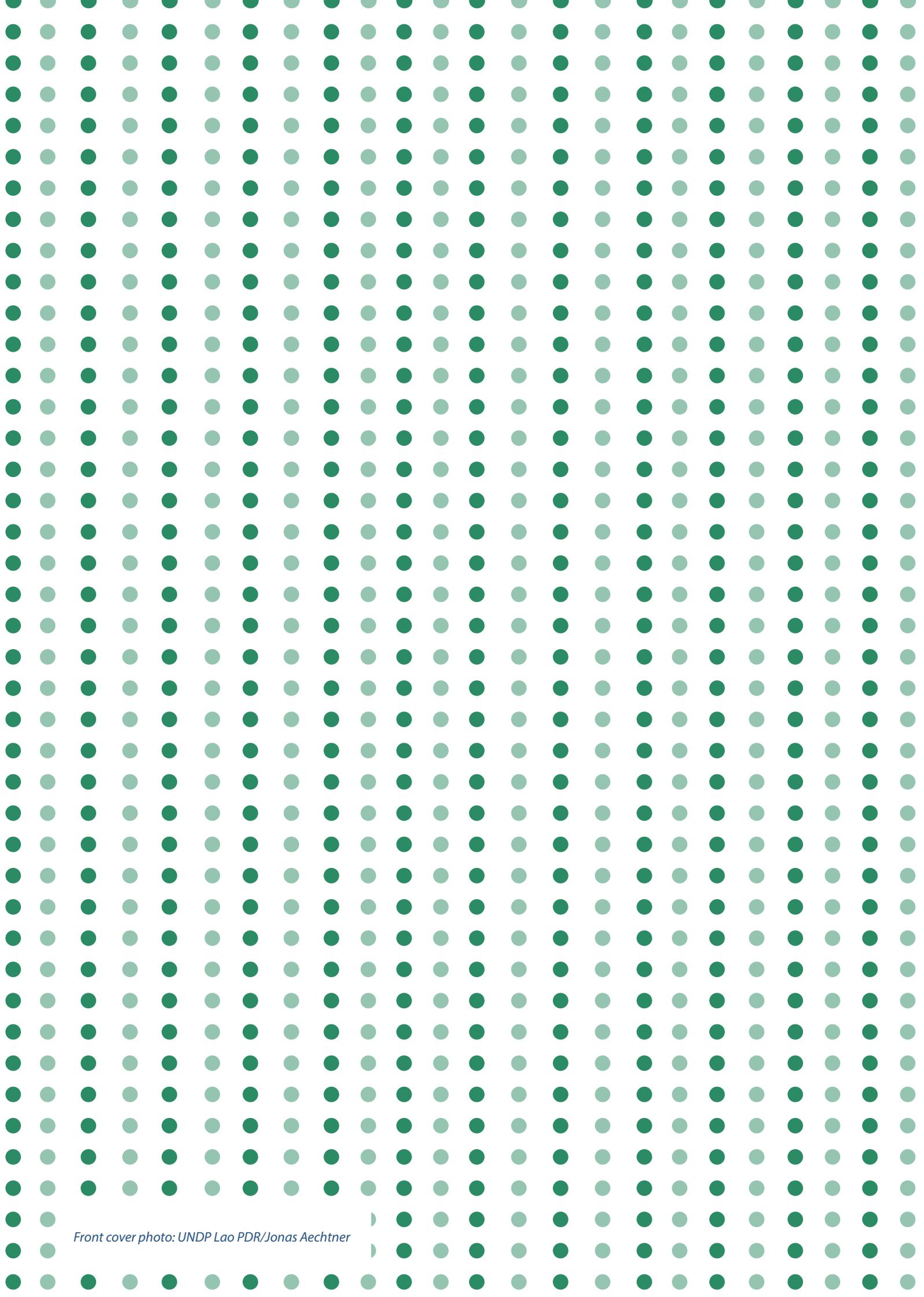




2017 PROGRESS REPORT

Lao PDR - United Nations
Partnership Framework
2017-2021

A Partnership for
Sustainable Development



Front cover photo: UNDP Lao PDR/Jonas Aechtner



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ACRONYMS

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

UN System in Lao PDR

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

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



INTRODUCTION





2017, the first full year of the new leadership following the 10th Party Congress and the National Assembly elections in 2016, saw a continuation of Lao PDR's rapid social and economic development. The Government continued to show strong commitment to the global development agenda, including graduation from Least Developed Country status, the Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals and the climate change agenda.

2017 was also the first year of implementation of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework (2017-2021), which serves as an overarching strategic framework to the United Nations in Lao PDR, with the aim to support the national development priorities as defined in the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan, graduation from Least Developed Country status and the Sustainable Development Goals. The foundation for the realization of the Partnership Framework is supported by three pillars (1) Inclusive Growth, Livelihoods and Resilience, (2) Human Development, and (3) Governance, Rule of Law and Participation in National Decision-Making. In this context, the UN Country Team is putting renewed efforts on cross-cutting issues, including systematic gender mainstreaming in all sectors.

Lao PDR continued to be at the forefront of localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the leadership of the Prime Minister, who chairs the national SDG Steering Committee, with the goals progressively integrated into the sectors. A Review "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals: Laying the base for 2030" was developed by the UN Team together with the Government and development partners. It provides an overview of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, compiles baseline data for the Sustainable Development Goals and highlights localization and monitoring issues. The development of the Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals has begun. The review will be informed by the second Lao Social Indicator

Survey and the Labour Force survey, which were both conducted in 2017, with results expected to be made available in early 2018. In addition to statistical support, the UN has sustained its policy guidance towards graduation from Least Developed Country status.

The Government also showed strong political commitment and action on the global climate change agenda, reporting to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on the status of its Nationally Determined Contributions and initiating their implementation. Forest cover continued to increase, supporting both climate mitigation and adaptation targets. A new Climate Change Decree and the Disaster Management Law are currently under development. In July, the Government welcomed the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for a mission. It has continued to remain responsive at the highest level, with the Prime Minister requesting a new order to improve the regulatory framework to combat illegal wildlife trafficking. The Penal Code was amended to include wildlife trafficking as a criminal offence and went forward to the National Assembly for approval.

Lao PDR was again affected by a number of natural disasters. It experienced a more intense wet season, and a further increase in frequency of extreme weather events can be expected in the coming years. Between end July and mid-August, parts of Lao PDR were heavily impacted by the flooding and landslides around tropical storm Sonca. Tropical storm Doksuri in September resulted in less damages and losses in comparison. The worsening locust infestation in the

North of the country is now known to cover at least 23 districts.

Having ratified seven of the nine core human rights conventions, the Government submitted its periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in August; to the Child Rights Committee in October; and to the Human Rights Committee in November. The UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, visited Lao PDR between 8 and 16 November. This was the first visit by an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in nearly a decade. The Government has indicated it intends to invite one Special Rapporteur per year from now on.

Updates to the constitution and laws promulgated in 2016 have been progressively applied during 2017. Among other things, the roles and responsibilities of the offices of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers and Heads of Ministry-equivalent organisations; and the division of labour between different levels of the government and administration have been further clarified. The amendments have also been essential for promoting institutions and policies at national and local level that can support the delivery of quality services to better respond to people's needs. The Government adopted the national human resource development strategy to 2025, highlighting its commitment to education and human development. The Ministry of Health launched several important initiatives, such as the tax-based social health protection scheme and better monitoring of tobacco tax collection. The National Health Insurance scheme is expected to be available nationwide in 2018 to improve access to health services at low cost for the entire population. A National Social Protection Strategy (2018 - 2030) has been developed by a national drafting committee with support of development partners. The strategy provides a clear framework for the development of a national social protection floor.

In terms of economic outlook, despite efforts to reduce public expenditure and enhance tax income, public debt is expected to reach 60 percent of GDP in 2017. The inflation rate remained at around 2 percent. GDP growth continued with an estimated 6.9 percent in 2017, bringing GDP per capita to an estimated US\$ 2,394. Economic expansion can be expected to continue at similar levels in the coming years, driven by growth in power generation, manufacturing and

agriculture, as well as construction. While tourism revenues overall declined, linked to the reduced number of arrivals in neighbouring Thailand for which Lao PDR serves as secondary destination, the revenue per tourist has increased. To further promote the sector, the Government has launched the "Visit Laos Year 2018".

Co-chaired by the UN, the Round Table Implementation Meeting on 22-23 November brought together around 350 participants from Government, National Assembly, international development partners, civil society and private sector, including Deputy Prime Minister Douangdy, Minister of Planning and Investment Keomixay, and 17 Vice-Ministers. Participants jointly reviewed progress in 2017 and discussed the priorities for 2018, with achievement of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan as overarching topic. Within this overall context, discussions focused on the environment for quality investments, enhancing skills and labour force, and strengthening south-south and triangular cooperation. The Prime Minister issued an instruction to line ministries to follow up on the outcomes of the meeting, which are also taken forward by the Sector and Subsector Working Groups.

Key priorities for 2018 will include the triennial Review of the list of Least Developed Countries by the Committee for Development Policy in March; the submission of the first Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals in July and the mid-term review of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan which is expected in September and will contribute to initiating the development of the 9th Plan.

In 2017, the UN System in Lao PDR including agencies operating from regional offices and headquarters, delivered around US\$ 70 million. The support of national partners as well as international partners such as Australia, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Switzerland and 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.

This report covers key development trends and results achieved under the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework 2017 - 2021, as well as lessons learned and way forward. It also reports on progress on communications and common business operations and includes an indicative financial overview.





1. DECENT LIVELIHOODS /
2. SOCIAL PROTECTION



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

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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status
1. Decent Livelihoods			
Percentage of total population living below the national poverty line	Baseline: 23.2% (2012-2013)	Target: 16.2% (2020)	23.2% (2012/13) <i>Updated by the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2017/18</i>
Gini coefficient	Baseline: 36.2 (2012/13)	Target: TBD (2021)	36.2 (2012/13) <i>Updated by the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2017/18</i>
Percentage of labour force in formal sector as a share of total employment rate, female/male	Baseline: 15.6% (female: 15% / male: 75%) (2010)	Target: 30% (female: 30% / male: 70%) (2021)	15.6% (2010) <i>Updated by the Labour Force Survey 2017</i>
2. Social Protection			
Number of formally employed workers enrolled in Social Security Fund (excluding army officials)	Baseline: 230,000 (2015)	Target: 300,000 (2021)	288,647 (2017) Of which female: 135,221
Percentage of poor covered by social protection schemes	Baseline: 80% (2015)	Target: 95% (2021)	91% (2017)

2017 saw a continuation of Lao PDR's rapid social and economic development. Despite efforts to reduce public expenditure and enhance tax income, public debt is expected to reach 60 percent of GDP in 2017. The inflation rate remained at around 2 percent. GDP growth continued with an estimated 6.9 percent in 2017, bringing GDP per capita to an estimated US\$ 2,394. Economic expansion can be expected to continue at similar levels in the coming years, driven by growth in power generation, manufacturing and agriculture, as well as construction. While tourism revenues overall declined, linked to the reduced number of arrivals in neighboring Thailand, for which Lao PDR serves as secondary destination, the revenue per tourist has increased. To further promote the sector, the Government has launched the "Visit Laos Year 2018".

2017 also saw continued strong commitment by the Government to collaborate with the UN system and other development partners towards the achievement of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), the National Strategy on Socio-Economic Development 2025 and the Vision 2030. UN Agencies also observed a further increase in national ownership of development cooperation. For example, the government has allocated national budget to the recent Labour Force and Lao Social Indicator Surveys.

Co-chaired by the UN, the Round Table Implementation Meeting on 22-23 November brought together around 350 participants from Government, National Assembly, international development partners, civil society and private sector. These included among others H.E. Mr. Somdy Douangdy, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, H.E. Dr. Souphanh Keomixay, Minister of Planning and Investment, and 17 Vice-Ministers on the side of the Government as well as Mr. Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and 15 Ambassadors and Charges d'Affaires on the side of the development partners. Participants jointly reviewed progress achieved in 2017 and discussed the priorities for 2018, with achievement of the 8th NSEDP, including graduation from Least Developed Country status and SDG achievement, as overarching topics. Within this overall context, discussions focused on the environment for quality investments, enhancing skills and labour force, and strengthening south-south and triangular cooperation.

A number of new laws were developed and existing ones revised throughout the year. The Investment Promotion Law was revised, resulting in the establishment of a one-stop-shop service center for investors. The Lao Statistics Law and the Social Security Law were also revised, and a new Health Insurance Law was passed. The decrees on Migration and on Special



2017 saw continued strong commitment by the Government to collaborate with the UN system and other development partners towards the achievement of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), the National Strategy on Socio-Economic Development 2025 and the Vision 2030.



Economic Zones were amended and new decrees on the development of the national statistical system, on occupational safety and health, and on labour dispute resolution were issued.

A National Social Protection Strategy (2018 - 2030) has been developed by a national drafting committee with support of development partners. The strategy provides a clear framework for the development of a national social protection floor. It builds on the results of the Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection which was finalized in 2017. The National Social Protection Strategy paves the way for providing all Laotians with a better life and increased social, economic, and human development prospects.

In this regard, the budget allocations for the health and education sectors were actively discussed and debated at the 4th Ordinary Session of the National Assembly. The budgets for health and education have been approved, amounting to a total of 21 percent of government expenditure, 13.3 percent for education and 7.7 percent for health.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, visited Lao PDR between 8 and 16 November. This was the first visit by an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in nearly a decade. The Special Rapporteur noted that Lao PDR has taken positive steps to address the plight of sale and sexual exploitation of children in the country, in particular through specific legislation and incipient regional cooperation. However, the sale and trafficking of children for sexual and labour exploitation, child and forced marriages and the prostitution of children remain issues of concern. The Special Rapporteur recommended to tackle the problem of impunity for

these crimes and develop an integrated national child protection system that provides care and recovery for child victims.

In 2017 there were 19 accidents related to unexploded ordnance, the second lowest figure in the past decade. These resulted in 41 casualties, which is the same number of casualties as in 2013 and the lowest figure in the past decade. Four persons died and 37 persons survived but were injured, some of them severely.

Results

National statistics and research

The UN Team provided technical support and capacity development on data collection and the conduct of surveys using computer-assisted personal interviewing and analysis. Key surveys conducted in 2017 included the Lao Social Indicator Survey, the National Labour Force Survey, the (Industrial) Manufacturing Survey as well as the Industrial and Establishment Survey. Using the data of the 2015 Population and Housing Census, UNFPA supported the Lao Statistic Bureau in completing its population projection. The final report is available since the end of 2017.

With support from UNICEF, the provincial authorities of Bokeo, Xiengkhouang, Phongsaly and Huaphanh have benefited from the development of a database and dashboard on planning and monitoring, using the existing Lao Social Indicator Survey data, and other major household surveys and administrative data for monitoring the national and provincial development agendas. The statistics departments in the provinces are now better able to use online tools in designing, developing and managing provincial databases and dashboards.

With support from UNFPA, and applying a multi-sectoral approach, the zero draft of the revised National Population and Development Policy is now available for further review and discussion with the sectors. The revision is expected to be completed and approved in mid-2018. Similarly, with the strong engagement of youth, UN Agencies have jointly supported the development of a youth policy, which is expected to be endorsed by June 2018.

Together with National Institute for Economic Research and UNICEF, a National Research Framework has been developed and disseminated in November 2017. This overarching and forward-looking research framework will facilitate evidence generation to inform policy-making, planning and sharing of learning and knowledge. The development of the National Research Framework serves as a reference document to guide socio-economic research with respect to the implementation of Lao PDR's Vision 2030, Strategy 2025, and the 8th National Socio-Economic

Development Plan.

The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry was supported by UNDP to conduct research on marketing. A number of national products were selected, food items to begin with, where Lao PDR potentially has a comparative advantage. Possible markets abroad were analyzed with the aim to optimize the future income of local producers. The first results of the analysis of markets in France and the United Kingdom seem promising. The Ministry of Agriculture's work on geographical indications will likely ease this initiative.

As part of implementation of the national action plan on elimination and protection of child labour, in 2017, the national committee discussed and launched the 2016 survey report on child labour in agriculture in two provinces - Savannakhet and Saravan. The report will be important data source for the government to plan and respond to challenges.

Decent rural employment

UNIDO supported the development of human and institutional capacities on standards, metrology and testing and related labs systems and their accreditation. A number of national standards have been established, including for concrete columns, gypsum sheets, corn flour, cassava and rubber. Quality and procedure manuals and testing for steel round bars have been approved for accreditation and the standard library for information and training centers has been upgraded.

With UNDP's support, the Government has developed and approved provincial investment promotion strategies for Saravan, Savannakhet and Phongsaly, including action plans and lists of investment projects to be promoted.



ILO and UNDP are among several development partners who continue to provide support to UXO survivors and their families through immediate medical assistance, physical rehabilitation activities and economic and livelihood support.



The 6th Lao Organic Agriculture Forum, supported by UNCTAD, focused on expanding organic exports through sustainability standards targeting producers, manufacturers, traders, exporters and government agencies as well international and regional development partners.

UNIDO provided technical support to major salt factories in Vernkham, Kengkok and Boten in conducting energy audits and provided a testing demo for green and clean technologies of salt production at Vernkham salt factory. Following a satisfactory demo, the factory foresees expansion and further investments. UNIDO also developed capacities of staff from private and state-owned financial institutions on evaluating credit and project appraisal for potential green and clean investments. An Information and Learning Center for solid biofuel production and usage at the Renewable Energy and New Material Institute, and an Information and Learning Center for solid biofuel production and usage will be launched in the course of 2018.

In 2017, with support from UNDP and other development partners, a cumulative number of 7,068 Confirmed Hazardous Areas, covering 17,275 hectares, have been identified as part of the ongoing first national survey of UXO. During 2017 alone, 5,304 hectares were cleared, leaving a remaining 51,247 hectares of Confirmed Hazardous Areas for clearance at a later stage. In the same period there were 41 casualties, the lowest figure in a decade. To reinforce this positive trend, advocacy through radio, as well as risk education at schools and at the village-level continue throughout the country. ILO and UNDP are among several development partners who continue to provide support to UXO survivors and their families through immediate medical assistance, physical rehabilitation activities and economic and livelihood support.

With ILO support, the 2016 Vientiane Declaration on 'Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN' was followed up with a 16-point Action Plan for its implementation, with two points already implemented in 2017. ILO also supporting the piloting of a decent work and rural employment promotion strategy. In this regard, the capacity of around 50 provincial and district officials in Sekong province on rural employment promotion was strengthened. Training was provided on issues such as occupational safety and health in farm and home-based work, value chain improvement, motorcycle repair and livestock raising. The rural employment initiative was extended to Savannakhet province. Meanwhile, with UNDP's support, livelihood support centers have been set up in two districts in Saravan province to assist men and women to access information on topics such as

agriculture, education and employment, including skills development on tailoring, traditional weavings and cooking.

UNDP in partnership with Lao Women's Union, supported the establishment of livelihood support centers in two districts in Saravan province. These assist men and women to access information on topics such as agriculture, education and employment, including skills development on tailoring, traditional weavings and cooking. Economic groups such as agriculture, livestock, handicraft, and microfinance and savings groups were established, promoting a community driven working approach, which will serve as the basis for future development. Business



Eight community radio programmes on safe migration were broadcasted in three target districts (Lakhonpheng in Saravan, Khop in Xayabouly and Nonghed in Xiengkhouang). Awareness raising campaigns on safe migration were conducted in target districts, to enhance community understanding of human trafficking, labour exploitation and what safe migration means.



practices and entrepreneurial skills were developed and marketing networks strengthened through training and knowledge exchanges with neighboring. By the end of 2017, over 5,000 people from 4 districts (Saravan, Taoy, LaoNgam, and Vapi) benefitted from improved access to livelihood resources and services.

UNODC has worked closely with the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision on introducing legal livelihoods to poor opium-cultivating farming communities.

17,214 additional users of financial services – 88 percent of them women - were recorded in 2017 as a result of the joint Bank of Lao PDR and UNCDF programme on Making Access to Finance more Inclusive for Poor People. These include 6,545 additional users of digital financial services: Of these, 5,040 users used the innovative service BCEL Community Money Express, with BCEL offering financial services in villages by contracting shop

owners – the BCOME agents; this proximity service enables the depositing of funds without traveling to the bank. Moreover, shopkeepers can replenish their stocks by paying their suppliers instantaneously, and remote family members in need can be supported. BCEL has expanded its agents network from 128 at the end of 2016 to 196 at the end of 2017. 1,505 people used the internal trial of the digital wallet Unitel U-Money: it offers a digital wallet linked to the Unitel SIM card that users can use to make peer-to-peer money transfers and pay bills. Unitel is neck-to-neck with Lao Telecom to vie for the leading position on the Laos mobile telecommunications market with 40 to 45 percent market share. Once the service has been authorized for nationwide piloting by Bank of Laos Users will be able to cash-in and cash-out at any of the 200 district branches of Unitel and a network of 300 agents.

Strengthened safe migration mechanisms

With technical support from ILO, the Prime Minister's Decree No. 68 on sending Lao workers to work abroad and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's Decision No. 43 on recruitment agency establishment and management were revised. The regulations for the protection of migrant workers have also been developed. This was accompanied by capacity development to better put into practice the International Conventions No. 97 on Migration for Employment and No. 143 on Migrant Workers.

Eight community radio programmes on safe migration were broadcasted in three target districts (Lakhonpheng in Saravan, Khop in Xayabouly and Nonghed in Xiengkhouang). Awareness raising campaigns on safe migration were conducted in target districts, to enhance community understanding of human trafficking, labour exploitation and what safe migration means.

Social Protection

The National Social Protection Strategy 2018-2030 has been drafted with technical support from the ILO, and inspired by the Lao Constitution and the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020). The strategy built on the Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection conducted by Government, and development partners, including the UN, to evaluate Lao PDR's social protection system.

Significant steps have already been taken to achieve the goals envisioned in the draft National Social Protection Strategy, in particular the extension of social security coverage. In 2017, 288,647 people were enrolled in the National Social Security Fund, of which 135,221 females, and 5,769 self-employed people (female: 2,674). As part of the Government's efforts to enhance access to social protection, an actuarial

analysis on the social security fund was finalized in 2017 and contributed to the revision of the national Social Security Law.

The merger of all health insurance programmes under the National Health Insurance Programme covers 91 percent of Lao citizens in 2017, according to latest data. This is an effort to accomplish the goal of Universal Health Coverage by 2025.

The National Assembly together with key Government counterparts benefitted from an orientation and advocacy session on Parliamentarian's potential engagement for better results for children supported by UNICEF. The workshop aimed to raise awareness on child-related issues such as nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; child protection; early childhood education and public finance for children.

To raise the profile of children and create an enabling environment for child-friendly policies and plans, particularly on national budget allocations to social sectors, UNICEF in partnership with the National Assembly organized an orientation session on "Strengthening Parliamentarians Involvement for better Results for Children" and monitored budget allocation for social sectors. The child budget analysis process has also been kicked off, engaging in Public Finance for Children to support the government for increased allocation and monitoring of budget expenditure for social sectors.



The National Assembly together with key Government counterparts benefitted from an orientation and advocacy session on Parliamentarian's potential engagement for better results for children supported by UNICEF. The workshop aimed to raise awareness on child-related issues such as nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; child protection; early childhood education and public finance for children.



Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The quality of partnerships remains vital to the success of the UN's interventions and should be continuously monitored. The UN agencies provide continued support to programme planning and implementation, often complementing national capacities. National ownership and sustainability should therefore be systematically enhanced, including through regular dialogue, information sharing and documentation of lessons learned, in addition to the ongoing capacity development efforts. In this regard, it is fundamental that capacity development as a long-term process is owned and driven by the national partners, in particular on monitoring and evaluation.

It was observed that national budget allocations to UN-supported programmes have significantly enhanced commitment and ownership. Continued advocacy for national budget allocations towards UN-supported programmes will therefore be important. A general lack of resources for the longer-term government budget commitments to social protection is observed and further advocacy is required in this regard.

Technical capacity and awareness on population and development will be important to increase understanding and awareness on population issues, especially regarding disadvantaged and vulnerable group. More technical support on population and development will be required across sectors, to ensure integration into all sectoral plans and programmes.





3. CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENT



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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status in 2017
3.1. Proportion of land area covered by forest	46% (2015)	70% (2020)	46% (2015) Forrest cover is 58% (2015) as per methodology used in the FIPD Forest cover map
3.2. Number of persons per 100,000 directly affected by natural disasters	Being established by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	Being established by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	Tbc
3.3. Agricultural value affected by natural disasters and climate change	Being established by Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Being established by Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Tbc
3.4. (a) level of hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption and (b) signature and ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury	(a) hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption of 2.3 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes (2010); (b) Minamata Convention on Mercury not signed (2010)	(a) hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption of 1.5 Ozone Depleting Potential Tonnes (2020); (b) Minamata Convention on Mercury signed and ratified (2021)	(a) 2.03 tons of hydrochlorofluorocarbon consumption; (b) Minamata Convention on Mercury signed and ratified

In 2017, the mandate for disaster relief, response and recovery was moved from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment back to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with MONRE retaining some responsibilities for preparedness and forecasting in the context of climate-related events. The reallocation of mandate between ministries has not reached down to all provinces and districts, leading to some confusion. The Climate Change Decree and the Disaster Management Law should clarify responsibilities, and their implementation will be crucial. The Disaster Management Law will define complementary roles and responsibilities amongst Government agencies before, during, and after a disaster, providing a legal context in which each Ministry can operate.

In 2017, Lao PDR was again affected by a number of natural disasters. It experienced a more intense wet season, and a further increase in frequency of extreme weather events can be expected in the coming years. Between end July and mid-August, parts of Lao PDR were heavily impacted by the flooding and landslides around tropical storm Sonca. Tropical storm Doksuri in September resulted in less damages and losses in comparison. The worsening locust infestation in the North of the country is now known to cover at least 23 districts.

Lao PDR continued to prioritize climate action. The Department of Climate Change of the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment completed the final revisions of the draft Climate Change Law. The revised draft law now reflects key aspects including the establishment of information systems for monitoring climate change, the strengthening of data sharing, and the facilitation of access to information. In addition, the law also defines the steps for assessment of vulnerability to climate change and the procedures for survey and registration of climate change data by key line ministries.

The review of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions was completed and implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions has begun.

UNDP, together with the Government and other development partners supported the Delegation of Lao PDR to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 23) on 6-17 November. In addition to participating in the negotiations the Delegation also participated in three side events for the three initiatives supported by UNDP: a joint South-South Cooperation Side Event with Timor Leste, showcasing small-scale climate resilient infrastructure and nature-based solutions; a panel discussion on the Circular Economy Study published in September 2017; and the launch of the Nationally Determined Contributions Support Programme by the UNDP Administrator, a global initiative with Lao PDR as a beneficiary country.



Lao PDR continued to prioritize climate action. The Department of Climate Change of the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment completed the final revisions of the draft Climate Change Law. The revised draft law now reflects key aspects including the establishment of information systems for monitoring climate change, the strengthening of data sharing, and the facilitation of access to information.



Development Partners, including several UN Agencies, continued advocacy for the cessation of illegal wildlife trade and support to the Government on implementing recommendations of the CITES Compliance Mission of 2016. In particular, and with UNDP support, the Penal Code has been revised, and illegal wildlife trade has been included as a criminal offence with appropriate penalties and fines. The Government also welcomed the CITES Secretariat for another Mission in 2017. Government has continued to remain responsive at the highest level, with the Prime Minister's directive to improve regulatory framework to combat illegal wildlife trafficking.

A new Decree No. 258 on Pesticide Management was released on 24 August, as a milestone in implementation of Government policy to bring the control of pesticide use in Lao PDR in line with the international framework for the management of pesticides. Lao PDR already was a contracting party to the Stockholm Convention and in 2010 also became a party to the Rotterdam and Basel Conventions. The new Decree on Pesticides Management regulates activities related to the import, export, transit, trade and use of pesticides in Lao PDR, as an important factor in enhancing food and nutrition security and protecting human health and the environment.

Results

Capacities in disasters preparedness, response and recovery strengthened

Before the start of the rainy season, in June, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee led by the Government and co-chaired by the UN approved a revised Inter-Agency Contingency Plan. The simplified plan ensures an effective, timely and coordinated response to mitigate the risk and reduce the impact of natural disasters on communities. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee also convened in October to discuss the impact of tropical storm Sonca, which had caused flooding and landslides between end July and mid-August.

WFP supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to conduct a joint rapid needs assessment following widespread flooding brought by tropical storm Sonca. The capacity strengthening support included primary data collection and analysis and use of remote-sensing imagery to inform decision-making. While the assessment concluded that there was no need for immediate food assistance, the Ministry requested further capacity strengthening support on disaster preparedness and response.

With UNDP support, the Government launched a Disaster Management Database called LaoDi which contains both historical and current data, fifty data variables, sixteen types of disaster events and support capacity building for reporting on the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

Items such as water buckets, jerry cans, water purifying tablets, coagulant, chlorine granules, and soaps have been prepositioned by UNICEF in 13 provinces, to enable a faster response to any affected populations in the provinces. Training on disaster risk reduction was provided to provincial and district departments and Village Disaster Prevention Units in Saravane province, along with the provision of disaster prevention kits. Training was also provided to government officials and local masons from Phongsaly province on construction of water tanks which can be used for rain water harvesting as alternative source of water in areas where the traditional water sources are unavailable. Responding to small-scale disasters, UNICEF distributed emergency life-saving items and other supplies to 2,400 affected people affected by fires and floods in Saravan province.

The capacities of national and provincial agencies in the health and agriculture sectors were further developed to prevent, detect and respond to avian influenza. In this regard, FAO and WHO continued to support enhanced surveillance by the Government sectoral agencies along the poultry supply chain in Luangnamtha, Oudomxay, Luangprabang, and

Xayabouly provinces and in Vientiane Capital. Throughout the year, WHO and FAO supported the Ministries of Health and of Agriculture and Forestry to respond to avian influenza outbreaks in Vientiane capital, Xaysomboun, and Champasak provinces, with all parties working collaboratively to ensure the outbreak was stamped out in the poultry flock and no human cases resulted from these outbreaks. The provincial and national teams continued to develop capacity to investigate and respond to the outbreaks in a timely manner. WHO/FAO supported a One Health Symposium to encourage communication and enhance coordination mechanisms between relevant Government agencies.

Support was also provided to the further development of the multi-sectoral One Health National Action Plan on Anti-Microbial Resistance for 2017 – 2021, including translation into Lao language, a technical review, and submission for endorsement by the leadership of the Ministries of Health and of Agriculture and Forestry. Consultative meetings were held with key national stakeholders to reinforce the One Health approach to addressing Anti-Microbial Resistance. To support eventual adoption of the National Action Plan. Practical tools were provided along with training to strengthen work on Anti-Microbial Resistance and Anti-Microbial Use in Lao PDR, to develop surveillance for Anti-Microbial Resistance in food animals, and to strengthen laboratory capacity for surveillance and monitoring systems and anti-microbial residue analysis and susceptibility testing in food. A pilot study on anti-microbial stewardship in Setthathirath Hospital was implemented as the first of many



Before the start of the rainy season, in June, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee led by the Government and co-chaired by the UN approved a revised Inter-Agency Contingency Plan. The simplified plan ensures an effective, timely and coordinated response to mitigate the risk and reduce the impact of natural disasters on communities.



activities planned to address this priority. During Antibiotic Awareness Week in November, an event was held for decision-makers from relevant ministries and health professionals to improve awareness and understanding, infection prevention and control and an antibiotic stewardship pilot study.

Capacities in climate resilience strengthened

The Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment completed the final revisions of the draft Climate Change Law, supported by UNDP with ADB and the International Federation of Red Cross. The revised draft benefitted from broad-based, cross-sectoral, provincial and inter-ministerial stakeholder consultations, including inputs provided by several UN agencies, including UNDP and UN Women. The revised draft Climate Change Law now reflects key aspects including the establishment of information systems for monitoring climate change, the strengthening of data sharing, and the facilitation of access to information. In addition, the Law also defines the steps for assessment of vulnerability to climate change and the procedures for survey and registration of climate change data by key line ministries. It is expected to be submitted to the National Assembly in 2018.

Support was provided to the REDD+ Division of the Department of Forestry on the preparation of the draft Emissions Reductions Program Document for submission to the Carbon Fund Participants in 2018. The preparation of the Program Document involved various consultations between a wide range of stakeholders on topics such as analysis of deforestation drivers, theory of change for identifying interventions, benefit sharing, land and resource tenure and carbon accounting.

With FAO support, an institutional assessment has been completed of the two wetland areas in Lao PDR protected under the Ramsar Convention, and Wetland Stakeholder Groups have been created to discuss synergies and cooperation on sustainable use and climate adaptation. Support has been provided for the completion of baseline assessments and studies on resilience-related aspects in terms of geospatial resource mapping and Geographic Information System development, wetland hydrology, gender needs and mainstreaming, vulnerability to climate change, the options for reopening of the wetlands, and the nature and scale of infestations by invasive plants.

UNDP and UNCDF completed thirteen small-scale, climate resilient infrastructure projects while linking these to nature-based solutions through ecosystem-based adaptation techniques. This will improve the resilience of the target communities in both wet and dry seasons. Both men and women have been beneficiaries under this initiative.

With UNDP support, Lao PDR signed its first Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme with the Green Climate Fund which seeks to strengthen the national framework for access to climate finance and ensure multi-sectoral engagement in national climate response.

Capacities in protection and management of forests and ecosystems strengthened

The open-source "Collect Earth" software tool was introduced to Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices through six training courses, exposing national and provincial level forestry staff to remote sensing technologies, and methods to self-assess forest cover changes for their geographic area of interest. Staff from all six provinces under the Emissions Reduction Program of Lao PDR (for REDD+) were trained in use of this tool. Provinces' ability to monitor local forest cover change on an annual basis has been enabled as part of the REDD+ mechanism. Previously, forest cover assessments were done only on a 5-year basis at the national level, without direct involvement of provincial authorities.

Support was provided to the National University of Laos to conduct an assessment to identify areas and approaches in Lao PDR for forest landscape restoration. In the target area of the assessment, a broad area was identified as suitable for restoration, with various levels of priority. Among the areas identified, plots were further selected as pilots where the University could promote restoration activities, engaging local communities to take these up. The assessment report was used as a tool to inform and disseminate the approaches on forest landscape restoration to government agencies and other parties that work on forest restoration. UNDP supported replanting of trees in degraded watersheds in Savannakhet Province, which will contribute to the national target of 70 percent forest cover by 2020. Village Conservation Teams have been established in the endangered Eld's Deer Sanctuary to improve monitoring within this protected area and to reduce habitat degradation of the globally important dry dipterocarp forest ecosystem.

Support was provided by FAO so that a methodology for using Village Forest Management Planning and Agreements was conceptualized and institutionalized as the primary mechanism through which the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Department of Forestry promotes good village forestry practices. Training modules on Village Forest Management Planning that adopt principles of adult learning were developed in Lao language, Training-of-Trainer sessions were provided to key Department of Forestry staff, who then delivered two provincial-level courses for participants from eight provinces.

Support was provided to the Standing Office for Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Department of Forest Inspection to strengthen their abilities to link programme support to the related Lao-EU roadmap and work plan. Through partnerships with three organizations, FAO has advanced the FLEGT process in the country through support to the Lao FLEGT CSO Network in engaging the process, small and medium timber processing enterprises in engaging in legal timber supply chains; and to the National University of Laos for timber species identification. In addition, FAO hosted the first technical meeting between key FLEGT and REDD+ stakeholders in Lao PDR which identified strong potential linkages and steps to operationalize them. FAO then commissioned Forest Trends to develop actionable recommendations to advance national policy and implementation of REDD+ and forest governance processes in Lao PDR.

In supporting the country to protect the environment and to fulfil the country's obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and based on the National Implementation Plan defined in the national policy on Persistent Organic Pollutants management, UNIDO provided technical support to address the area of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in containing equipment and waste, and Polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins as well as polychlorinated dibenzofurans from open burning activities. The 2nd draft of the Decree on Controlling of the Import-Export of PCB Products was supported, along with the 2nd draft of the Guideline on Disposal and Management of PCBs, and completion of the 1st draft report on Health and Environmental Impact of PCBs in Lao PDR. The PCB treatment facility site has been identified and agreed with Electricite Du Laos. The draft structure and content of curriculum on POPs with a focus on PCBs was completed in collaboration with the National University of Laos. A total of 330 samples were collected out of the target of 953 samples within Vientiane Capital and another 309 samples from major cities around the country. Lab tests showed that more than half of the samples contained high concentration of PCBs (some cases as high as 768 ppm against the permitted standard of 50 ppm). Those transformers are being labelled and awareness and management of PCB has been raised.

Best Applicable Techniques and Best Environmental Practices for Open Burning activities were demonstrated, aiming to assist the country to reduce unintentional Persistent Organic Pollutants emissions from the burning of solid waste and landfills. The legal framework and draft specific policy were reviewed, setting targets to reduce current Polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxin and polychlorinated dibenzofuran releases by 90 percent at pilot demonstration sites, along with an assessment of the impacts of common and traditional open burning practices, and a review of the effectiveness of policy, laws, legislation, regulatory frameworks including financial/incentive mechanism.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Despite a shift in mandates towards the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment remains vital for building resilience to climate change, advancing green growth, promoting sustainable use of natural resources, and improving the coordination between line ministries.

Emergency preparedness, and particularly strengthening of the national early warning system remains a major priority. In this regard, it is essential that knowledge and skills in disaster risk reduction provided to provincial and district government staff through the institutional support and training can be applied to benefit the people.

It is similarly important that the UN continues to support the development of the REDD+ and FLEGT programmes with cross-linkages, as these initiatives will leverage major benefits in increasing forest cover as well as in climate change mitigation. The UN will also continue to support access to climate finance and readiness programmes.

Sharing of information between animal health and human health sectors occurs largely during outbreaks and is mostly ad hoc rather than routine. The existing coordination mechanism is not fully operational and faces challenges in sustaining its functions and relevance. In addition, the capacity of national health care systems and personnel to effectively integrate climate-related risks into policy, planning, and regulatory frameworks is limited. The limited awareness across sectors of the health risks posed by climate change hinders consideration of climate change impacts into national and sub-national adaptation planning.





4. BASIC EDUCATION



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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	Target (2021)	Status (2017)
Percentage of new entrants in Grade 1 of primary education with pre-school experience	51% (girls: 52% / boys: 50%) (2015)	75% (girls: 75% / boys: 75%) (2021)	61.7% (girls: 62.4%; boys: 61.0%) <i>(Ministry of Education and Sports Education Management Information System, 2017)</i>
Survival rate in primary education (girls/boys)	78% (girls: 80% / boys: 77%) (2015)	93% (girls: 93% / boys: 93%) (2021)	81.1% (girls 82.6; boys 79.7) <i>(Ministry of Education and Sports Education Management Information System, 2017)</i>
Proportion of youth (female/male) employed as a result of participation in vocational training programmes	30% (2015)	70% (2021)	34% of male youth; and 43% female youth who report that their highest education completed is TVET are in employment <i>(Preliminary results from 2017 Labor Force Survey)</i>

2017 was another important year in the development of Lao PDR. The government adopted the national human resource development strategy to 2025, highlighting its commitment to education and human development. This will help boost the ongoing efforts of the implementation of the 8th Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020), the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020) and the Sustainable Development Goals, which form the basis for the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework (2017-2021). Recognizing its importance, the 2017 Round Table Implementation Meeting dedicated one panel discussion and a plenary policy dialogue to investment in skills and labour for human development.

In the context of the ongoing education reform led by the Ministry of Education and Sports and supported by development partners, some good progress has been made against the national targets, with continued focus on basic education. Nevertheless, public investment in the education sector did not meet the 18 percent target of the national budget, leaving little fiscal space for necessary capacity development. Allocative efficiency in the sector budget also requires further improvement to enable a more result-based sector financing.

The Ministry of Education and Sports has undergone a major institutional restructuring during 2017, including changes in high-level officials. Associated reforms of the Education Sector Working Group were carried out, facilitating coordination within the ministry and with development partners for the implementation of the Education Sector Development Plan. As a result of the institutional changes, programme implementation required a flexible approach.



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Localisation and integration of SDG 4 on Education was further advanced through regional cooperation, including the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 and the Asia-Pacific Regional Technical Capacity Development Workshop on Effective Planning of Education Sector for Achieving SDG4-Education 2030 through south-south cooperation with Malaysia. At the country level, the ongoing primary curriculum and teacher education reforms, along with the sector planning and statistics reforms, have contributed to mainstreaming SDG 4 into the Lao context. UN agencies have played an important role in supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports in this critical effort.

Results

During the first year of implementation of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework, good progress has been made towards children and youth enjoying better access to inclusive and equitable quality basic education and vocational skills. Based on the Results Groups Joint Work Plan for 2017-2018, coordination among relevant UN agencies has been further strengthened, which has enabled a more harmonized and effective approach in supporting the government to attain the national targets.

According to the Education Management Information System, the rising trend of Early Childhood Education enrolment for children aged 3-5 continued in 2017, reaching 52.7 percent in 2017 (boys 52.5; girls 52.8). Between 2016 and 2017, the percentage of new entrants in Grade 1 with Early Childhood Education experience made great strides, from 51.2 to 61.7 percent. Both the primary repetition rate and drop-out rate continuously decreased, from 5.8 percent to 4.1 percent (boys 4.8; girls 3.4) and from 7.8 percent to 4.4 percent (boys 4.7; girls 4.1), respectively. Together with the constant rise of the primary survival rate, which currently stands at 81.1 percent (boys 79.7; girls 82.6), the lower-secondary gross enrolment rate continued to increase from 78.1 percent in 2016 to 82.9 percent (boys 85.1; girls 80.5).

Despite these achievements, half of the children aged 3-5 remained excluded from Early Childhood Education services, and the highest repetition and drop-out rates continued in primary early grades (Grade 1 and 2). Whilst girls are better off in these key indicators throughout the primary level, the situation is adverse in the lower-secondary level. Only 60 percent of primary schools have functioning water and sanitation. Significant urban-rural, socio-economic, sex and ethnic disparities persist across the sector.

Lao PDR continued its effort to reform the Technical and Vocational Education and Training and skills development system to narrow the gap between quality supply and demand for skilled workers. The preliminary results of the Labor Force Survey in 2017 showed some progress in promoting youth employment through Technical and Vocational Education and Training programmes, with a higher rate among females (with 43 percent of trained young women entering employment) compared to males (34 percent). However, challenges remain in linking skills development with employment and income generation opportunities as well as productivity and poverty reduction.

To address these challenges, the UN Team, led by UNICEF, focuses on four strategic priorities in education, in which relevant UN agencies have comparative advantages and have the capacity to effectively support the government. These outputs are aligned with the sector plans, and inter-linked and complementary to each other to achieve the overall Outcome goals.

Enhanced health, WASH and nutrition in formal and non-formal education

In 2017, school health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition was promoted through a comprehensive approach, which was collectively assisted by relevant UN agencies. Tangible results were achieved both at school and community level as well as at policy and system level, strengthening the linkage between the two. This downstream-upstream linkage, along with associated capacity development, helped enable school and community level interventions to be more sustainable, and inform policy and practices for further improvement through a bottom-up approach.

At the school and community level, with UNICEF's support and in partnership with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 6,237 children (3,041 girls) gained access to improved water, sanitation and hygiene services, including gender- and disability-sensitive latrines and boreholes, in 85 primary schools. These schools, together with additional 115 primary schools and 50 pre-primary schools in four provinces, benefited from hygiene education, where 19,188 primary (9,164 girls) and 1,269 (622 girls) pre-primary students have practiced improved daily hygiene behaviors. Relevant Provincial and District School Health Task Forces, as well as primary and pre-primary teachers and school principals were trained to ensure the sustainability.

WFP continued to assist more than 140,000 pre-primary and primary students with nutritious school meals in four Northern and three Southern Provinces.

The school meals act as a pull factor for children's access, retention and better learning. The first part of the transition towards handover of the school meals programme to the government and communities was completed in 2017, whereby all 1,450 school communities were shifted from the provision of mid-morning snack to lunch for children. To strengthen the communities and their ownership, WFP also provided school agricultural, hygiene and cooking trainings, and established handwashing stations and dining rooms.

With UNFPA support, a girls' group initiative under the name of 'Nang Noi' was developed and piloted in 10 villages in Savannakhet. In partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports, the initiative aims to delay pregnancy and marriage as well as keep girls in school. This pilot includes 200 girls aged 10-12 and 20 mentors aged 16-24 from the 10 target villages.

At the policy and system level, development of national standards for water, sanitation and hygiene in schools was initiated with UNICEF's support, and the updated school garden guidance was finalised with WFP's support. These efforts have been made in collaboration with other development partners, including Australia, GIZ and the Japanese Association for Aid and Relief. The full handover of the school meals programme is scheduled for 2019 onwards.

Strengthened teacher education and other capacity building

The UN's support on capacity development of government officials, school administrators, teachers and communities was delivered through multiple channels. This has collectively contributed to enhancing the knowledge and skills of key stakeholders in delivering quality services for targeted learners.



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In 2017, UNESCO supported the capacity development of provincial-level government officials to provide in-service teacher training at the provincial level. In July, a capacity and training needs assessment was conducted for officials from the Provincial Teacher Development Centres and the Teacher Development Unit under the Provincial Education and Sports Service in 18 provinces. Based on this, a training manual on strategic planning and project management is being developed and an 8-day training workshop for provincial officials will be organised in 2018. Preparation for training sessions on facilitation; and monitoring and evaluations skills is underway.

With UNICEF's support, 188 (female: 151) pre-primary teachers and school principals enhanced their knowledge and skills through experience exchange workshops and training, which benefited 3,120 (girls: 1,450) pre-primary students. 20,000 (girls: 9,235) primary students in 227 primary schools enjoyed better teaching-learning delivered by teachers, who were assisted by Pedagogical Advisors. These advisors were trained and supported for their school outreach with UNICEF's support. The District Education and Sports Bureaus and Provincial Education and Sports Services in the same districts and provinces were assisted by UNICEF to strengthen their capacity for monitoring and mentoring support, including their school visits. To advance a holistic approach to Early Childhood Development, in partnership with Lao Women's Union, Parenting Education was conducted in Saravan province, benefiting 2,436 (female: 1,477) parents and care-givers.

As part of the national rollout strategy on know-how about business learning, ILO has developed the capacity of 28 secondary school teachers of grade 5 in teaching and facilitating know-how about business in tourism, including printing of teacher guides and student books.

UN Women brought a gender perspective to the Ministry of Justice's Mediators' Manual and Training of Trainers Manual on Village Mediation Skills. These manuals now include content on applying a victim-centered approach when Village Mediators are approached by women who have experienced violence. 19 trainers from the Ministry of Justice learned how to apply this approach in practice.

With IOM's support, 57 returned victims of trafficking have been assisted with vocational training along other social protection services. Information, Educational and Communication materials on safe migration have also been produced and disseminated to government partners, accompanying capacity building trainings for government officials on victims protection and victim assistance provision.



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Improved school and teacher education curricula

During 2017, significant achievements in curriculum improvement at different levels of education, and skills development education and training. The UN-supported revisions of curricula and associated materials have led to improved quality and relevance of the education and training designs.

UNESCO supported a summative evaluation of early childhood teacher education curriculum (bachelor's degree level) in Dongkhamxang Teacher Training College. To date, the curriculum is rolled-out in Dongkhamxang (with a total over 400 students enrolled), Luangnamtha, Saravan, Bankeun, Luang Prabang, Pakse and Savannakhet Teacher Training Colleges (TTC). Based on the evaluation results, expected in January 2018, UNESCO will help the curriculum improvement to better prepare prospective early childhood teachers and promote inclusive, gender-sensitive learning environments. UNESCO will also assist capacity development of relevant teacher educators from TTCs. This initiative will also help make Dongkhamxang TTC to serve as a Centre of Development in Early Childhood and Primary Education.

With UNICEF's support, the national School Readiness Competencies were revised - one of the first revisions made in the East-Aria and Pacific region. Based on the revised competencies, the national pre-primary curriculum and teachers' guides were revised. This revision enhanced quality, relevance, age-appropriateness and continuum to the primary level. The revised curriculum will be rolled-out after a pilot in 2018.

Age-appropriate comprehensive sexual education, developed with UNFPA's support, has been integrated into the revised national primary curriculum for Grade 2. This aims to increase the knowledge of students aged 7-8 on life skills. The integrated comprehensive sexual education in the revised curriculum has been piloted in five target schools in Savannakhet province. In addition, UNFPA supported the Ministry of Education and Science to produce a booklet, with the theme of showing respect in the family, to supplement the national curriculum.

ILO supported Champasak skills development center to review and design a 45-day training, assessment and testing process as well as internship programme for providing motorcycle repair skill training to rural workers. ILO also continued supporting the government in designing national skills standards and curriculum of bricklaying and plastering for mutual recognition of skills with other ASEAN countries.

IOM has trained 40 female students in Tourism and Hospitality in partnership with Lanith college in Vientiane. Following this training, the students participated in an internship in Bangkok at various 5-star hotels. Upon return, many of the students started working in hotels, or within the tourism and hospitality sector.

To enhance the understanding of nutrition among school children, WFP and FAO supported a pilot to include school agriculture and nutrition into the primary curriculum and education and provided inputs to the overall curriculum discussion.



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Increased access, participation and learning outcomes of students in rural and remote areas

UN-Government joint efforts in enhancing equitable access to quality education and skills development opportunities were further advanced through multiple modalities, especially focusing on rural and remote areas. The achievements have contributed to narrowing the disparities in education and training, and thus have helped advance the SDG 4 goal of universal life-long learning.

Supported by UNICEF, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Sports and Village Education Development Committees, 20 new Community-Based School Readiness centres were established in 2017 and started operation in remote communities in two provinces, benefiting 521 children (280 girls).

WFP supported the distribution of more than 40,000 books for children in rural and remote areas as well as targeted literacy strengthening activities.

A total of 10 families were trained on mushroom cultivation supported by ILO. In addition, advanced motorcycle repair training was carried out by the Champasak Skill Development Centre. The ILO expert is supporting the centre in improving training and apprenticeship programme for 25 selected villagers.

Production and broadcast of safe migration community radio programmes was undertaken with IOM's support, via a new station operated by the Lao Youth Union. The radio broadcast is estimated to reach up to 200,000 people.

Evidence-based advocacy and actions

In 2017, continued efforts for evidence-based advocacy have enabled government partners to take informed policy decisions. This has contributed to strengthening result-based sector planning and development.

With UNICEF's support, the Ministry of Education's costed Action Plan for Early Childhood Education (2018-2022) was developed in alignment with the 8th Education Sector Development Plan. A costed Education and Sport Information Management System Strategic Development Plan (2018-2022) was developed and endorsed by the Government. UNESCO supported the establishment of a database system to monitor in-service training. These will inform the annual workplans of the Ministry of Education and Sports and the upcoming Education Sector Development Plan Mid-Term Review, scheduled in 2018 through the Education Sector Working Group.



WFP plans to hand over 500 school meal initiatives in 2019 and the remaining 940 in 2021 to the Government and communities. In 2017, WFP set up a tool to analyse the strength of each of the communities to increase contributions and sustain implementation of school meals.



The UNICEF-supported reviews of the primary student learning outcomes; student assessment system; and pedagogical supervision system, have led the Ministry of Education and Sports to develop a coherent national policy framework on student learning assessment, which is currently underway with UNICEF's support. A longitudinal study of water, sanitation and hygiene in schools provided critical recommendations for further improvements.

WFP plans to hand over 500 school meal initiatives in 2019 and the remaining 940 in 2021 to the Government and communities. In 2017, WFP set up a tool to analyse the strength of each of the communities to increase contributions and sustain implementation of school meals. The analysis enabled WFP to establish targeted packages of support for

mobilising the communities and their ability to solve problems and increase access and attendance rates to primary education. Beyond regular monitoring mechanisms, WFP has also established a feedback mechanism for communities so they can contact WFP relating to the support provided.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

Key bottlenecks remain related to the limited institutional and human capacities of Government institutions at all levels, especially at sub-national level. Mid- and long-term strategies will be required to sustainably develop national capacities at all levels, in particular in monitoring and evaluation. There also remains a critical need for enhancing the ownership and accountability of the government to ensure the sustainability of the programme interventions.

Moreover, weak coordination, including inter-departmental coordination within the Ministry of Education and Sports as well as coordination between the national and sub-national levels, needs to be better addressed. Enhanced coordination and collaboration among development partners also remains significant to enhance programmatic synergies and avoiding duplicated efforts. The UN Results Group on Education will further strengthen linkages with the existing education sector coordination mechanism, to enhance joint advocacy and promote a harmonized approach towards the national targets.

In 2018, UN-supported programme will continue to strengthen the government's capacity at all levels, with strengthened linkage of upstream-downstream work. Coordination among the UN agencies will be further improved to enhance the joint impact and sustainability.





5. HEALTH, WATER AND SANITATION



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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status
Maternal mortality ratio	197 per 100,000 (2015)	160 per 100,000 (2020)	197 per 100,000 (2015)
Under-five mortality rate, girls/boys	64 per 1,000 (2016) (girls 83 per 1,000/ boys 95 per 1,000)	40 per 1,000 (2021) (girls and boys)	64 per 1,000 (2016) (girls 83 per 1,000/ boys 95 per 1,000) <i>Lao Social Indicator Survey data will be available in January 2018.</i>
Percentage of population using improved drinking water source and sanitation facility	76% water supply coverage; 71% sanitation coverage (2015)	90% water supply coverage (2020); 80% sanitation coverage (2020) (female: 30% / male: 70%) (2021)	Proportion of population using an improved source of drinking water: 80.4% Proportion of population with access to an improved (and not shared) sanitation facility: 72.6% <i>UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme, 2017</i>

In 2017, the Lao economy continued to grow at around 7 percent, which should translate into improved social determinants. The Ministry of Health launched several important initiatives, such as the tax-based social health protection scheme and better monitoring of tobacco tax collection. The issuance of a tobacco control fund decree allows the Ministry of Health to collect a 2 percent of profit excise tax or 200 LAK per pack on imported cigarettes, whichever is higher. The fund will be used for tobacco control interventions and to improve health facilities. It will be pooled into the national health insurance programme.

Nevertheless, domestic spending on health as a percentage of total government spending still lags behind the national target of 9 percent of the national budget. With continued economic development and potential graduation from Least Developed Country status, external funding to the health sector may decrease. Collective efforts are therefore required to integrate donor-funded vertical programs into the health system and to ensure the sustainability of funding for priority health services. Inequities remain, with child mortality rates and access to high impact interventions, together with care received, varying by geographic location, ethno-linguistic group, mother's education and socioeconomic status.

The National Health Insurance scheme is expected to be available nationwide in 2018 to improve access to health services at low cost for the entire population. If implemented effectively by all stakeholders, including government authorities and health workers, the insurance scheme has the potential to significantly reduce the financial burden on households and contribute to the Government's commitment of achieving universal health coverage.

In July, Lao PDR reached a milestone as WHO confirmed the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem. The country has integrated efforts to reduce neglected tropical diseases into its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) program. Access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene is linked to disease prevention, improved nutrition and better health outcomes for communities.

Access to healthcare services has improved for maternal and child health, as the Ministry of Health defined and endorsed the essential health service package per facility. Partners are supporting the development of an Emergency Obstetric Neonatal Care training module, which has been tested and finalized.

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Moreover, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Health to draft a Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene strategy and its plan of action. The strategy will also foresee the implementation of a district-wide approach to eliminate open defecation.

In the area of infectious disease, Lao PDR continues to build International Health Regulation core capacity to detect, assess, notify and report events, and respond to public health risks and emergencies of national and international concern. In this regard, the Ministry of Health runs a functional Emergency Operation Centre that handles outbreak and emergency response. In 2017, Lao PDR successfully stopped further transmission of the vaccine derived poliovirus type 1. The virus has not been detected since 11 January 2016.

In 2017, outbreaks of dengue, hepatitis A and clusters of influenza A were reported. The provincial and national teams continued to develop capacities to investigate and respond to the outbreaks in a timely manner. With technical support from WHO, Lao PDR has conducted a Joint External Evaluation for International Health Regulation core capacity in February. The National Work Plan for Emerging Infectious Diseases, Public Health Emergency and Health Security has been revised based on the evaluation's recommendations. In terms of laboratory capacity development, laboratory quality and biosafety are key to strengthen laboratory capacity. National laboratory quality standards, and laboratory biosafety regulations and guidelines were developed and submitted to the Ministry of Health for approval.

In the context of the End Tuberculosis Strategy, the National Tuberculosis Programme continued its effort to increase treatment coverage, with the case detection rate increasing from 37 percent in 2015 to 42 percent in 2016. The Lao National Tuberculosis

Strategic Plan (2017-2020) commits to increasing domestic financing to tuberculosis programmes, offering molecular diagnosis of tuberculosis, including multi-drug resistant tuberculosis for all presumptive patients nationwide, providing free quality drugs to all tuberculosis patients and integrating the tuberculosis data system into the Health Management Information System using District Health Information Software.

Results

Health sector partners continued to work together to achieve universal health coverage, with a focus on human resources for health, health financing, service delivery, and strengthening health information systems, governance and accountability.

As a crucial step towards Universal Health Coverage, with technical support from WHO, a set of essential health services were identified for each facility and community through extensive coordination and consultation among relevant government counterparts and development partners, including other UN agencies such as UNFPA and UNICEF.

Phase II of the UN Joint Programme on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health was launched with support of UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO. This four-year joint programme supports the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (2016-2025). In addition to supporting integrated service delivery, the UN Joint Programme supports the national Secretariat for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in its coordination and oversight role.

To reduce the current maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, WHO in collaboration with UNFPA supported the government in testing and developing a training module on Emergency Obstetric Neonatal Care. The training was rolled out in four provinces. Furthermore, UNFPA supported the national Maternal Death Surveillance and Response steering committee through establishing a permanent secretariat based at the Maternal and Child Health Centre. The secretariat's role includes the consolidation of maternal death notifications from provincial and central-level hospitals; conducting reviews in liaison with provincial and central Maternal Death Surveillance and Response committees; and quality assurance. UNFPA supported all 18 provincial committees in conducting maternal death reviews and developing responses.

In addition, support was provided by UNFPA to conduct a cost-benefit study on family planning. A policy brief was produced and disseminated during the National Family Planning Conference, with the aim

“UNODC has continued to work with the Ministry of Health and the Lao Commission for Drug Control and Supervision on introducing Community Based Treatment centres for drug users in district hospitals around the country. During 2017, UNODC worked with national counterparts on establishing 15 additional centres.”

to accelerate political commitment to ensure universal access to, and coverage of, family planning information and services. This strengthened the partnership for financial sustainability of contraceptive commodities by bringing together Government, technical experts, private partners and civil society.

UNFPA provided support to the Ministry of Health to develop the National Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Service guidelines, to raise awareness among health-care providers on the special characteristics of adolescents and appropriate approaches to address some of their health needs, and to strengthen the ability of health-care providers to respond to adolescents more effectively. The guideline is endorsed by the Ministry of Health, and training of providers will be rolled out in 2018. This will contribute to achieving the Noi 2030 vision for adolescent girls, which emphasizes the importance of health.

To reduce neonatal and under-five mortality to less than 12 and 25 per 1,000 live births, respectively, WHO, in collaboration with other agencies, has supported the government to roll out Early Essential Newborn Care to all provinces and at least one district per province.

Lao PDR has set up the Health Professional Council to register health professionals. It has endorsed the National Health Insurance Strategy 2017 – 2020 and the revision of the Health Insurance Law. The District Health Information System has been extended to cover HIV, tuberculosis and malaria at both district and health centre levels, through a pilot project in Luang Prabang.

In the context of the Health Sector Reform, the government has shown commitment to strengthening the community health system, realizing that to achieve universal health coverage, concrete steps must be taken to improve the community service delivery. The Ministry of Health's Decree No. 2175 foresees the implementation of integrated, community-based services in 8 provinces, including on nutrition, mother and child health, water, sanitation and hygiene and environmental sanitation. Furthermore, a strategic action plan for community service delivery is being developed with support from UNICEF and partners.

The national vaccination coverage in 2016 showed a decline in coverage of all antigens compared to 2015. The WHO-UNICEF estimates of national immunization coverage for the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine for instance declined from 89 to 82 percent and measles coverage fell from 88 to 76 percent. The decline in national immunization coverage is due to several factors; in part, the decrease in programme performance is explained by the need to respond to the outbreak of vaccine derived poliovirus type 1. During these campaigns, routine immunizations were delivered which may not have been recorded in vaccine registers as per normal operations. With support from WHO, Lao PDR became the second country in the world to introduce the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Stop Transmission of Polio / Immunization and Surveillance Data Specialists project.

Moreover, WHO supported the Center for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in updating the National Treatment Guidelines, the policy on pre-exposure prophylaxis and the retesting policy. HIV self-testing in high-risk populations and partner notification were promoted. WHO also supported the Center for HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections to update the national Sexually Transmitted Infections Guidelines, with emphasis on supporting the triple elimination of HIV, viral hepatitis and syphilis. Following capacity development of data managers on data entry and data approval, HIV and sexually transmitted infections are now reported through the District Health Information System.

UNODC has continued to work with the Ministry of Health and the Lao Commission for Drug Control and Supervision on introducing Community Based Treatment centres for drug users in district hospitals around the country. During 2017, UNODC worked with national counterparts on establishing 15 additional centres. These will be operational in the first half of 2018, increasing the total number of Community Based Treatment centres in Lao PDR to 28.

In the area of water, sanitation and hygiene, according to the Joint Monitoring Programme of WHO and UNICEF, the population with access to an improved source of drinking water (within 30 minutes distance) has reached 80.4 percent and the population with access to improved (but not shared) sanitation facilities has reached 72.6 percent. WHO and UNICEF continued to support Government partners in promoting Water Safety Plans as part of an integrated package for communities and to ensure the safety of drinking water from catchment to consumer.

With UNICEF support, an estimated 3,341 people including 1,584 females in rural areas gained access to improved source of water in Phongsaly, Saravan and Savannakhet Provinces. 6,237 primary school children including 3,041 girls in 85 schools have access to gender segregated and accessible school latrines for boys, girls and children with disability equipped with handwashing stations, and improved source of water in Saravan and Savannakhet provinces. 19,188 children including 9,164 girls in 195 primary schools and 1,269 children including 629 girls in 50 pre-primary schools are practicing hygiene behaviours on a daily basis.

Through the district-wide approach of scaling up sanitation, 114,000 additional people (57,000 female) are now living in open defecation free communities since 2017.



Delivering essential services and making healthcare affordable for everyone requires extensive collaboration, including on health finance, human resources, health information, with actors in and beyond the health sector.



Lessons Learned and Way Forward

In 2017, several Director-Generals retired from their positions and were replaced by their deputies or senior Ministry of Health officials from other departments. Transitioning to the new leadership has been smooth, and programmes continue to be implemented with support from development partners.

Delivering essential services and making healthcare affordable for everyone requires extensive collaboration, including on health finance, human resources, health information, with actors in and beyond the health sector. For example, reducing maternal mortality through improving the quality of perinatal care requires not only strengthening the emergency obstetric care but a more comprehensive approach including uninterrupted supply of essential medicine and equipment, a referral system, and routine care to prevent emergency cases.

Sequential integration of Early Essential Newborn Care into the health system, including health financing, human development and health information, can be used as a model for sustainable institutionalization.

UNICEF and Nam Saat introduced the district-wide approach of elimination of defecation, considering the entire district as one unit rather than just targeting the communities. UNICEF and Nam Saat are developing Standard Operating Procedures for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committees with the objective to institutionalize these.





6. FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The most vulnerable people benefit from improved food security and nutrition



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status
Outcome Indicator 6.1: Prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity (FIES) and Food Consumption Score (FCS)	FIES and FCS within the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2017/2018	TBD	<i>Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey results will become available in early 2018</i>
Outcome Indicator 6.2: Percentage of children 6-23months with improved dietary diversity	Baseline: TBD from LSIS2	TBC	<i>See above</i>
Outcome Indicator 6.3: Wasting prevalence among children under 5 years	Baseline: 9.6 % (LCAAS 2015)	Target: < 5%	<i>See above</i>
Outcome Indicator 6.4: Annual data on nutrition generated by national nutrition surveillance system	Baseline: Nil	Target: Annual reports	Constrained

The 3rd annual National Nutrition Forum and the 1st Nutrition Technical Symposium were conducted in November. The National Nutrition Forum concluded with an Outcome Statement summarizing the key nutrition related commitments and priorities of the Government and Development Partners for 2018. Emphasis will be given to data generation and analysis for improved nutrition policy and programming, greater effort given to address behavioural determinants of undernutrition and ongoing support for national and sub-national multi-sectoral coordination for nutrition and convergence of nutrition actions in target provinces and districts.

On the occasion of World Food Day and International Day and National Week for the Eradication of Poverty in 2017, a seminar on “Change the Future of Migration: Invest in Food Security and Rural Development” was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the UN Team in October. Observations were made by a panel of experts comprising national and local Government, UN agencies, and the private sector. The seminar concluded on the need to address both forced displacement due to natural disasters, and also the root causes of movements of people due to hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change; and to invest more in rural development through innovative policies that create business opportunities and jobs for young people that are not only agriculture-based. It was agreed that the Sustainable Development Goals can only be reached with the inclusion of all people, including migrants, and by facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships at all levels to leverage expertise and resources that can meet immediate and long-term needs of migrants, as well as origin and host communities.

Related to the two above events, the priorities of the development partner’s group for food security and nutrition include; (1) national and sub-national level multisectoral coordination and convergence of nutrition actions; (2) addressing social and behavioural determinants of undernutrition; (3) strengthening human resource capacities and systems for nutrition specific and sensitive services delivery; (4) improving quality nutrition information systems including but not limited to data collection, reporting and analysis to inform nutrition programming and policy dialogue.

Linked to the priority on data, evidence for informed decision-making is being made available through a number of surveys and analyses. The Lao Child Anthropometric Assessment Survey, conducted in 2015, showed a downward trend for stunting among children under five years of age. Compared to the Lao Social Indicator Survey, stunting decreased from 44 per cent in 2011 to 36 percent in 2015. Despite this

reduction, undernutrition remains a significant issue. The Government, with development partner support, has prioritized nutrition because of the inclusion of undernutrition as part of the Human Development Assets Index, one of the three criteria for graduation from Least Developed Country status.

It is expected that results from the Lao Social Indicator Survey 2017 will provide up-to-date data on key nutrition indicators such as stunting, wasting and underweight. The results are pending and expected to be released sometime in the first or second quarter of 2018. The data was not available at the time of writing this report.

The Fill the Nutrient Gap Analysis provided a detailed review of nutrition situation, dietary intake, food security, household food expenditure, and socio-economic status. It has been carried out to facilitate future decision making for the Government to improve the quality and access to nutritious food, especially



The Fill the Nutrient Gap Analysis provided a detailed review of nutrition situation, dietary intake, food security, household food expenditure, and socio-economic status. It has been carried out to facilitate future decision making for the Government to improve the quality and access to nutritious food, especially during the critical period of the initial 1,000 days of life.



during the critical period of the initial 1,000 days of life. The key findings show that the cost of a nutritious diet varies significantly across the country. The analysis outlined high availability of nutritious ingredients, while noting the strong link between stunting and unaffordability of staple diet across different provinces. The analysis also found that it costs more to meet nutrition requirements of adolescent girls, pregnant and breastfeeding women. The analysis revealed that cost of nutritious diet for a non-breastfed child aged 12-23 months, is 52 percent higher as compared to a breastfed child. Finally, it shows that improving diet diversity and quality, rather than quantity of food, would result in greater nutritional benefits.

Drawing from the various analyses, new laws and policies have been developed and institutions established. The Ministry of Health for instance led the process of reviewing and drafting a new Decree for the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. This new Decree is expected to be submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister for endorsement in quarter one of 2018. The Decree describes regulations related to the promotion, marketing and advertisement of breastmilk substitutes, roles and responsibilities of health workers and includes guidance on penalties for violations of the Code regulations. Once implemented, the Code Decree will provide the necessary enabling environment for mothers to breastfeed according to WHO and UNICEF recommendations.

Provincial Nutrition Committees have been set up in all provinces of Lao PDR, and initial delays in setting them up have been resolved. Challenges are anticipated on how each committee initially functions because the members are not familiar with their new roles and the inter-sectoral, multi-stakeholder coordination that is required. This anticipated challenge is being mitigated by providing each province with a coordination facilitator to support the functions of the Provincial Nutrition Committees. Moreover, to date there are also 44 District Nutrition Committees. It is expected that further districts will establish their respective committees over the course of 2018.

Results

Increased capacities for sustainable agricultural commercialization

FAO and WFP provided technical support to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for a range of activities designed to improve food security. To achieve this outcome, the UN Team focused on supporting capacity building for sustainable agricultural commercialization, community-based agriculture infrastructure plans and implementation of the Farmer Nutrition School training package.

Moreover, support was provided to enable the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to engage more strategically on policy dialogue and multi-stakeholder coordination in relation to the sector's responsibilities under the National Nutrition Strategy Plan of Action, ensuring synergy and convergence on actions related to nutrition-sensitive agriculture nationwide. This leadership has been reflected in a balanced approach within the Agriculture Development Strategy to nutrition-sensitive agriculture and commercialization of the sector; a reformed Committee, Secretariat, and Technical Working Team on nutrition-sensitive agriculture; and a more coherent approach to the design of the new nutrition-sensitive agriculture programme, funded by the French Development Agency AFD.

In the context of the Agricultural Development Strategy and the National Agrobiodiversity Programme, technical assistance was provided to the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute and Department of Agriculture for the development of the National Seed Policy, following the framework of the FAO Voluntary Guide on Seed Policy Formulation. Similarly, technical assistance was provided to the Department of Livestock and Fisheries and the formulation of the National Livestock Development Policy, with stakeholders broadly consulted on both policies.

Institutional capacities of more than 20 national and local organisations, led by the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute, have been developed towards strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems, and enhancing policy linkages and functional aspects involved in agricultural value chains. Five innovation "niches" have been supported, with two in the rice value chain, two in livestock and one in horticulture. An Innovation Fair was held, bringing together the representatives of the five niches with stakeholders from other innovation systems, to compare approaches to capacity development and lessons learned. In addition, a National Policy Dialogue was held to review the capacity needs of the two innovation niches in rice, involving a wide range of stakeholders from Government, private sector (including the banking sector), civil society and farmers' groups. Following the Policy Dialogue, a policy brief was prepared for submission to national and local authorities on recommended approaches to address local level innovation.

Support was provided to several departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for the development of a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to sustainable intensification of production at the landscape level for the lowland/paddy rice system with associated aquatic animal resources, using Farmer Field Schools and other participatory extension methods. This result drew on the following two initiatives:

Interventions on Sustainable Intensification of Rice Production in lowland rice have been scaled up through Farmer Field School programmes. Season-long Farmer Field Schools were scaled up to cover 18 locations across four Provinces, with a total of 553 rice farmers (including 238 women) participating in 2017, and with a cumulative total of 1,551 Lao farmers (including 579 women) trained between 2015 and 2017. The interventions on the sustainable intensification of rice production have resulted in increased productivity (1.3 - 1.4 tons/ha) and lower costs to give extra revenue. This was brought about through better understanding and application of the benefits of the sustainable intensification of rice production amongst enablers and farmer and of the potential of mechanization technologies and services available; and uptake of innovative practices for sustainable agriculture production.

Support was provided to expand the geographic scope of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's small-scale agriculture-aquaculture promotion trials during 2017, and to increase the impact on improving food and nutrition security among small-scale farmers. The trials have been expanded from two to five provinces covering both the North and South, and the number of farming families participating in the trials has increased from 37 to 104. An assessment and review of the trials has enabled the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to refine and develop its approach to promoting small-scale agriculture-aquaculture farming systems. New operational procedures and guidelines have been developed for government extension workers to support farmer learning groups and promote more effective farmer-to-farmer training.

Under the "Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction" project and in close consultation with farmers, retailers, and millers, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was supported in the formulation of strategies for improving the efficiency of rice value chains, to reduce losses and better estimate their cost. These strategies are based on analyses of the nature and level of quantitative and qualitative losses of harvested rice, the prices and value added of raw materials, intermediary and final products, as well as social and environmental impact of the various supply chain operations.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was also supported in the development of Strategic Investment Plans for four provinces in the North, covering the sustainable production and commercialization of ten commodities. Working with local authorities in the provinces, data defining the current and future value chains were analyzed using the RuralInvest tool, and reports have been developed for cardamom, tea, coffee, poultry, pigs, cattle and aquaculture.

Under the Soum Son Seum Jai Programme, WFP and IFAD supported communities to create assets which would bring long-term impacts on social-economic and livelihood development for communities and as well as help target communities become food secure during the lean season through conditional food assistance. The partnership established 86 assets in 66 villages in Oudomxay Province, including 60 community rice banks, 14 water supply systems, 11 rural access roads to production areas and 1 irrigation system.

Increased capacity for planning, implementing and monitoring nutrition sensitive interventions

Data illustrating the impact of nutrition sensitive interventions on children will be available in early 2018, when the Lao Social Indicator Survey findings are released. WFP and FAO have supported the Ministries of Health and Agriculture and Forestry to increase their capacity for planning, implementing and monitoring nutrition sensitive interventions. There has been strong sector-wide contribution to the national Social Behaviour Change and Communication strategy.

“Under the “Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction” project and in close consultation with farmers, retailers, and millers, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was supported in the formulation of strategies for improving the efficiency of rice value chains, to reduce losses and better estimate their cost.”

Support was provided to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to identify and build on successful experiences with nutrition-sensitive agriculture through two FAO projects: one piloted use of specific nutrition-sensitive agriculture activities within the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action and baseline tools; the other capitalized on experiences of a wide range of development partners implementing nutrition-sensitive agriculture in Laos. These efforts benefited from and fed into discussions within a newly-formed 'community of practice' comprising International NGOs and other development partners involved in delivering and advising nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions.

The organizational capacity of the Department of Planning and Finance within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was enhanced in the development of tools and plans for food security and nutrition at the national level, as well as the ability to provide training and mentoring support for planning staff at the provincial and district level government agriculture offices. Moreover, the Ministry was supported in the development and piloting of a monitoring and evaluation framework for sub-national nutrition sensitive agriculture programming, and capacities of key government institutional stakeholders have been developed at national, provincial and district level for the monitoring and evaluation of nutrition sensitive agriculture programmes.

Through the Agriculture for Nutrition project, WFP is supporting communities in 400 villages and 12 districts to develop village nutrition sensitive agricultural infrastructure plans. Technical assistance is also being provided by WFP to Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry and Health for the design and implementation of the Farmer Nutrition School training package and Social Behaviour Change and Communication materials.

Moreover, WFP provided technical assistance to the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat and the Ministry of Health to commence the process for formulating a National Food Fortification Strategic Action Plan. An initial multi-sectoral and intra-ministerial consultation was held with the relevant stakeholders in September and consultations will continue in 2018.

WFP in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports has continued the provision of school meals in more than 1,500 schools reaching 150,000 primary schools students across the country as part of the school feeding programme.



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WFP, UNICEF, FAO, EU and USAID supported the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat in organizing the First National Nutrition Technical Symposium from 31 October to 1 November in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Education and Sports, Agriculture and Forestry, and Planning and Investment. The symposium brought together more than 400 delegates from national and provincial governments, development partners, academia, clinicians, students, media, private sector and international development partners.

Increased capacity for planning, implementing and monitoring nutrition specific interventions

Data on wasting prevalence among children under 5 years will only be available in early 2018 when the findings of the Lao Social Indicator Survey are released. UNICEF, WFP, WHO and UNFPA have supported the Ministry of Health to implement the ten nutrition specific interventions from the National Nutrition Plan of Action (2016-2020).

To build the capacity of Ministry of Health to plan, implement and monitor nutrition specific interventions, WFP has provided technical assistance to the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat to carry out the Fill the Nutrient Gap and Cost of Diet analysis in Lao PDR. The report was launched by the Minister for Health in September. The analysis was based on a multi-sectoral consultative process along with capacity building of the Ministry of Health and Provincial Departments of Health staff in areas such as market surveys, analysis and data interpretation. The findings of the review will be used by development partners and government in various reports including the design of the national Social Behavior Change Communication Action Plan.

WFP has continued collaboration with the Ministry of Health in the implementation of the stunting prevention during initial 1,000 days of life project in 1,116 villages in Oudomxay, Luangnamtha and Sekong Provinces, reaching on average monthly basis 22,087 beneficiaries (5,318 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and 16,769 children 6-23 months). WFP has also supported implementation of nutrition education and awareness campaigns in Oudomxay and Sekong provinces in partnership with Population Services International, reaching more than 14,000 beneficiaries in 401 villages. Nutrition education sessions were held in 715 villages by the Village Health Volunteers in Oudomxay, Luangnamtha and Sekong provinces, reaching 25,025 beneficiaries.

UNICEF provided technical assistance to the National Nutrition Centre for the development of micronutrient guidelines, clinical and operational guidelines for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition and a National Decree for the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. UNICEF contributed to increased capacity for the provision of Infant and Young Child Feeding counselling at community level in the districts in Savannakhet Province and six districts in Houaphan Province in 2017. 140 Lao Women's Union health volunteers were trained and have improved skills to support caregivers of children aged 0-2 years with information and counselling for breastfeeding, complementary feeding and health hygiene promotion. UNICEF supported capacity building for health staff to treat and manage children with severe acute malnutrition and as a result, the three southern provinces Attapeu, Sekong and Saravane have improved active case finding at village level, a more responsive and relevant health care service for treatment and follow up, and improved nutrition data management. UNICEF supported the distribution of Micronutrient Powder to children aged 6-23 months through integrated health outreach in Savannakhet, Saravane and Attapeu provinces.

UNICEF also continued its support to the Ministry of Health in implementing the Universal Salt Iodization programme and quality assurance and quality control activities were carried out by Food and Drug Department in all eight salt factories across the country. The web-based iodization monitoring tool was implemented and put into use by the salt factories, with access provided to the Food and Drug Department of the Ministry of Health, who used the inputs as a basis for additional quality checks.

WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF supported the implementation of nutrition specific related actions under the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child Health strategy (2016-2025). Deworming for pregnant women, vitamin A for children aged 6-59 months

and family planning services were provided through integrated health outreach and routine maternal health services. A total of 1,171,707 - or around 90 percent of school age children - received deworming tablets. WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA also supported the Ministry of Health to develop a Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition Essential Services Package, which, when implemented, will ensure a harmonized, integrated and standard package of services is available at each health care delivery point - from village to tertiary hospitals.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will be able to leverage greater engagement in nutrition from its own agencies through the Committee for Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, its secretariat and the technical working team, through the multi-stakeholder Community of Practice on Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, and through a standardized results framework.

The outcomes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's work on improving production at the landscape level for the lowland/paddy rice system with associated aquatic animal resources will be followed up by a joint communication strategy for the capitalization of lessons learned across all concerned departments from three years of farmer-led trials, under the heading of "Green Rice Landscapes".



A combination of central-level policy dialogue, informed by continued participatory study and learning along with sub-national practical coordination and implementation, will continue to heighten the profile and support for nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Working across UN agencies and with multiple projects implementing specific interventions will help improve the focus on nutritious foods and household-level food security.



The Ministry's work on small-scale aquaculture has confirmed the effectiveness of farming families producing a year-round supply of nutritious food by integrating small-scale fish culture into their rice-based farming systems and more effectively recycling on-farm nutrients. The Ministry now has a promotion strategy for working with small-scale farmers to reach the government's national average consumption target for fish of 28 kg per person per year by 2020. This target is an important component of national strategies on nutrition and poverty reduction.

There has not been an effective indicator for food security at the national level beyond rice self-sufficiency. The Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey, to be undertaken in 2018-2019, will address this through the inclusion of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and the Food Consumption Score. This measure directly relates to sustainable agricultural commercialization and will provide a nation-wide baseline.

The agriculture sector, as the focal point for improved food security, is not yet well oriented towards this task at all levels; the sector remains oriented towards enabling commercialization of the sector as a strategy for economic development and national, rice-based food security. A combination of central-level policy dialogue, informed by continued participatory study and learning along with sub-national practical coordination and implementation, will continue to heighten the profile and support for nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Working across UN agencies and with multiple projects implementing specific interventions will help improve the focus on nutritious foods and household-level food security.

Data obtained from the Lao Social Indicator Survey will be used to inform target areas for convergence of nutrition sensitive with nutrition specific interventions. The Social Behaviour Change and Communication Plan will be finalized and provide guidance on key target behaviours that all sectors - health, education and agriculture - will be able to contribute to changing through their respective communication approaches and channels.

Data from the Lao Social Indicator Survey will also be used to redefine target areas for nutrition specific interventions and the development of the surveillance system and community level monitoring system will provide routine data informing programmatic adjustments.

Multi-sector coordination of nutrition interventions remains a major challenge for the various government agencies, at both central and sub-national levels. The UN agencies will continue to support coordination through an improved set of planning, monitoring, and reporting tools, including a national nutrition information system, roll-out of a Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture planning, monitoring, and reporting system, and designation of priority nutrition districts for convergent planning and action. Limited donor support for the nutrition specific interventions will have a negative impact on the progress of nutrition work. Evidence suggests that the desired outcomes of nutrition sensitive interventions are best seen when complementing the nutrition specific action.

The treatment services for severe acute malnutrition need to be monitored more thoroughly at every level, including provincial, district, health centre and village levels. To support the improvement of service delivery and data management, the national guidelines for integrated management of acute malnutrition should be disseminated to all 18 provinces. UNICEF and WHO will need to continue to work closely together to ensure the national nutrition centres have the capacity to monitor the implementation of these guidelines and to provide additional technical and financial support to the provinces, districts and health centres, including capacity development health providers.

In 2018, UNICEF will be supporting a capacity development plan for nutrition centres and key health staff responsible for the implementation of nutrition specific interventions. The process of developing a national nutrition surveillance system has been agreed by development partners and Ministry of Health as a key priority for 2018. The constraints related to the modalities for providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Health have been resolved.





7. INSTITUTION BUILDING

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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status
Number of new households receiving 2 or more basic services from their districts	373,948 households (2015)	600,000 households (2021)	On track: A new joint programme with Ministry of Home Affairs and others, will begin delivery from 2018 as planned. ¹
Percentile rank on the aggregate Government effectiveness	39.4% (2014)	45% (2021)	39.4 (2016)
Extent to which National Socio-Economic Development Plan monitoring informs evidence-based policy making	Limited extent (2015)	Target: Large extent (2021)	Some progress: Lao Statistics Bureau has a costed action plan to monitor and assess progress towards the 8th NSEDP and SDGs targets. Lao Info Dashboard has been developed in a user-friendly manner in coordination with relevant ministries and the Government agencies

¹ Governance for Inclusive Development Programme 2017-2021 (Joint Programme UNDP/ UNCDF)

Updates to the constitution and laws promulgated in 2016 have been progressively applied during 2017. Among other things, the roles and responsibilities of the offices of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers and Heads of Ministry-equivalent organisations; and the division of labour between different levels of the government and administration have been further clarified. The amendments have also been essential for promoting institutions and policies at national and local level that can support the delivery of quality services to better respond to people's needs. The reforms have benefitted from the results and lessons learned of the 'Sam Sang' (3 Builds) pilot project.

Under the 'Sam Sang' devolution initiative, which has been extended nationwide to all 148 districts, local administrations are assigned more responsibilities and the authority to be more proactive and self-reliant in local development and poverty reduction. The expansion of 'Sam Sang' presents ongoing challenges, given the pressures on the national budget.

The draft Decree No. 75 on Official Development Assistance is in the final stage of development, and the revised Decree No. 238 on Non-Profit Associations has been signed, following a protracted consultation process. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been actively developing the necessary administrative and organizational capacities at all levels for the management of civil society affairs. Guidelines on the implementation of the Non-Profit Associations Decree have been developed. Furthermore, a regular mechanism to discuss the implementation of the INGO guidelines at national and provincial levels was established among INGOs, development partners and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Results

Under the 'Sam Sang' devolution initiative, local administrations are being assigned more responsibilities and authority to be more proactive and self-reliant in local development and poverty reduction. The 'Sam Sang' policy has been extended nationwide, and updated laws have helped to clarify the roles and responsibilities amongst members and different levels of the Government.

The district administrations led the climate resilient infrastructure development process, taking a participatory and bottom-up approach. The process followed the due procedure of public expenditure management and built on the existing District Development Fund mechanism and the inter-governmental fiscal transfer system. Specific targets were established for channeling additional resources to the district administrations in order to develop institutional capacity in managing climate change

adaptive small-scale infrastructure investments at the sub-national level. Under the total allocation of US\$ 2 million, a total of 29 small-scale rural water-infrastructure projects ranging from water supply and irrigation to wetland management and bridge construction, were developed in 12 districts of Sekong and Saravan provinces between 2014 and 2017. The Climate Resilient Grants were implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources in close cooperation with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and supported by UNDP and UNCDF. The public expenditure management process review of the Climate Resilient Grants was conducted in October and produced a detailed business process mapping, lessons learned, and optimization options for further institutional strengthening both at the central and sub-national level.

Through 8 Community Radio Stations, the access to information on national policies, development initiatives and basic services has been increased for marginalised and disadvantaged people, including ethnic groups and women in rural and remote areas. The radio stations, which are estimated to reach around 290,000 people, are supported by UNDP together with IOM, UNODC, UNV and other agencies.

The revised Non-Profit Association Decree 238 has been signed, following a protracted process of consultations. Within the Decree 238, the process in setting up an Non-Profit Associations is more clearly defined; delegated approval is given to various



The newly established Provincial People's Assemblies face implementation challenges. Their capacity remains to be developed, including on their mandate and responsibilities. The legal updates, for example to the Law on Government, Law on Local Administration, Constitution, Law on Elections of the National Assembly and Local Councils approved in 2015, and Law on National Assembly amended in 2016, promise greater devolved authority and clearer roles.



ministries for those associations operating under their aegis; and to Ministry of Home Affairs to manage the register for all types of association; and a more clearly outlined coordination mechanism amongst central ministries and local authorities is established. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been actively developing the necessary administrative and organizational capacities at all levels for the management of civil society affairs. Guidelines on the implementation of Decree 238 are under development. Development partners continue to express concern regarding the obstacles facing civil society's engagement and the impact that might result from the revised decree. Opportunities to understand in detail the content of the revised decrees should be provided to Government officials at all level as well as to the Non-Profit Associations and other key stakeholders.

IOM has been supporting the capacity development of law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges, through prosecution, prevention and protection services to combat transnational crime. In collaboration with the Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutor, Lao Women's Union and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, IOM has held developed national capacities to address human trafficking, including a training of trainers on case processing with the Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutors and a workshop on the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons.

With ILO's technical support, the country's labour inspection system has been strengthened. A Ministerial Decision on the Organization and Functions of Labour Inspectors was issued, leading to the restructuring of the labour inspection roles and mandates. The first ever national Labour Inspection Plan was also developed to provide national strategic direction on priorities and budget allocation. A labour inspection checklist was tested and is in use, proving an important tool for labour inspectors. Also, more than 60 officials of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions received training and are now better able to represent workers' interests and to contribute to resolving labour disputes in the workplace through social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Lessons learned and way forward

The lessons learned from the pilot implementation of the District Development Fund - Climate Resilient Grants highlighted the need to strengthen

coordination between line ministries and agencies to move from silo-based towards more integrated approaches. The establishment of an inter-ministerial coordination body at the central level is ongoing. This will help to address limitations inherent in project-based approaches. To support the development of local administrative and public financial management capacities, including grant management, it would be beneficial to employ a performance assessment mechanism. As the first step to designing such a mechanism, its purpose should be clearly defined in terms of affecting the grants allocation amount depending on the competitiveness of district administrative capacity, providing incentives for improvement, and identifying both institutional and functional capacity gaps and corresponding capacity-building support areas in public financial management. A performance assessment mechanism for governance and institutional strengthening could be designed to be integrated into government internal audit systems to promote and ensure credibility, integrity, quality assurance and maintenance of tracking of financing as an internal government function. A performance assessment mechanism would enhance alignment to the national inter-governmental fiscal transfer and monitoring system, ensuring the appropriate checks and balances by involving the external third parties other than local authorities. An integrated performance assessment mechanism system can introduce quality assurance and verification from the programme in charge of the grants system. The results of the assessments should be published and shared widely to ensure full transparency, public awareness, positive competition, learning and targeted capacity-building support.

The newly established Provincial People's Assemblies face implementation challenges. Their capacity remains to be developed, including on their mandate and responsibilities. The legal updates, for example to the Law on Government, Law on Local Administration, Constitution, Law on Elections of the National Assembly and Local Councils approved in 2015, and Law on National Assembly amended in 2016, promise greater devolved authority and clearer roles. The lack of a state budget entitlement by districts – the lowest level of administration – remains challenging, as earlier efforts to decentralize had faced difficulties in part because newly devolved responsibilities did not come with matching budgets and human resource capacity improvements.





8. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

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



Key Development Trends

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Status
Number of people's grievances redressed through courts and village mediation units using legal aid services	Formal Courts 4,000; Village Mediation Units 4,746 (2015)	Formal Courts: 7,000 Village Mediation Units: 8,000 (2021)	Formal Courts: 4,644 Village Mediation Units: 5,320
Number of Laws certified by the Ministry of Justice that are compliant with requirements of drafting / amending and public consultations	0 (2014)	8 (2021)	6 (2017): Penal code, Law on Lawyers, Law on Judgement Enforcement, Law on Treaties and International Agreement, Law on Supreme People's Prosecutor, and Law on Disaster on Climate Change
Percentage of accepted recommendations of the second Universal Periodic Review cycle implemented	0 (2015)	60% / 70 of 116 (2021)	The implementation of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations was supported by the development of a national Action Plan on the Universal Periodic Review.
Percentage of women in National Assembly, and in leadership positions in State bodies and Party	Baseline: 27.5% in National Assembly (2016), 6.06% in leadership positions in State and Party (2013)	35% in National Assembly and 20% in leadership positions in State and Party (2021)	27.5% in NA 10% in leadership positions in State and Party



Recognizing human trafficking as a major challenge, the Government has adopted a second National Action Plan on Human Trafficking in 2017, complementing the comprehensive Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law of 2015.



Eight years after the adoption of the Legal Sector Master Plan, significant achievements have been made towards Lao PDR becoming a rule of law state. However, progress remains slower than expected. Regional and international integration, while presenting many opportunities, also test the system in terms of rapid economic and social change and transborder trade and crime.

Recognizing human trafficking as major challenge, the Government has adopted a second National Action Plan on Human Trafficking in 2017, complementing the comprehensive Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law of 2015. Article 2 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law defines all offences of trafficking in persons and Article 89 outlines the penalties. Trafficking in persons results in 5-15 years imprisonment and a 10-100 million Kip fine, and offenders are also subject to confiscation of property. Most recently, in May, the Government ratified the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons. However, law enforcement efforts remain modest, and inter-ministerial efforts and coordination on trafficking prevention are still insufficient.

The Lao Women’s Union became the overarching national structure to develop and coordinate the implementation of the national policy and action plans for gender equality and women’s rights in Lao PDR. Its status is now the equivalent to that of a Ministry. The National Commission on the Advancement of Women, Mother-Child is now placed within the structure of the Lao Women’s Union. It is mandated to implement policies, constitution, laws and regulations and continues to be the responsible body to report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Lao PDR submitted the national report to the CEDAW Committee in August. Increased attention was paid to identifying enforcement mechanisms for the recently

passed legislation on the Development and Protection of Women and on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children. It is worth noting that the national core resources include since last year gender budgeting elements. At the Round Table Meeting in November, the Lao Women’s Union highlighted the need for the Lao Statistics Bureau to expand its capacity to collect data disaggregated by sex. The National Assembly and the Ministry of Home Affairs continue to generate annual data on women in leadership positions, with the target to reach 35 percent of women in the National Assembly and 20 percent in leadership positions in state bodies and party by 2021.

Results

In close collaboration with national partners, remarkable progress has been achieved through UNDP’s support to the national Legal Sector Master Plan, the amendment of the law on lawyers; the development of the legal aid and legal fund decrees; the adoption of the law on treaties and the revision of the law on judgment enforcement. These legislative developments are steadily moving forward the legal reform agenda. The support to the national Legal Sector Master Plan has also contributed to the adoption of approximately 109 laws by the National Assembly. Moreover, courts and prosecutors’ offices have been restructured and expanded with new offices and the Village Mediation Units have been established in most villages. Plans to establish an administrative court are underway. A major achievement under the Legal Sector Master Plan was the adoption of the penal code, which benefitted from technical inputs by UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC and WHO.

The codifying of the criminal and civil codes marks a critical juncture in the evolution of the legal sector, as the codes are expected to introduce new legal provisions in both spheres, giving rise to significant changes in the legal landscape.

The legal aid decree was informed by the citizens’ survey led by the Ministry of Justice, which was the first in the justice sector. The survey has set a positive trend in recognising the need to have reliable and current data to draft pragmatic laws. Efforts have been made to expand nationwide coverage of legal aid services. The Lao Bar Association has continued its efforts to expand and strengthen the legal profession in country. There are now three regional provincial branches from North to South (Oudomxay, Vientiane and Champasak provinces) and new legal aid offices were established. Several administrative reforms including the restructuring of the internal administrative frame work of the Lao Bar Association have been completed to enhance accountability.

A database to monitor judgment enforcements and a pilot case management system are being introduced. They are expected to make delivery of justice services more efficient and effective once completed. The case management system in particular is expected to reduce the time taken to transfer files from sub-national court houses to the central level.

UNDP also supported the implementation of 116 recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review that were accepted from a total of 196. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is leading the finalization of the action plan for the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations through broad consultations with stakeholders, including the UN system.

UNODC worked closely with the Government to improve its response to transnational organized crime. A particular focus was placed on synchronizing economic and security agendas in light of ongoing regional integration processes. In this regard, UNODC has inter alia been working with the Customs Department and other relevant agencies to establish a Container Control Unit in Thanaleng on the Lao-Thai border. The Container Control Unit is designed to assist with profiling of containers for inspection. UNODC has handed over relevant equipment, and conducted trainings and mentoring throughout the year to build capacities of the unit, which was officially opened in December. UNODC has also continued to support a network of 15 Border Liaison Offices across the country with training and equipment. Inputs to the revision of the Penal Code were provided on sexual offences, human trafficking, environmental crimes, corruption, anti-money laundering and the financing of terrorism, to enhance the national capacity to respond to transnational organized crime.

UNODC has throughout the year worked closely with the Environmental Police Department, the Customs Department, and the Department of Forestry Inspection to improve capacities for addressing wildlife and timber-crimes through a mentorship programme involving key staff and investigators. Furthermore, UNODC experts have built national capacities on investigation techniques and risk profiling to enhance interception of illegal wildlife trade. Many types of organized crimes are facilitated by corruption. In 2017, UNODC has provided support to the State Inspection and Anti-Corruption Authority on the peer-review process under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. Investigations in regard to transnational crimes often require cross-border cooperation and Mutual Legal Assistance. Jointly with the Prosecutor's office, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNODC has conducted an assessment of obstacles to effective mutual legal assistance and



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extradition. Capacity building measures have been initiated following the assessment. UNODC has also worked with Ministry of justice, the Prosecutor's Office, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Public Security on improving capacities to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. Activities have included trainings for police on sexual exploitation of children in travel, and tourism, and study tours to Thailand and the Philippines.

IOM conducted training of master trainers for official of the Office of the Supreme People's Prosecutor, enhancing prosecutors' access to investigative methods and techniques to combat trafficking in persons. Through the Migrant Assistance and Protection Programme, IOM provided 57 returned victims of trafficking with direct assistance including health checks, psycho-social assessments and counselling, pocket money, daily necessities and travel funds to return to their villages. Victim assistance programmes are active in Savannakhet, Khammouane, Luang Prabang, Oudomxay and Vientiane provinces.

UN Women supported the capacity development of Village Mediation Units, which are now better able to provide gender-sensitive responses and access to justice to women seeking help related to cases of gender-based violence. As a result of UN Women's support to the Ministry of Justice and Village Mediation Units, in collaboration with UNDP, gender-based violence issues are now integrated into the Legal Sector Master Plan; the training curriculum for gender-based violence was developed and is subject to final endorsement; and trainers within the Ministry of Justice were trained on gender norms, causes and effect of gender-based violence and mediation methodologies.

The justice for children project supported by

UNICEF started to develop and pilot community-based preventive and responsive service models for vulnerable children, especially children in contact with the law as offenders, victims or witnesses in 2017. The Secretariat for the Juvenile Justice Coordination Committee started a project on legal and social assistance for children in contact with the law in 15 target villages in Saythany district of Vientiane Capital. For the first time, a legal aid clinic for children was also available at the village level. The project provided a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration between Juvenile Justice Committee for Children and the Commission for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children. This is a good example for the leveraging of resources from Government, UN, INGOs and social/private sector to provide legal services for women and children at the village level.

With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Justice piloted the “Community-Based Diversion program” in four villages in Vientiane Capital and Savannakhet province to demonstrate a model of community support to the rehabilitation and reintegration of child offenders. The project strengthened the capacity of local authorities and community members for applying the laws, principles and procedures of the community-based diversion. Village chiefs, members of mediation committees and volunteers from project sites received training on the skills for facilitating family conference to help families with children in conflict with the law to develop practical diversion plans.

UNICEF also supported the enhancement of services for women and children victims of violence and trafficking. The Lao Women’s Union in Vientiane and in 14 provinces is now better able to identify victims, counsel them, and provide recovery and reintegration services. Basic equipment including bedding for victims and a computer-based telephone system were provided to the Centre. UNICEF also continued to support capacity building of law enforcement officers, social welfare staff and concerned officials to implement the newly approved laws, particularly the Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedure and the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children. Altogether 415 officials (of which 122 females) judges, judge assistants, prosecutors, police officers and social welfare sector staff from 17 provinces and Vientiane Capital received orientation on the Child Rights Convention and the new Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures. These initiatives strengthen the capacities of law enforcement and enhance the availability of preventive and responsive services for children to survive and thrive in an enabling environment that is free from abuse, neglect, violence, stigma, and exploitation, thus contributing to the development of a child protection system.

UNCITRAL has supported the Government in formulating country legal frameworks that enable private sector development and access to rule-based cross-border trade, supporting for instance Lao PDR’s accession to the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods. Despite strong commitment by all stakeholders, there are substantial capacity constraints at the judicial level and thus significant capacity development is required. UNCITRAL will continue its comprehensive capacity development efforts, including on the UN Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts and the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

A body of legal analysis, judgements and precedent cases is nascent. Ongoing support will be required to develop this body of knowledge, which is a foundation stone of a rule of law state. While notable progress has been made in terms of law making and capacity building efforts of justice professionals, ongoing sector challenges include the weak law enforcement and the limited legal awareness and knowledge within the legal sector and administration, and amongst citizens in general.

In cases of gender-based violence, the initial response is crucial, given that women are often re-victimized during the process of investigation. UN Women supports the Village Mediation Units to enhance gender responsiveness, as they are the first contact point for victims. However, there is no clear referral system between mediation unit and formal justice sectors. Moreover, Village Mediation Units members are often not equipped with necessary knowledge on the justice system. Thus, to ensure access to justice, the linkage between Village Mediation Units and legal aid and other formal sectors needs to be addressed further with the Ministry of Justice. UN Women supported the introduction of an Essential Services for stakeholders in legal sector to assist the comprehensive legal pathway including the initial contact. In this context, the UN system as a whole could support the linkage between the relevant legal sectors and the development of a “one-stop service system”.

IOM will continue to support victims and vulnerable individuals, providing direct assistance, vocational training, awareness raising campaigns and training on human trafficking and migration. IOM hopes to broaden victim assistance programmes and awareness raising campaigns to Northern Laos where assistance and access to information regarding human trafficking is limited, and marriage migration to China has become an increasing concern.



JOINT COMMUNICATIONS



Looking back

In 2017, the United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) continued its work to raise the profile of the United Nations in Lao PDR. The UNCG based its work on the UN in Lao PDR's joint Communications Strategy 2017-2021, the UN's Guide to Communicating as One, the Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework 2017-2021 and the Vientiane Declaration for Effective Development.

Previous successful events and an enhanced understanding of the UNCG's work amongst UN Country Team members resulted in a substantial expansion of the UNCG in 2017, with a membership of 22 recruited from 11 agencies and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (compared to 15 members from 9 agencies in 2015). This higher involvement also increased the appetite for joint events and generated a range of requests from agencies for covering their events. While in 2016 the UNCG Secretariat was the main generator of events, in 2017 the focus shifted towards advising agencies and UNCG members in their own communications efforts and coverage of events.

In 2017, the UNCG launched its new community engagement event range, branded Development Dialogues. Three related events were organised in Vientiane around the topics of Road Safety (including a social media campaign, reaching 271,000 people), Inspiration for youth (an event entitled What's your goal?), and Volunteerism, attracting around 300 people in total.

2017 was the year of large-scale online SDG campaigns, relying on two sets of communications products: films and infographics. The 7 min film (and short version) on SDGs in the Lao context and the related #ThisIsDevelopment social media campaign reached 1.5 million people, with the film watched 112,000 times on social media. The film was also broadcast twice on Lao Star TV, a privately-owned channel with national reach, and was screened at a youth event in a cinema theatre in Vientiane, with an audience of 150 people. 18 SDG infographics and a related #IamDevelopment social media campaign reached 983,000 people.

UN Day 2017 was celebrated by opening up the UN House in Vientiane to school children, in the first-ever event of this kind. 150 school children from four different schools around 4 districts of Vientiane capital joined the #OpenUNHouse event, where student were greeted by the Resident Coordinator and led in groups around 11 stations throughout the UN House. The stations illustrated the work of various agencies of the UN family in Laos in an engaging way, and the students received a mock UN passport, which they could fill with their photo at the #MySecGen photo station and SDG stickers collected at the stations.



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A traditional set of events saw UNCG involvement, most notably the Round Table Implementation Meeting 2017 in Pakse, Champasak, with coverage (including the first-ever Facebook live broadcast of the UN in Lao PDR during the opening session of the meeting, with 2,500 views and 43 shares) and ensuring UN visibility at the development exhibition for the duration of the meeting.

International Women's Day, World Food Day, World AIDS Day, 16 Days of Activism for Ending Violence against Women and Girls and International Volunteer Day were all organised with the help and coverage of the UNCG.

During 2017, approx. 60 articles published in 7 different national outlets reached an estimated 60,000 people in Lao PDR – these articles were jointly written by the UNCG, many more stories saw light in various outlets originating from different agencies. National television channels broadcasted from approx. 10 events and meetings that the UNCG had involvement in. International media published at least 5 of the UNCG's stories, including Xinhua, The Nation and Vietnam News.

The UN in Lao PDR's digital platforms experienced a substantial audience increase in 2017:

Website: 63,093 pageviews (total number of visitors) in 2017 (2016: 53,992). Average time spent on page: 3:26 min (2016: 1:44 min – over 1:00 considered good average for content publishing sites). Bounce rate (single-page visits): 60,15% (2016: 51%). Top pages: Vacancies, Home, SDG overview page, About us.

Facebook page: 7,384 page likes, up from 4,791 on 31 Dec 2016. Highest reach: 491,100 (out of which 4,227 organic reach) sharing the SDG film in a boosted post (2016: 51,900 announcing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's visit to Laos). Most likes: 5,021 from Laos (3,220 in 2016), highest percentage (21%) of them females between age 18-24, highest percentage of males: 20%, between age 25-34. Overall slightly more males (53%) engage with the page.

Twitter account: 696 followers, up from 352 on 31 December 2016. Top tweet: Women's invisible burden report launch tweet, generating 7,478 impressions (highest impressions in 2015: 5,045).

Exposure page: No new story in 2017. Story on Ban Ki-moon's visit viewed 1,083 times.

Future strategies

2017 has seen the buy-in from an increasing number of agencies. It was also the year of successfully engaging Lao youth, as well as tried and tested social media advertising in campaigns. The positive momentum of a high interest of youth in the UN's work should be further capitalised on with a string of engaging events and campaigns in the coming months. Strengthening the interface between the UN's work and public interest will be at the core of the UNCG's efforts in 2018 – an increasing number of Lao nationals as members of the UNCG (7 at the end of 2017) is an excellent base for this effort.



As Lao PDR prepares to submit its first SDG Voluntary National Review to the UN in the second quarter of 2018, the UNCG sees it as its task to further unpack the SDGs, graduation from Least Developed Country status and related requirements to the Lao public through dedicated campaigns and events, with particular focus on national media.



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Noi, an advocacy figure created by the UN, representing all adolescent girls in Laos, will receive attention from the UNCG as a way of raising awareness of a societal group previously left behind.

Visual content as opposed to the written word and engaging events will be at the center of the UNCG's attention for 2018, as well as heightened attention to pitching to international media outlets, so that stories from Laos break international news threshold as often as possible.





COMMON BUSINESS OPERATIONS

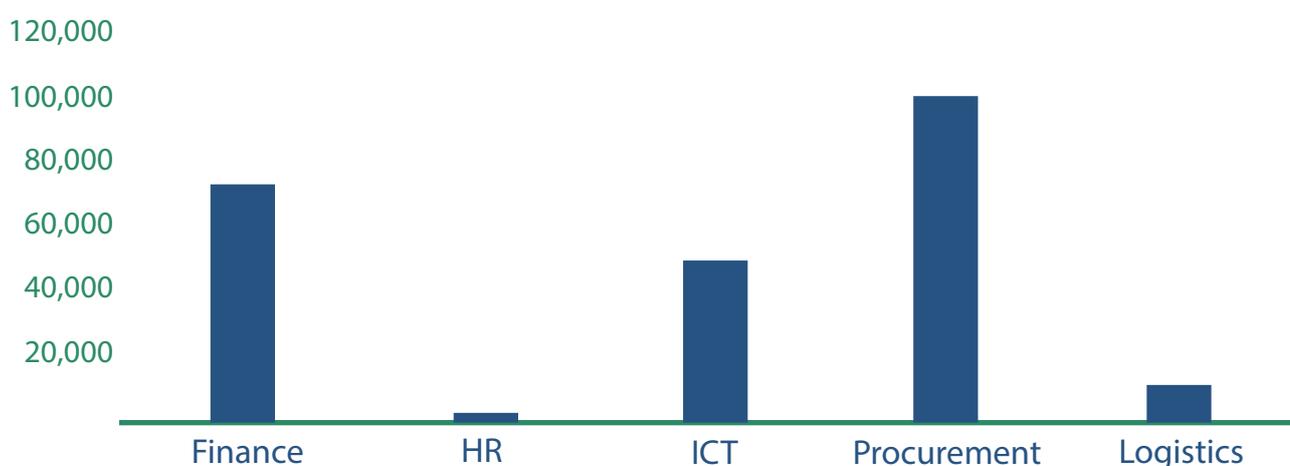


The UN Agencies enhanced their collaboration on operational matters through the first Business Operations Strategy (BOS), which covers the period of the Lao PDR – UN Partnership Framework (2017-2021). It focuses on the areas of finance, human resources, ICT, procurement and logistics. In the first year of implementation and under WFP leadership, the Operations Management Team (OMT) and its sub-working groups achieved estimated cost savings amounting to USD 230,000 across the five areas. Led by WFP, the savings in the area of finance are USD 72,000 thanks to a new waiver for common bank fees for incoming funds (USD 18,000), a common electronic banking (USD 8,000), and improved currency exchange rates (USD 45,000). Under UNICEF, the human resources group developed a common Long-Term Arrangement (LTA) for job vacancy announcements, and organized joint training sessions for UN staff on competency-based interviewing and operations. Total savings in this area are USD 2,000. The ICT group led by UNFPA focused on common internet services through the extension of the LTA, and is working on an arrangement for the maintenance of ICT equipment and VHF radios. The savings amount to USD 48,000. Under the procurement area under UNDP's responsibility, the LTAs with two travel agents and for tax-exempt fuel have been extended. The group is currently working on common

“In the first year of the implementation of the Business Operations Strategy and under WFP leadership, the Operations Management Team and its sub-working groups achieved estimated cost savings amounting to USD 230,000 across the five areas.”

arrangements for translation, customs clearance and stationery. The total savings are USD 98,000. Also under UNDP, logistics supported the fleet sharing pilot with most UN agencies participating. An LTA for car rental and a roster for vetted suppliers are under development. The work on common premises is ongoing. Savings in this area amount to USD 10,000. In addition to the implementation of the BOS, the OMT successfully established a cost-recovery mechanism for the UN Dispensary through a direct billing with the insurance providers. In 2018, the OMT and its sub-working groups will work to further enhance cost-savings.

Cost saving by area in US\$

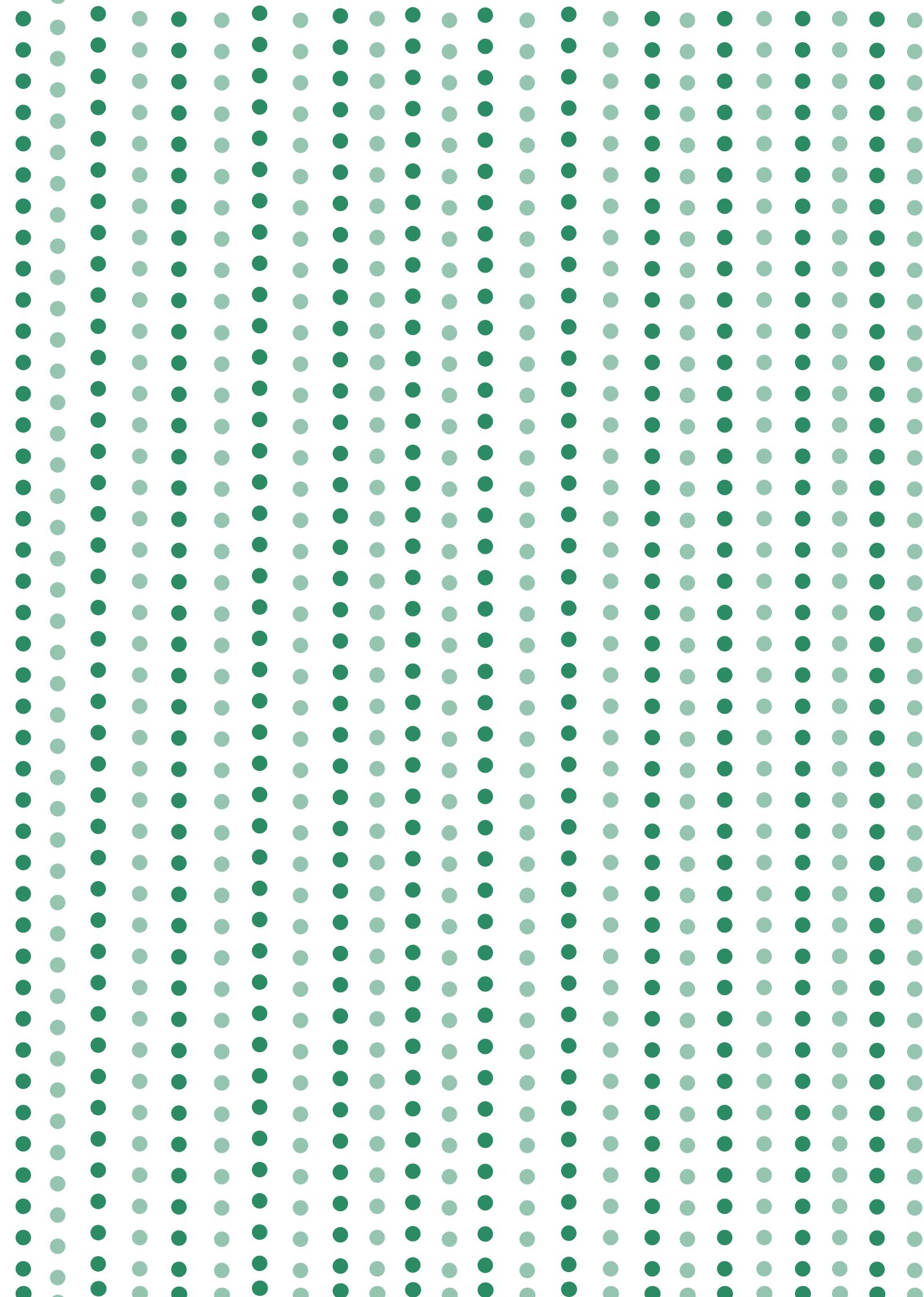




INDICATIVE FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



Outcomes of the Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework	2017		2018		2019	
	Delivery (in USD)	Planned commitments Planned budget = available funds for this period (in US\$)	Funding Gap if any (in US\$)	Planned commitments Planned budget = available funds for this period (in US\$)	Funding Gap if any (in US\$)	
Outcome 1 - Decent Livelihoods	8,941,913	8,790,516	2,939,770	6,993,500	951,000	
Outcome 2 - Social Protection	2,092,257	2,244,368	301,000	1,949,777	301,000	
Outcome 3 - Climate Change, Disaster Management and Environment	9,758,703	12,363,086	1,433,535	10,964,037	2,603,426	
Outcome 4 - Education	11,546,389	11,721,987	1,367,000	10,465,167	2,362,901	
Outcome 5 - Health, Water and Sanitation	11,136,103	11,629,407	2,086,391	18,709,894	1,936,391	
Outcome 6 - Food Security and Nutrition	16,139,705	22,754,188	2,155,338	25,722,895	4,911,888	
Outcome 7 - Institution Building	7,001,380	8,079,090	1,992,995	8,107,121	2,523,703	
Outcome 8 - Access to Justice	3,061,081	2,231,505	2,409,001	1,223,010	2,669,001	
Total	69,677,530	79,814,147	14,685,030	84,135,401	18,259,310	





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