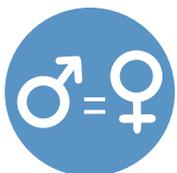




GENDER

GENDER EQUALITY IN LAO PDR



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Legal and political context

Lao People's Democratic Republic's (PDR)'s Human Development Index value for 2018 is 0.604— which put the country in the medium human development category—positioning it at 140 out of 189 countries and territories. Lao PDR has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value¹ of 0.463, ranking it 110 out of 162 countries in the 2018 index. 27.5% of parliamentary seats are held by women. The political representation of women in the National Assembly has grown by nearly 20% since 1990. It's among the highest in the region (27.5% in 2016). However, women continue to struggle to participate in equal numbers. Women are still under-represented in senior government positions (10% in 2018). The Government acknowledged the role of social protection in reducing poverty, inequality, and vulnerabilities and in promoting socio-economic development and social cohesion. The National Social Protection Strategy intends to help the redistribution of economic growth benefits, to alleviate material and non-material deprivation, and to protect vulnerable households from falling into - or back into - poverty. In 2018, Lao PDR participated in constructive dialogue with treaty bodies on the basis of its initial report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the combined third to the sixth Child Rights Convention reports, and the combined eighth and ninth reports on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Findings

Great progress has been made in Lao PDR towards girls' school attendance and gender parity in education, but deeply rooted gender inequalities continue to keep girls and boys from having equal opportunities in their lives. 35% of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 46% of men. In some communities, girls are at risk of child marriage and early pregnancy. Women and girls are expected to carry domestic workloads and care for family members, while their voice and participation in public life carries much less weight. Violence against women and girls is another result of gender inequality. Female participation in the labour market is 76.8 % compared to 79.7 for men². Rural areas are undergoing rapid transformation and off-farm jobs are helping pull households out of poverty. But, at the same time, this also makes women who don't have access to arable land and lack off-farm skills more vulnerable. Women are mainly responsible for household water supply and energy for

cooking yet their voices are still often excluded from local and national decision-making processes about how to manage risks from natural disaster and climate change.

Sectors

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Occupations once considered off limits for girls are now drawing a small but steadily rising number of female students attracted by work that offers both good incomes and the chance to set up their own business. The need for technically skilled workers has never been greater. Lao PDR is a fast-growing economy aiming to emerge from least developed country status by 2020. But while its headline growth numbers are impressive it is also running into major skills shortages in key technical fields including the construction, furniture making, plumbing, electrical, and automotive industries. The number of female students is increasing at public TVET colleges, with women accounting for 43% of all students enrolled in the academic year 2016-2017. But their course selection remains heavily skewed towards occupations traditionally deemed "female", such as tailoring, basic business administration, and hospitality. Coaxing young women to consider courses once seen as the sole preserve of males is one of the central goals of an ongoing Asian Development Bank-assisted Strengthening TVET project. The project, which was approved in 2010 and is now in its second phase, introduced a number of initiatives to address barriers to women's involvement in so-called "blue-collar" occupations³.

Health

The maternal mortality rate has fallen by 78.2% over the past 25 years, from around 905 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 197 in 2015. However, there remains higher than the regional average (110/100 000 births). While maternal deaths have declined dramatically, access to prenatal and maternal care remains a major challenge for the public health in Laos. In 2015, only 40% of births were attended by skilled health personnel and only 53% of pregnant women received antenatal care.⁴ Access and quality of services varies considerably depending on location (urban / rural areas). The highest rate of women aged 20-49 who got married before the age of 18 is among those from Hmong-Mien headed households (55%)⁵. The fertility rate is high, although declining steadily. The average number of children per woman is 3 and the rate

1 The 2010 HDR introduced the GI, which reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labor market participation rate for women and men. The GI can be interpreted as the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GI dimensions

2 Source: Human Development Report 2019, Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century Briefing note for countries on the 2019: Human Development Report Lao PD

3 Changing perceptions about TVET, key measure: (1) set of a 20% quota for female participants in courses covering priority skills for the Lao economy— construction, furniture making, and automotive and mechanical repairs. (2) introduction of a voucher assistance system to entice poorer students to take up short courses in priority skills areas. About 40% of the vouchers were allocated for females, while a quarter of the short-term training slots were reserved for women out of school. (3) construction of dormitories to encourage students from remote and poor rural areas to take up TVET education, with 50% of the spaces reserved for girls. The project also conducted a social marketing drive to improve perceptions of TVET, with a special focus on attracting interest from girls. These initiatives have been reinforced by a vigorous homestay outreach campaign by TVET colleges in rural communities

4 (GGGR 2015).

5 Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017

of adolescents aged 15-19 who are pregnant or already mothers is 94 births per 1,000 women⁶. Domestic violence is a silent but widespread problem: 1 in 5 women is victim and traditional gender stereotypes persist. These questions particularly affect rural women, especially in certain ethnic groups such as the Mon-Khmer. Women represent 70% of the country's migrants. An increasing number of women are migrating to Thailand as workers mainly in the service sector and as domestic workers (UN Women). A UNODC study estimates that 35% of women migrants to Thailand are victims of sexual exploitation.

Gender in programmes implemented by LuxDev in Lao PDR

Local, rural and sustainable development

Luxembourg, by adhering, among other things, to the Busan Declaration, is committed to considering the objective of gender equality in its development efforts⁷.

Interventions incorporating a gender component in recent years have focused on:

- Advancing equal access to gender responsive health, vocational and higher education and access to justice services;
- Increasing women's voice in decision-making and leadership and improving their livelihood security.

Lao-Luxembourg Health Sector Support Programme phase II (LL-HSSP II) LAO/027

In Laos, the majority of ethnic women deliver at home, usually without trained assistance. In addition, access to care is still taxed through significant out-of-pocket expenses. LAO/027 focuses on improving skilled birth attendance, promoting quality and institutionalized delivery and effective neonatal and child health reflects the commitment of the programme in achieving a balanced portfolio of quality health care services for all. The recently adopted National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme, which is supported by the programme, also aims at addressing the economic burden through free delivery and curative care for children under five years of age. At the provincial, district and community levels, quarterly zonal health committee meetings convened with village representatives are essential for increasing uptake of essential maternal and child health services, including pregnancy health checks.

Since 2019, gender sensitivity-oriented achievements have been done. Firstly, an average of 70% of scholarships has been awarded to females by the end of 2019. Secondly, efforts have been made to ensure that women have priority access to training provided under the LL-HSSP II. In particular, young females from ethnic minorities receive preference to the scholarship programme offered by the project. An operations research is conducted on the uptake of institutional child delivery services in provincial and district hospitals. This includes the assessment of coverage of needs for rational Caesarean sections. The results of this research will guide further stud-

ies on health-seeking behaviours of pregnant women and mothers within different communities, specifically focusing on understanding how to improve the integration of institutionalized mother and child services. As for the structure of the LL-HSSP II, its technical team aims at gender equality as nearly half of the national and international experts are women when the programme's administration department reaches 45% of women.

Skill for Tourism Project LAO/029

Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue and significant objective of the LAO/029 project which clearly sets out the target in the end-of-project outcome indicator, for instance 60% women have participated in a Tourism/Hospitality (T/H) TVET and skills development training programme by the end of the project. Gender equality cuts across the four project outcomes, and the project's Gender Action Plan (GAP) identifies targets and indicators across all outcomes and outputs, as well as at the management level. T/H is often cited as a key sector for the provision of employment and career opportunities for women. Gender equality is advocated at output and outcome level in an effort to ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities for participation and can fulfil their potential. Women are a key beneficiary group for the project, evidenced by a recent annual survey which showed that 76% of participants in project-supported education/training programmes and 88% of participants in teacher training initiatives are women. The project also strives for gender balance in the implementation team which currently stands at 46% women and 54% men.



⁶ (GGGR 2015)

⁷ Art. 20.C of the Busan Declaration, 2011

Local Development Programme LAO/030

LAO/030 addresses gender equality gaps through mainstreaming and special activities benefitting women in particular, such as access to education and water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition improvements. The democratic and highly participatory village development planning process offer equal opportunities for women to participate and promote decision making. For example, the project ensures women's voices are included in the activity selection and prioritization and women must be a member in the village development and credit scheme committees. At community level, most training is provided in the individual villages to enable women's participation. To help ensure benefits and participation of women, specific targets and disaggregated targets are defined in the project monitoring and management information system.



Strengthening the Rule of Law Project LAO/031

In Laos, most citizens rely on customary law and village-based justice due to the limited reach of the formal justice system, for reasons including language barriers (e.g. limited Lao and literacy skills of rural women) and the low number of legal professionals (e.g. less than 200 lawyers nation-wide), among other reasons. The LAO/031 project specifically identified, trained, and created support structures for the government, trained village mediation units, law students and communities by using the legal awareness campaigns for the advancement of women to inform the citizens, especially of their rights before the law. The activities on Clinical Legal Education with the Faculty of Law at the National University of Laos and the material production and awareness raising on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women with the Ministry of Justice led to increased capacity to address the needs of women and even in ethnic minority areas.

Gender issues

Progress on gender equality is linked to progress on the following points:

- Increase the coverage and quality of maternal and reproductive health and nutrition, with a focus on remote areas;
- Pursue a labor-intensive growth strategy that expands opportunities, especially in emerging industries such as tourism, garments, and food processing;
- Expand women's control over finance, land, and business training for farm and non-farm enterprises;
- Improve female participation in transport, hydropower, and mining operations;
- Reduce incidence of violence against women through legal reform efforts, as well as efforts to increase public awareness, and capacity of health, law enforcement and protection services staff;
- Support regional policy dialogue on how to minimize risks from regional economic integration through forums such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region Working Group on Human Resources Development and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking;
- Looking ahead, partners are currently speculating on whether the COVID-19 pandemic will see changes to business-as-usual.

Improvements track

- Ensure the development of a Gender Strategy by the ROF;
- Help increasing women's voice in decision-making and leadership and improving their livelihood security;
- Help mainstream gender considerations into climate change and disaster planning, and ensure that women participate in consultation and decision-making at local, regional and national levels;
- Use sex-disaggregated indicators and targets in planning, implementation and monitoring.



Sources

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- Programme reporting (DTF, progress reports, evaluation reports)







Internal document,
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2021

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