded that the results did not warrant for an intervention. A second assessment was conducted in December 2015 and January 2016 to first gather baseline data on the food security situation in the country and second, assess the impact of dry weather on livelihoods in an unusually dry year. The results of this assessment will be available in 2016.

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As a direct result of UN support, Lao PDR's 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and strategy development now systematically incorporate agro-biodiversity conservation.

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Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The Government's multi-sectoral convergence approach has been greatly strengthened in 2015 as three major sectors have worked together in a coordinated and targeted approach involving health, agriculture and education. The UN has provided critical support with one agency acting as the main partner in each sector, and taking a lead role by co-chairing the development partners' coordination group and being an active member of the development partners' task force on nutrition through the chairs of the UN inter-agency group on food and nutrition security.

Despite Lao PDR achieving the hunger target of MDG 1, it remained off-track on the malnutrition target. The areas highlighted and actions agreed at the end of 2014 under the Chief Executives Board's MDG Acceleration Framework review have been taken forward under a coordinated multi-agency approach, with significant progress made on almost all areas. As a reflection of the continuing importance the Government places on malnutrition, the SDG malnutrition target has been incorporated into its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. The MDG Acceleration Framework continued to provide a good opportunity to engage with new partners working in the food and nutrition sector.

Further efforts on addressing the systemic issues of capacity development were provided at various levels, including strengthening institutional capacity and local governance, strengthening service delivery mechanisms, and enhancing community resilience, risk management and adaptation to challenges affecting food security and livelihoods, such as climate change.

In support of the Government's efforts to improve food security and nutrition, UN agencies in the country will prioritize increased agricultural productivity and diversification and support to smallholder farmers; strengthening the government institutional capacities by providing advice in policy development and building their capacity; behavioral change to reduce child malnutrition; strengthening of the role of women in nutrition to improve food security; and participatory approaches to reach the most vulnerable populations.





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

Overall HIV prevalence in Lao PDR remains low. However, there are increasing concerns about a growing HIV epidemic through unprotected sex among sex workers and clients, among men who have sex with men and through sharing contaminated injecting equipment among people who inject drugs in some northern provinces.

Results

Joint UN support was provided to achieve universal access to HIV prevention and treatment. Advocacy efforts were made to address the emerging HIV risk among injecting drug users. Collective UN efforts were also made to the development of the new national HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2016-2020.

With support from UNAIDS and UNDP, an assessment was conducted to review existing national policies and the protection framework and their impact on the access of key populations to HIV prevention, treatment and care services. The findings were shared with government partners for discussion on structural, legal and policy barriers that need to be removed in order to scale up access to HIV services for vulnerable groups such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people and those who inject drugs.

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and care services.*

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The UNAIDS Secretariat and its UN co-sponsors continued constructive dialogue with government partners to remove or reduce heavy penalties in the penal code that act as the barriers to accessing services, including discussion on the development of new protective regulations and policies to ensure marginalized groups have an equal access to services.

UNAIDS, WHO and other development partners worked closely with the Centre for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections of the Ministry of Health to launch a campaign to mark the 2015 World AIDS Day, with a series of activities to raise awareness among young people with high risk towards HIV infection. The campaign also promoted early HIV diagnosis by testing and treatment under the promotion theme Know Your Own Status.

Awareness on HIV/AIDS was further raised through the media. An orientation was provided to the media to improve their understanding of the HIV/AIDS situation and the Fast Track Initiative to end AIDS by 2030. UNAIDS also worked with the Lao National Radio and supported radio features, radio spots and talk shows in Lao and two ethnic languages including Hmong and Khmu.

UNAIDS and WHO led the conduct of a country analysis on the HIV/AIDS situation which highlighted the trends, disparities and determinants as well as the setting for UN support for programing on HIV/AIDS under the United Nations Partnership Framework 2017-2021.





7

**SUSTAINABLE
NATURAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT**

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&

8

**ADAPTATION & MITIGATION
OF CLIMATE CHANGE &
NATURAL DISASTER
VULNERABILITIES**

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The government ensures sustainable natural resources management through improved governance , and; Community participation and The government and communities better adapt to and mitigate climate change and reduce natural disaster vulnerabilities in priority sectors

Results

UNDP continued to contribute to the promotion of sustainable natural resources management through improved governance and community participation. In particular UNDP supported capacity development on agrobiodiversity and sustainable farming practices in two Northern provinces, application of national policy initiatives and improvement of livelihoods through the provision of small-scale infrastructure, training, supply of seed stock, market access and investment and re-investment training. These interventions have helped to raise the awareness of the importance of biodiversity for reducing the pressure on forests and forest resources, diversification of crop productions and enhancing livelihoods.

Additionally, the completion of the National Agrobiodiversity Programme is a major policy intervention for mainstreaming agrobiodiversity into national plans and programmes. Due to UNDP efforts, and with technical support from FAO, agrobiodiversity has been integrated in the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. UNDP and FAO support the Sub-Sector Working Group on AgroBiodiversity, which is a national platform for policy dialogue. UNDP has facilitated the design of a new programme on sustainable forestry, protected areas management and biodiversity conservation which will contribute to the government's efforts to increase forest cover to 70 percent by 2020, enhance livelihoods and contribute to food security.

The application of agrobiodiversity techniques resulted in engagement with communities and women in particular, in two Northern provinces. Community members have been taught farming techniques and are now less dependent on the forest resources. Community members have also invested in crop production and are now paying most of the production costs, managing their savings and re-investing in their own businesses.

Through sector and sub-sector working groups, UNDP has continued to advocate for increased efforts on addressing the loss of forest cover in order to meet the national target for forest cover. Final consultation for the National Agrobiodiversity Programme was held - a key national instrument to guide the implementation of agro-biodiversity implementation. As a direct result of the Agrobiodiversity Programme, Lao PDR's 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and strategy development now systematically incorporates agro-biodiversity conservation.

UNDP technical assistance supported the finalization of the revision and approval of the District Development Fund guidelines. The revised District Development Guidelines mark a major policy intervention for the inclusion of climate resilience in the design of small-scale infrastructure sponsored by the Fund.

Following UNDP's support to the Lao Delegation on the negotiating platform at the 20th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2014, the Government requested UNDP's support in the preparation of the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution with the aim of submitting in time for inclusion in the Global Synthesis Report to be presented at the 21st Conference of the Parties in Paris. UNDP supported data collection and verification, and multi-stakeholder cross-sectoral consultation that included both government agencies and development partners. The government demonstrated strong commitment and ownership, and the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution was submitted on time. UNDP supported four members of the Delegation of Lao PDR to the Paris meeting to negotiate the new global agreement. In 2015, UNDP was requested to co-chair the Sub-sector Working Group on Climate Change, Disasters and Environment, a key milestone in coordinating with the government and merging two proposed sub-sector working groups, which recognizes the synergies and linkages among these sub-sectors.

In early August, seven provinces were affected by floods. The Government and UN responded, with UNICEF for instance providing 8,400 people, including 4,000 children, with lifesaving Water, Sanitation and Hygiene items in Borikhamxay and Khamouane Provinces. UNICEF led the cluster and conducted a rapid assessment and accordingly total 95 community dug wells in 19 villages of 4 districts of Borikhamxay Province have been disinfected using chlorine, benefiting around 5,700 people including 2,700 children.

UNIDO supported the development of a draft policy on low carbon in industry, which is being put into practice, and UNIDO is also supporting the country's implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants through a review and update of the National Implementation Plan. A Persistent Organic Pollutants element has been included in the national environment protection law, a Boiler Technology Management curriculum has been introduced in the National University of Laos, and Persistent Organic Pollutants management training and awareness raising took place.

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The revised District Development Guidelines mark a major policy intervention for the inclusion of climate resilience in the design of small-scale infrastructure sponsored by the District Development Fund.

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Furthermore, UNIDO supported the Demonstration of Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices in open burning activities, strengthening the management of Persistent Organic Pollutants. Local authorities' capacities on Polychlorinated Biphenyls sample collection and safety have been developed, and a law and first draft policy on Polychlorinated Biphenyls management have been developed. UNIDO has thus directly contributed to the national response to the Stockholm Convention, enhancing environment protection and sustainable management of natural resources through the better management of waste and toxic chemicals.

IOM supported capacity development on Emergency Shelter and Camp Coordination, and Camp Management at the central level, as well as in all provinces and a pilot district. This laid the groundwork for emergency shelter preparedness and response, specifically at local levels, promoting its inclusion into local level disaster management planning. IOM also supported a National Disaster Management Training Framework and Database, now housed within the Disaster Management Division of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, designed to streamline all trainings surrounding disaster risk management and promote cooperation between the government and the international community.



ຈຶ່ງລະເບີດ!!



Danger!! UXO!!

9

REDUCED IMPACT OF
UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE



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



Key Development Trends

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) contamination remains an obstacle to development and a threat to human security. The provinces with the highest levels of UXO contamination are also broadly the poorest. 41 casualties were caused by UXO accidents during 2015, in many cases leading to death or disability. Nonetheless, significant changes have occurred during 2015 with regards to the UXO sector:

The number of casualties has been reduced to 41, from 46 in 2014, as a result of clearance and mine risk education activities. As of 2015, all humanitarian clearance operators in Lao PDR now implement the evidence-based survey methodology; only one operator did so at the beginning of 2014. The new focus of the sector on survey-based clearance has yielded an overall increase in the number of cluster munitions found per hectare from 7.9 in 2014 to 22.9 in 2015; this represents a major increase in efficiency. New targets have been set for the UXO sector in the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. These targets better reflect the new approach. By 2020, non-technical survey should be completed in 5,238 villages in the nine most-contaminated provinces; technical surveys should be completed on 124 Focal Development Areas in these provinces; the number of casualties should be reduced to less than 40 annually; and assistance should be provided to 1,500 victims of UXO accidents.

Humanitarian Clearance Teams of the Lao People's Army have begun to be trained and equipped to become a long-term national capacity in the area of UXO clearance, embedded in the institutions of Lao PDR. The National Regulatory Authority has presented a Five-Year Sector Work Plan for 2016-2020 to coordinate the work of the sector.

The governance of the UXO sector has seen increased involvement of the Government, evidenced by the presentations given by Line Ministries of the National Regulatory Authority's Board at the UXO Sector Working Group. Also, Prime Ministerial decrees have been drafted on mainstreaming UXO clearance costs into development and mainstreaming UXO education into the schools' curriculum.

In 2015, a total of 3,814 hectares of land were cleared, according to interim figures. These included 2,918 hectares of agricultural land and 896 hectares of development land. According to the interim report, operators destroyed more than 114,729 items of UXO, of which 194 were bombs, 87,123 were bombies, 51 were mines, and 27,361 were other UXO units.

These developments represent changes relating to the behavior of actors in the UXO sector and to the enabling environment in which they operate. The UXO sector is in essence an enabler of agriculture, human security and development, and, after land is cleared, the responsibility to ensure positive developmental impact lies largely with the user or developer of the land.

Results

UNDP's UXO programme is focused on increasing the capacity of the National Regulatory Authority and UXO Lao to independently manage activities in the UXO sector. As such, and in the context of the nationally-implemented project, all of UNDP's support is aimed at capacity-building. This includes support to training of UXO Lao's teams, as well as to the management of both UXO Lao and National Regulatory Authority. The clearance activities supported by UNDP will, in themselves, reduce permanently the risk of UXO accidents. Also, mine risk education activities permanently increase awareness of UXO risks. UNDP's support, financed by Korea International Cooperation Agency, to the equipping of humanitarian clearance teams from the Lao People's Army is aimed at creating a nationally-owned and managed capacity to deal with UXO contamination in the long term. UNDP provided technical support to conduct a mid-term review of the national strategic plan "Safe Path Forward II" 2012-2020, and developed a draft Multi-year Work Plan 2016-2020. The new work plan set new targets and goals relevant to the current UXO issues. In addition, it serves as a better guidance for all humanitarian operators in reducing the UXO impact in a more target-oriented manner.

A Chief Technical Advisor has been deployed to support both UXO Lao and the National Regulatory Authority, providing technical advice on the transition from largely request-based clearance to the new evidence-based approach. UNDP has supported both organisations in their procurement of equipment necessary to manage and undertake UXO-related activities. In 2015, this has included procurement of protective equipment, vehicles, detectors, and explosives for UXO Lao, and procurement of trainings and equipment for the Humanitarian Clearance Unit of the Lao People's Army. As co-chair of the UXO Sector Working Group, UNDP advocated for implementing the evidence-based clearance methodology and formulating a Victim Assistance Strategy, both of which have been achieved. At the Sector Working Group, UNDP voiced support for strengthening the prioritisation mechanism for UXO clearance and for creating a broader disability policy covering UXO victims.

Priority follow up actions have been taken to a 2014 Capacity Assessment, including the completion of an Assessment of the National Regulatory

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Authority's monitoring and evaluation capacity, which has led to the formulation of an initial concept for strengthening the monitoring and data management to improve long-term planning and ensure maximum development impact.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Priorities for 2016 include: to formulate an annual sector work plan to support the implementation of new five-year strategy 2016-2020 as well as the implementation of the recommendations from the 2008 assessment of gender perspectives into UXO action. The annual work plan will include sector-specific targets based on the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

UNDP should orientate the UXO programme to having a pro-poor, gender sensitive focus- strengthening people's voice and participation in processes that affect them, gender and improving the UXO Lao and the National Regulatory Authority's capacities to deliver services that promote the values of human development.

At a minimum, mechanisms should be developed and implemented that allow the voices of women, the young, the old, the disabled, and other marginalized groups as well as the voices of village leaders to be heard in the decision-making process about task prioritisation, including the Cluster Munitions Technical Survey process; and at a minimum, the principle of "do no harm" should be meaningfully incorporated into the programme, and Social and Environmental Safeguards applied.



"Lao PDR faces an estimated 8.7 million hectares of land contaminated by unexploded ordnance. I encourage all development partners to accelerate efforts to support Lao PDR on this life and death matter, and commend the country on its global leadership in support of the Convention on Cluster Munitions."

- Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator and Chair of the UN Development Group speaking at the 12th High Level Round Table Meeting



10

**GENDER EQUALITY &
PARTICIPATION
OF WOMEN**

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**People in the
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

The Government endorsed a number of policies and strategies, demonstrating continued commitment to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The newly endorsed regulations include the Lao Women's Union's Vision 2030 on Women's Development; the National Strategy on Women's Development (2016-2025) and its Action Plan; the National Commission for the Advancement of Women's Vision 2030; and the National Strategy on Gender Equality and its Action Plan. Also, the budget law that was passed by the National Assembly in December refers specifically to gender equality as an element to consider in programme financing.

A new national development cooperation policy that promotes gender equality was endorsed by the Government and its partners. The Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation endeavors to promote balanced nation-wide development and gender equality for greater development results, and to put in place a specific system for monitoring gender inequality and regional disparities. Accelerated efforts will be undertaken to collect and disseminate disaggregated data. The declaration also aims for women's empowerment and gender equality in the public and private sectors as a means for poverty reduction.

The second National Strategy on the Advancement of Women (2011 – 2015) was concluded. It aimed to translate political commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international agreements into practical actions, and to integrate gender equality principles into national laws and policies. As foreseen in

the strategy, a Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children had been promulgated - a major step forward, as violence against women is a widespread and socially accepted phenomenon. The lessons learned and unfinished objectives under the strategy have been incorporated into new strategies and laws.

Promotion of gender equality remains one of the Government's priorities and is prominently featured in the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020). The Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular Goal 5 on gender equality are considered by the Lao Women's organizations as a key tool to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Results

The UN agencies, under the lead of UNFPA and UN Women, continued to collaborate in their support to develop national legal and planning frameworks around gender equality and women's empowerment. Moreover, the UN has contributed to empowering national institutions to better implement and monitor these laws, strategies and actions plans, such as the National Strategy on the Advancement of Women and the National Action Plan on Elimination of Violence against Women and Children.

The UN provided gender-sensitive inputs to policies and laws such as the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020) and the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children, which has been promulgated in May. Capacity building in gender sensitive law-making and advocacy was provided to the Ministry of Justice and the National Assembly. Promotion and mainstreaming of gender equality into policies and programmes continued, for instance, through a workshop in the Northern Provinces on the implementation on Millennium Development Goals and introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a result of UN support, the Ministry of Education and Sports is better able to design projects, mainstreaming the gender dimension into the full project cycle; and members of the National Assembly have enhanced capacity for gender mainstreaming and an increased understanding of the role and duties of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. Similarly, UN Women trained 260 senior officials of Lao Women's Union on gender equality and women's empowerment. Technical support was also given to the preparation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Periodic Report, which is expected to be submitted to the CEDAW Committee in early 2016. The UN ensured that the report reflected contributions from all stakeholders, including from civil society.

A national survey on prevalence of violence against women helped raise national awareness. UN Women and CARE International sensitized 50 government and civil society representatives and 100 volunteers and community members on violence against women and girls, encouraging them to address this important issue. Moreover, coordinated by UN Women, the UN 16-Days of Activism and the UN Secretary General's 'UNiTE' campaigns to End Violence against Women raised public awareness on violence against women, targeting young people in particular.

In November, Ms. Roberta Clarke, the Regional Director of UN Women for Asia and the Pacific hosted a lunch with prominent Lao women leaders such as Ms. Pany Yathotou, President of the Lao National Assembly and only woman member of the Politburo, together with Ms. Helen Clark, chair of the UN Development Group and UNDP Administrator, and UN Resident

Coordinator Ms. Kaarina Immonen. The luncheon contributed to reaching out to high-level policy makers and leaders in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The participants indicated their commitment to ending violence against women by joining the UNiTE campaigns.

The issue of gender-based violence was integrated into the teacher's guidebooks of the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the sexual and reproductive health programmes of the Ministry of Health, including the midwifery curriculum.

ILO supported a pilot on integrated rural employment promotion and livelihood improvement for poverty reduction in Sekong province, one of the country's poorest provinces. The programme aims at reducing rural poverty through an integrated strategy of productive and decent employment promotion. ILO also supported a revision of the Ministerial Agreement on Labour Inspection, to ensure that female workers are equally treated and protected by the law.

IOM included a module on Gender-Based Violence as a component in Camp Coordination and Camp Management training for emergencies, ensuring that the protection of women and children and specific needs of groups such as pregnant and lactating mothers are addressed in emergency shelter situations.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

A Gender Scorecard assessed the UN Country Team's performance against a set of indicators on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The scorecard revealed potential for improvements in particular in the areas of programming, partnerships, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and UN capacities. The recommendations have been built into the development of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021.

There is a continued need for the UN to be more strategic in mainstreaming gender into its programme. Gender mainstreaming needs to be strengthened, in particular for those UN agencies for which the target group is not specifically women and girls. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, including collaboration between UN Agencies continued to be a key factor for the successful support to promote gender equality. The inter-agency working group on gender should be further strengthened.

Limited capacity, coordination and resources of the national gender machineries remain a challenge.

The UN's policy advisory work should pay special attention to gender parity on project management committees, since 97 percent of the heads of village are male. In many instances the only female on the committee is the representative of the Lao Women's Union. Efforts should therefore continue to promote and strengthen women in leadership positions, including at the village, district, provincial and central levels.

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JOINT COMMUNICATIONS



The UN conducted a series of outreach and advocacy activities within the framework of its Joint Communications Strategy. A noteworthy highlight were the participatory awareness raising and advocacy on key global and national development trends under the umbrella of the UN Day campaign, marking a number of anniversaries such as the 70th anniversary of the UN and the 60th anniversary of the country's admission to the UN. On this occasion, the national landmark monument "Patuxay" was among iconic monuments and buildings globally that turned UN blue as part of the Turn the World Blue campaign.

Over 80 youth shared their vision of Lao PDR by 2030 via a mobile-phone photo competition "#Namkan2030" and a related social media campaign, to raise awareness on the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The winning entries were displayed as part of the UN photo exhibition "Working together for Lao PDR" that also highlighted 60 years of partnership between Lao PDR and UN, touring different locations in the capital. The exhibition is planned to move to the provinces in 2016.

A media field trip to Phonsaly province highlighted national progress in promoting maternal, neonatal and child health, with technical support of UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and WFP. The field trip allowed local journalists to witness first-hand some of the challenges faced in reaching these remote, vulnerable populations.

An outreach event helped the Lao press become better familiar with the UN mandate. The UN became more active in social media through the new Twitter account and the photo essay channel Exposure.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The local press requires further capacity development to strengthen issue-based communications. Limited funding for outreach activities, a challenging media environment and a high turnover of members of the UN Communications Group have also an impact on UN joint communications. One of the main lessons learned is that "a picture speaks for itself", resulting in a shift away from formats such as newsletters towards photo stories and other innovative ways of communication.

A joint communications strategy in support of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework (2017-2021) will be developed in 2016.





COMMON BUSINESS OPERATIONS



With WHO passing the OMT chair to WFP, UN Agencies continued to enhance cooperation in the area of business operations. The OMT has initiated the development of a joint Business Operations Strategy for 2017-2021. Long-Term Agreements have been established with a travel agent and with the Lao State Fuel Company, enabling UN Agencies to purchase tax-exempt fuel and cutting procurement costs. Further Long-Term Agreements on internet services and IT solutions as well as printing and translation are under development.

UN Agencies have agreed to revise the common Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) rates for Government staff, in line with the updated Government Decree no 2066/FIN of June 2015. Salary scales for national fixed-term appointments and Service Contracts have been adjusted across agencies. UN Agencies have also harmonized with regard to taxation of local staff. In line with corporate recommendation, UN agencies have aligned their practices, agreeing not to pay income tax on behalf of their staff.

The Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) was strengthened through a UN HACT taskforce. Upon receiving new HACT guidelines, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF agreed to undertake a joint micro assessment of Implementing Partners. A total 29 implementing partners of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF were assessed in 2015. This helped save costs, enhanced the common understanding of issues, and contributed to harmonizing The UN's approach to cash transfers.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

A joint Business Operations Strategy for 2017-2021 will be developed in 2016 to enhance the cost effectiveness and quality of operations back office processes such as procurement, ICT, human resources, logistics and administration and finance in support of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021. It is a voluntary framework focusing on Joint Business Operations (including Common Services) allowing the UN Country Team in Lao PDR to take a strategic, results oriented approach to planning, management and implementation of Harmonized Business Operations at the country level.

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INDICATIVE FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



Results Areas	Estimated Funds delivered in 2015 (in US\$)	Estimated Funds available for 2016 (in US\$)
1 - Equitable and sustainable growth	5,513,350	3,807,348
2 - Public services, rights and participation	5,799,102	5,776,325
3 - Equitable education and training	4,488,433	5,850,868
4 - Equitable health and social welfare services	7,965,721	4,250,395
5 - Improved food security and nutrition	26,806,996	29,882,649
6 - HIV prevention, treatment and support	2,060,770	680,243
7 - Sustainable natural resources management	8,834,560	4,642,333
8 - Mitigation of climate change and natural disaster vulnerabilities	8,446,195	5,750,909
9 - Reduced impact of unexploded ordnance	6,103,955	6,020,079
10 - Gender equality and participation of women	274,745	43,700
Cross-Cutting	868,445	629,366
Total	77,162,272	67,334,215

The support of national partners as well as international partners such as Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Norway, 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.



