

**National Review of Lao People's Democratic Republic
Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of
the Beijing Declaration and Platform
(BPfA+25)**



Lao Women's Union

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List of Abbreviation

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nation
AYFS	Adolescent and Youth Friendly Service
BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Actions
CBHI	Community-based Health Insurance
CDD	Community Driven Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of a Child
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DHIS	District Health Information Software
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
HEFs	Health Equity Funds
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSIS	Lao Social Indicator Survey
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce

MOICT	Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOSWL	Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NCAWMC	National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Month-Child
NPAMC	National Plan of Action for Mother and Child
NSEDP	National Social-Economic Development Plan
PHC	Population and Housing Census
PRF	Poverty Reduction Fund
RMNCH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
SASS	State Authority for Social Security
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SMEs	Small Medium Enterprises
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSO	Social Security Office
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VNR	Voluntary National Review

Executive Summary

The top three outstanding progress Lao PDR has made in the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) over the past five years includes (1) the formulation of legal frameworks that provide an overarching architecture for the effective implementation of advancement of women's rights; (2) the improved health care and service to serve the medical needs for women and (3) the better education attainment by women. Despite the achievements, there are also some challenges such as the lack of disaggregated data on sex, the shortage of human and financial resources for implementing BPfA, and the low level of understanding and acceptance of gender equality among the general public, especially those residing in rural and mountainous areas. The evolving forms of human trafficking also make it strenuous to implement BPfA in the country.

The review of BPfA+25 of Lao PDR follows the guidance note and the questionnaire format of the BPfA+25. This national review comes in timely as the country has recently submitted its Voluntary National Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and concluded its mid-term review of the 8th National Social Economic Development Plan, mid-term review of other sectoral plans as well as Lao Social Indicator Survey II. Therefore, findings from these related documents, among others, form the basis of this review.

Apart from that, the Lao Women's Union, being the focal point of SDG 5, was assigned by the Lao Government to take lead to monitor the progress of the implementation of BPfA. Therefore, Lao Women's Union coordinated with line ministries, focal points for Sustainable Development Goals, development partners and civil society organizations to gather relevant information related to the twelve critical areas of concern in BPfA to inform this review. Consultation workshops with stakeholders from different sectors were also conducted to ensure that this review, to the largest extent, is representative, objective and inclusive in the spirit of leaving no one behind.

The review concludes that the top five priorities for accelerating the progress for women and girls in Lao PDR for the next five years include (1) further strengthening the establishment of political participant and representation of women as well as the implementation of the approved laws; (2) building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprise; (3) increasing of access to healthcare for mothers and child; (4) ensuring quality education including short-term and vocational training programmes and (5) improving unpaid care and domestic work. Apart from these five areas, domestic violence, human trafficking and lack of disaggregated data on gender will also continue to be important areas that Lao PDR, especially the Lao Women's Union, attempts to address.

I. Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks

According to the latest Global Gender Gap Index, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has improved from 60th ranking in 2013 to 26th ranking in 2018 among 149 countries. This is because the promotion and protection of women's rights has always been a priority of the Lao Government, which is reflected in the commitment of the Lao Government, inter alia, to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), Millennium Development Goals and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) and its efforts to adopt disaggregated data on gender to support relevant SDG indicators.

Demonstrating the unyielding and continued commitment towards BPfA, the Lao Government has mainstreamed BPfA into the 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016 - 2020 (NSED) as part of the cross-cutting outcome pillar that has impact across the other three priority outcomes namely, economic, social and environment. To ensure the effective execution of BPfA, the Lao Government has tasked the Lao Women's Union (LWU) to be the secretariat coordinating with line ministries, ministry-equivalent agencies and mass organizations to take lead in the implementation of BPfA's 12 critical areas of concern, and supporting them in translating the critical areas into their sectoral development plans.

1. What have been the most important achievements, challenges and set-backs in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past five years?

From 2014 to present, Lao PDR has achieved a slew of noticeable progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women. The areas of progress that are worth highlighting in this review include (1) the formulation of legal frameworks that provide an overarching architecture for the effective implementation of advancement of women's rights, (2) the improved health care and service to serve the medical needs for women and (3) the better education attainment by women.

1.1 The formulation of legal frameworks that provide an overarching architecture for the effective implementation of advancement of women's rights

The adoption of the key directives such as the Law on the Development and Protection of Women in 2004, the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in 2006 and the Law of Lao Women's Union in 2013 formed the foundation for the formulation of many related legal frameworks including laws and regulations to promote the status and participation of Lao women in the socio-economic development of the country in recent years. This includes (1) the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Children adopted in 2014 by the National Assembly, and promulgated in 2015; (2) the adoption of a number of legislations that incorporated provisions of CEDAW such as the amended Constitution of the Lao PDR in 2015, specifically on Article 35 and Article 37, which define that all Lao citizens are equal before the law irrespective of their gender, social status, education, beliefs and ethnicity, and Lao citizens of both genders enjoy equal rights in the political, economic, cultural and social fields and in family affairs; (3) the

adoption of the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons by the National Assembly in 2015, which is promulgated in 2016 by the Lao Government.

Realizing the importance of gender equality in the national budget planning, the Lao Government amended Law on State Budget in 2015, Article 6 (11) on the principles of the State budget's expenditure, stipulating that the expenditure of State budget shall ensure gender equality. At the same time, gender equality is entrenched in the newly endorsed Health Care Law of 2015 stating that the Lao Government has a duty to ensure that all citizens, societies and communities have access to equal, full, equitable and quality health care services in order to be able to effectively contribute to the protection and development of the country.

To reinforce the importance of the related gender equality laws, the Lao Government has directed relevant ministries to formulate various directives, decrees and documents to concretize the contents of laws related to gender equality and disseminate the information vertically from the central to the local governments.

The progress towards legal frameworks is remarkable in the last couple of years, and this is critical as it forms a basis for many activities in promoting the advancement of women's rights to take place. However, the implementation of those laws is still not quite effective, especially in the remote areas, where mobilization of resource to raise the awareness and conduct capacity building on the relevant laws to concerned parties is still limited. Technical terms of the laws and regulations available in the Lao language may not get translated correctly into dialects that are easily understood by the ethnic groups, whose level of Lao language proficiency is still low.

1.2 Improved healthcare and services

Improved health care and services is considered to be one of the significant achievements in the social development of Lao PDR, resulting in positive cross-cutting impact across all development sectors. Building upon the achievements of MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality and MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health, the Lao Government has committed to further strengthening the quality of healthcare and services, aiming for universal health coverage that all people, males and females, can access the health services while being protected from being pushed into poverty.

The endorsement of the revised Health Sector Reform Strategy and Framework till 2025 in 2016 by the National Assembly forms a comprehensive foundation for many health action plans to follow in recent years. For instance, the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health 2016 – 2025 (RMNCH) was adopted and monitored by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to support the reform. The strategy shows the direction of RMNCH for the next 10 years, with specific actions to be taken in the next 5 years. Development of this new strategy and action plan builds on the experience gained from the implementation of the Strategy and Planning Framework for the Integrated Package of Maternal, Newborn and child Health Services 2009-2015 (MNCH), which has been reviewed through an evaluation process that took place in end of 2014 and early 2015. Unlike MNCH, Reproductive Health as a strategy was included in the RMNCH following the high adolescent birth rate of 94/1000 reported in the LSIS (2011/2012). Building on this strategy, the guideline on Adolescent and Youth

Friendly Service (AYFS) was developed in 2017 to strengthen the capacity of service providers in providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services to adolescents and young people to help them feel more comfortable talking about SRH and be better equipped to address the subject issues.

The commitment towards the RMNCH is also translated into further improvement of Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR). LSIS (2011/2012) showed that the MMR was 357 per 100,000 live births, which was one of the highest in the ASEAN region. Due to the high MMR, Lao PDR took a big step forward and the Lao Government made a commitment to produce a workforce of 1,500 midwives by 2015 through the development and implementation of the Skilled Birth Attendance Plan 2008-2012. According to the Population and Housing Census (PHC) 2015, MMR went down to 206 per 100,000 live births. There were more than 1,794 midwives trained as of 2018 under a programme that now focuses on the quality of midwife education through the Midwifery Improvement Plan 2016-2020. The percentage of women age 15-49 covered by health insurance is 15.4 percent (LSIS, 2016/2017). The percentage of births attended by trained health personnel went up from 54 percent in 2015 (MOH:NHSR 2014/2015 administrative data) to 64.4 percent in 2017 (LSIS, 2016/2017).

Non-traditional donors such as China and South Korea have supported the Lao Government in recent years in terms of access to healthcare and healthcare infrastructure. For instance, the Aid of China has helped to construct the Hospital 103 and Mahosot Hospital in Vientiane Capital. At the same time, they are also committed to providing medical equipment and training support to medical staff. The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has committed to providing US\$7 million funding from 2016 to 2020 to improve access to maternal and child healthcare services in villages through mobile clinics.

Since 2013, the World Health Organization has been collaborating with the Ministry of Health under the framework of the National Health Sector Reform to set up and customize District Health Information Software (DHIS2) – a web-based open source system to replace the paper-based reporting system for health management information, one of many Health Information Systems currently used in Lao PDR. Since 2016, information on maternal and child health has also been captured by DHIS2 system to provide a more robust information on the health of mothers and children across the nation, allowing for comprehensive analysis on the health of mothers and children. The system will also be linked to the supply chain management system using mSupply software that can provide real-time data on the stock of essential medicines at provincial and district levels.

Two new indicators associated with health namely, percentage of women of reproductive age (age 15-49) currently married or in union whose demand for contraception being satisfied with modern methods and percentage of women having experienced at least one induced abortion in their lifetime, are included in the LSIS (2016/2017) for the first time, yielding baseline results for policy-making consideration, and monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the indicators.

“SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-being for All at All Ages” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is in part related to BPfA. Therefore, to reaffirm its commitment towards BPfA, the Lao Government has also tasked MOH to be the lead in the implementation of SDG 3, translating it into

the current and future NSEDP as well as the sectoral strategy to provide equity and quality healthcare to women and young girls.

1.3 Better education attainment by women

In the constitution of Lao PDR, Article 38 states that Lao citizens have the right to receive education, knowledge and skills development, and compulsory primary education for all was stated in the Article 22 of the constitution. With this as an overarching framework, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) has adopted the Five-Year Education Sector Development Plan 2016 – 2020 (ESDP) to improve and tackle many challenges related to education development in the country.

During its recent mid-term review in November 2018, ESDP shows that gender disparities have been effectively eliminated from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to lower secondary; but persist at upper secondary and higher education although they are also decreasing. This is because the 2015 amendment of the Education Law has made lower secondary education compulsory (ECE is not yet compulsory). Nevertheless, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for lower secondary is 0.95, which lags behind ECE and primary that have almost equal numbers of girls and boys. The review also shows that the number of primary education level survival rates have improved from 78.3 percent to 82.2 percent with survival rates of girls higher than that of boys. The net attendance ratios for girls divided by net attendance for boys in the lower secondary school and upper secondary school are 1.04 and 1.03 respectively (LSIS, 2016/2017). Almost 100 percent of female teachers have completed the teacher-education training programme in primary and lower secondary education levels (LSIS, 2016/2017). These achievements demonstrate the commitment of the Lao Government towards education development in the spirit of inclusiveness and gender equality.

Driving factors for the achievements highlighted above include, among others, the 2017 amendment to Education Law that has made lower secondary school education compulsory and the establishment of the Department of Early Childhood Education within MOES to specifically oversee the work related to ECE in the country. To increase the ECE rate across the country, the Lao Government has committed to investing US\$28 million from 2014 to 2020 with the financial loan from World Bank.

The commitment towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially “SDG 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”, will propel the achievement rate of BPfA as many of the indicators in SDG 4 are disaggregated by gender to keep stock of the progress of women in the field of education.

1.4 Challenges

Despite several achievements, gender inequality in Lao PDR across socio-economic and environmental development is still a challenge and affects the main development areas in the country. These include:

- The cultural norms associated with a patriarchal society like Lao PDR make the efforts towards gender equality strenuous;

- The level of awareness and acceptance of the importance of gender equality and women's rights is still limited, especially among those residing in the remote and mountainous areas;
- The existing platforms that provide for horizontal and vertical coordination between different line ministries and equivalent, and the local governments is still not sufficiently robust;
- The implementation of legal frameworks on gender equality and gender-based violence is still weak due to the insufficient training among the law enforcements officers;
- The evolving forms of human trafficking, with girls and women being the main victims, makes it challenging to implement BPfA;
- The absence of gender indicators disaggregated by sex leads to incomprehensive monitoring mechanism, which might result in gender-blind policy making process;
- The insufficient funding makes the monitoring and capacity building on the importance of gender equality among the local government officials and non-government sectors difficult to achieve.

2. Which of the following have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country over the past five years through laws, policies and/or programmes?

The top five priorities for accelerate progress for women and girls in Lao PDR in the last couple of years include (1) the formulation of legal frameworks, (2) the improvement of access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, (3) the provision of quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, (4) the establishment of women's enterprise and (5) the increase of the political participation and representation by women in both public and private sectors.

2.1 Formulation of legal frameworks

Over the past five years, the Lao Government has focused on drafting and approving relevant laws that can protect and guarantee the rights of women and girls as they form the foundation for many gender related activities to take place. As such, many laws on gender have been approved and promulgated in 2015 to ensure the effective implementation of BPfA, CEDAW and unfinished works related to gender-specific MDGs while paving way for the smooth implementation of SDGs.

2.2 Improvement of access to healthcare

Building upon the recommendations from the review of CEDAW and MDGs in 2015, the Lao Government has continued to improve on the quality of healthcare and services aiming for universal health coverage by 2025. This commitment is attested in the adoption of health related strategies and action plans, increasing partnership with different development partners and donors, both traditional and non-traditional, and the allocation for budget through financial grants.

2.3 Providing quality education

Similar to healthcare, education is another imperative pillar of development, especially creating equal access to quality education at all levels for girls and women. Therefore, the Lao Government has put priority over this for the past five years. The females' dropout rates of school are in tandem with the early marriage and teenage pregnancy rates, which can potentially create many social ills to the country. To address this, the Lao Government has invested resources in education in the recent years to close the gap of gender parity index in the secondary school level, with females performing worse than males. Among many initiatives, the Lao Government has increased the quota for teachers in the remote areas with more allowances for hardship, increased the basic salary of teachers across the board and approved of education development projects targeting at gender equality and providing conducive environments for females to go schools.

2.4 Establishment of women's enterprise

LWU has been working closely with the Lao Women's Business Association and Gender Development Association and other civil society organizations to promote and encourage women to set up small and medium businesses, which can potentially scale up to benefit society. The Lao Women's Business Association, with the support from LWU, has also been working with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) to address challenges of gaining access to funding and markets by businesswomen.

The Women Owned Business Survey in 2016 conducted in the collaboration of the Lao Women's Business Association, Lao Women's Union and Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, revealed that 83.5 percent of Lao women businesses have not had enough funding to run their businesses and that 75 percent of Lao women businesses are operated from home. The top five businesses which are run by women include retail sales, calculating for 15.49 percent, while 11.49 percent are construction businesses, 11.11 percent involve agriculture, 9.76 percent are some type of industrial processing, and 9 percent are wholesale operations. To push this priority forward, LWU has included the number of female business owners as one of the SDG 5 indicators to monitor the progress of the priority.

2.5 Political participation and representation by women

Under the Lao Women's Strategic Development Plan 2025, LWU has set very clear goals and targets aiming to increase the political participation and representation by women in both public and private sectors as much as possible. LWU and National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC) have representatives in every ministry and key local government agencies that can help to ensure the plans set forth can be achieved.

41 women were elected as members of the National Assembly 8th Legislature, accounting for about 27.5 percent of the total 149 Assembly members, an increase of 2.5 percent compared to the figure of the 7th Legislature. Women also accounted for 31.75 percent in the Provincial Assembly. In 2018, 5 out of 68

ministers, mayors and equivalent are women. 24 out 190 deputy ministers, deputy mayors and equivalent are women.

To further achieve political participation and representation by women, LWU continues to be committed to encouraging, promoting and coordinating with all sectors to create conducive environments allowing women to progress on all sides, including strong political conduct, work-life balance and building entrepreneurial spirit. It also works with development partners to support the potentiality of women for the agricultural production and handicrafts, which complements to building up a small and medium family business, and promote women's role to participate in preserving natural resources and sustainable environment.

3. Over the past five years, have you taken specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination?

Article 177 in the Penal Law of Lao PDR (2005) states that any person who discriminates against [any woman], or who keeps [any woman] separate from, or prevents or restricts the participation of any woman in, any political, economic, socio-cultural or family activity, based on gender reasons, shall be punished by imprisonment from one year to three years and shall be fined from 1,000,000 Kip to 3,000,000 Kip.

Despite the enactment of the Penal Law, the female vulnerable groups including people in the remote areas, informal workers, the poor, the lowly educated as well as those living with disabilities still face discrimination. To reduce the impact of this, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MOICT), in partnership with development partners, has been launching awareness campaigns on gender and racial related issues through conducting workshops with local government officials who in turn disseminate information to grassroots leaders.

The adolescent pregnancy in Lao PDR, which still requires great attention, is often frowned upon by society. Despite achieving adolescent birth rate of 83 percent per 100 births (the national target was 90), this rate remains one of the highest in the region (MDG, 2015). The high adolescent birth rate requires prioritizing the availability and use of contraceptives, especially among unmarried adolescents who still have difficulties in accessing such services, despite the national policy on birth spacing. The rate is highest among adolescents with little or no education or those living in areas without road access.

To address these problems experienced by the adolescent girls, the Noi 2030 framework “Achieving Gender Equality & Empowerment of Adolescent Girls”, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was created and launched on the International Day of the Girl Child in 2016 as an advocacy tool to raise awareness, build partnerships and increase investments in adolescent girls that enable them to achieve their full potential. The Noi 2030 framework is a holistic approach to addressing obstacles faced by the adolescent girls, inducing a virtuous circle with a poverty reduction outcome, benefiting Noi, her community and the nation.

To prevent and respond to violence against women and children issues, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), in partnership with UN Women, developed law on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and

Children. The law, endorsed by the National Assembly in 2014 and promulgated by the Lao government in 2015, states that the civil and criminal measure for perpetrators of violence against women and children.

Lao PDR is still in the process of drafting the Gender Equality Law. Once approved, it will be a key document to accelerate the implementation of BPfA.

4. Has the increasing number of humanitarian crises – caused by conflict, extreme weather or other events – affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country?

The long-standing unexploded ordnance (UXO) and recent nationwide flooding have greatly affected the implementation of BPfA. Even though the number of UXO casualties was reduced by 85 percent in the last decade, UXO still poses threats to the socio-economic development of Lao PDR. According to the data obtained from the National Regulatory Authority in 2018, the majority of the casualties in 2016 were male (59 casualties). Of the total, 5 were girls and 3 were women. In recent years, a combination of effective risk education, clearance of contaminated areas and wider economic opportunities that reduce risky behaviour have seen the numbers of casualties dropping from 302 in 2008 to 41 and 13 in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

To address this challenge and the burden carried by widows or women with their husbands suffering from UXO, Lao PDR has adopted a UXO Victim Assistance Strategy in 2014, which seeks to enhance medical services, rehabilitation, and socio-economic support for survivors. As of 2018, the UXO Victim Assistance Strategy has provided some 3,300 survivors with medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, economic reintegration, and vocational training. LWU, in partnership with UN Women with the support of the Embassy of Canada in Lao DPR, also conducted regular skill training courses on culinary in 2018 in Xiengkhouan province for women UXO survivors or whose husbands being affected by UXO.

The recent nationwide flooding in the country from July to August 2018 caused by Tropical Storm Son-Tinh and the collapse of Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy saddle dam affected the livelihood of people and the development of many sectors including education, agriculture and transportation with the damages and losses amounting to US\$371 million. Among this, agriculture, the sector where many females predominantly work in, was hit the most, leading deprivation of the poor in terms of health and education services. The fatal flood in Attapeu province, another most UXO-contaminated area, has made the efforts to locate and clear UXO painstaking as the bombs buried in the soil or mud could have been disturbed.

5. Which of the following does your country consider to be the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country for the coming five years through laws, policies and programmes?

In the next five years, the Lao Government will continue with the unfinished work left over from MDG, the 8th NSEDP and sectoral plans on gender equality while simultaneously implementing the localized SDG 5 and other SDGs with gender specific. Some of the future priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Lao PDR in the next five years include (1) establishment of political participation and representation by women in both public and private sector and the implementation of the approved laws,

(2) building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprise, (3) increasing of the access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, (4) ensuring quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, and (5) improving unpaid care and domestic work.

5.1 Establishment of political participation and representation and implementation of approved laws

LWU will continue to implement the action plans set forth in the 7th Congress of Lao Women's Union representatives adopted in 2015 and improve on the laws, with the focus on the development and advancement of women, the promotion of gender roles and the direction of LWU in strengthening unity among members for the fulfilment of national protection and the development cause in all sectors. Vision for Development of Lao Women 2030 and Strategic Development Plan for Lao Women 2025 will continue to provide directions to encourage and promote women's status in all sectors.

The National Assembly Women's Caucus will continue to work closely with governmental bodies and contribute input to the new laws, ensuring the rights of women are represented to the maximum extent possible. It will also continue to monitor and support the implementation of the constitution related to women's rights as well as increase the effective partnerships with women's caucuses in other countries.

5.2 Building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprise

The Lao Government will continue to increase the number of women joining the labour force, especially in the high skill sectors. This will be done through promoting and encouraging females to take up vocational training courses while supporting relevant associations that promote skill training for women. LWU will also continue to work with relevant ministries and development partners to make access to funding and market easier for female business owners to expand their businesses. Key focus areas include provision of loans and revolving funds, promotion of handicrafts, textiles and agricultural work with a view to income generation for their families.

5.3 Increasing of the access to health care

Even though Lao PDR has achieved remarkable results in the health sector in recent years, improvement on quality health and universal health coverage still remains a challenge. The RMNCH 2016 – 2025 will continue to be the top priority, creating access to quality and equity health care to mothers and young girls. Healthcare provided by private sector continues to be welcomed to complement the existing health services operated by the Lao Government. Partnership with trusted development partners to provide mobile clinics and healthcare to the remote areas serving ethnic groups, especially women and girls, will continue to be instrumental in the next five years. This commitment is also reflected in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the localization of SDG 3.

5.4 Ensuring quality education

Quality education and focus on STEM for girls will continue to be pivotal for the gender equality development in Lao DPR. This is directly linked to the efforts of the Lao Government to increase the participation of women in the labour force, especially in the formal and high skill sector, and the public and

social arenas. This is done through the expansion of access to education and retention of girls in school throughout the lower and upper secondary school education. To achieve gender equality in education, education strategies and national education curriculum will also continue to be more gender-focused, including addressing adolescent fertility and ensuring the retention of pregnant girls in schools.

5.5 Improving unpaid care and domestic work

In Lao DPR, unpaid care and domestic work is still largely carried out by women. The Lao Government will continue to implement various plans set forth on the promotion of the advancement of women's rights in the development plans of LWU and NCAWMC through changing the perception of males towards violence against women, improving on the gender equality in all forms, raising awareness on the roles of women in social, economic and environment sectors in both urban and rural areas, and designing national education curriculum with focus on gender equality. Along with this, the Lao Government will continue to work with development partners and civil society organizations to devise appropriate action plans to accelerate this.

II. Progress across the 12 Critical Areas of Concern

1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

1.1 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to advance gender equality in relation to women's role in paid work and employment?

The number of women joining the workforce in Lao PDR has increased gradually over the years due to the increase in the education attainment by women and the increasing availability of information about the job markets. In the Labour Force Survey (LFS) conducted in 2016/2017, it showed that females formed 15 percent of the labour force in the formal sector as a share of total employment rate in 2016. By 2021, the Lao Government is committed to doubling the number. However, the survey revealed that the wage difference between men and women still prevails in the formal sector. Average gross monthly income of employees, including cash and in-kind payments and incomes from secondary jobs, was LAK 2.5 million (US\$ 300) and the median was LAK 1.8 million (US\$ 220). There was a notable gender gap, with women employees earning, on average, LAK 0.5 million (US\$ 60) less per month than men.

Many women still join the informal sectors and lower skills industries such as retail and services, which makes them not entitled to relevant employment benefits and social protections. A study on the Situation of Women Market Vendors in Vientiane Capital conducted in 2017 by UN Women is the first survey of its kind in Lao PDR to understand more about the predicaments and situational analysis of Lao female market vendors. The survey revealed that women represent more than 90 percent of vendors in fresh food markets across the country earning between LAK 100,000 – 500,000 (US\$ 12 – 62) on a daily average. The study provides insightful input to one aspect of the informal sector predominantly engaged by women.

Realizing the vulnerability of the informal sector, International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with the Lao Government has been working on the implementation of the 2016 Vientiane Declaration on “Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN”. The implementation was followed up with a 16-point Action Plan, with two points already implemented in 2017.

Females form the largest internal migration, with many of them migrating to Vientiane Capital to work in garment factories. The majority of these female migrants are from the northern highland provinces and from Vientiane province. In contrast, few migrants come to Vientiane Capital from the southern provinces, because young people from these provinces are likely to move to Thailand in search of work. Therefore, the Lao Government has continued to work with ILO on the new phase of the Decent Work Country Program for Lao PDR (2017 – 2021) to solve the unproductive migration problem, reduce poverty through promoting employment in the rural areas. 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.

Meanwhile, LWU, in partnership with UNDP with the support from the Republic of Korea, established livelihood support centers in two districts in Saravan province in 2017 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. 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.

Gender equality and non-discrimination in the private sphere are defined in the Labour Law 2013. Article 96 defines the gender equality in workplace: female employees have the right to employment and professions in every sector not contrary to the law, including production, business and management, and may participate in training, labor skills improvement and providing expertise. Female employees shall receive a salary or wages equal to that of male employees. In April 2018, Lao PDR supported the ILO Convention on Stop Gender-based Violence at Work.

1.2 What actions has your county taken in the last five years to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and promote work-family conciliation?

In 2015, 61 percent of women in the labour force worked as unpaid family workers, compared to 26 percent of men. Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences conducted in 2014 showed that the majority of men still did not regard the opportunity loss by their wives who stay at home as the unpaid family workers.

To promote work-family conciliation and to allow men to understand more about domestic work, the Lao Government has passed a notice in 2015 to allow fathers to take paternity leave for 15 days to attend to the new born and mother while still enjoying the full employment benefits. The amended family law approved by the National Assembly in 2018 aims to protect women and reduce financial risks often born by females, who are largely involved in unpaid care and domestic work, in the event of divorce by acknowledging the woman's contribution to the family during marriage.

LWU will continue to work with development partners and relevant sectors to increase the level of understanding and appreciation of unpaid care and domestic work performed by females.

2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

2.1 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

LWU is in the administrative board of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) at both central and local levels that has direct impact on eradication of poverty by women. PRF Programme uses a Community Driven Development (CDD) approach, whereby communities themselves decide on how resources are allocated, manage sub-project funds, and implement sub-projects. Extensive facilitation and training is provided through the Programme to ensure that all community members, including women and different ethnic groups, participate in the decision-making process and benefit from the Programme. The Programme builds local capacity by providing technical support for communities, over a number of years, to help solve

problems and resolve conflicts. It also aims to create stronger links between the local authorities and communities. PRF staff at the district, provincial and national levels helps to coordinate and facilitate these linkages.

Under the PRF (II), 278 villages have been identified to be the priority areas for poverty reduction from 2015 to 2019, with many awareness raising initiatives on the participatory planning that requires involvement of villagers, especially the disadvantaged groups and women, being carried out. PRF (II)'s guidelines also require that at least 40 percent of the participants in decision making about allocation of PRF resources must be women. From October 2015 to September 2016, among the livelihood activities by women, 51 percent are related to poultry raising, 20 percent pig raising, 12 percent goat raising, and 7 percent for aquatic rearing weaving; 2 percent for banana plantation and 1 percent for horticulture and cassava plantation. Out of the total number of self-help group (SHG) members, 76 percent female SHG members are leading these livelihood activities. Under the PRF (III), out of 348 sub-projects, the proportion of them prioritized by women is 25 percent. To promote and increase the empowerment of women in community development, the PRF (III) includes one additional women Kum ban (village units) facilitator per Kum ban, meaning two women and one man facilitators per Kum ban.

About 70 percent of employment in Lao PDR is in the agriculture and fishery sector. Realizing the importance of this figure, the Lao Government has adopted the Vision the Year 2030 and the Implementation Project on Gender Equality Strategy of Agriculture Forestry and Rural Development Sector from 2016 to 2025 in February 2017. By 2020, the strategy aims to provide training courses to 70 percent of women working in the agriculture and fishery sector and train 35 percent of women to be the technical officers and experts in this sector. The recent review of the implementation project in 2018 showed that the progress has been on the right track.

The Lending and Saving Projects, Saving Groups, Village Development Funds are being carried out at central and provinces in order to be a reducing poverty mechanism, social welfare providing and make a contribution to the socio-economic at grass-root levels. Such funds have resulted in the improvement of the financial status and quality of life of women, their families and the society as a whole. CARE International in Lao PDR also works closely with Lao Women Union to strengthening ethnic women economic, access to finance and financial management skills. The approach is called Village Saving and Loan Association (VLSA). The approach is built entirely on women member savings and interest from loans. Through purchasing shares, members contribute to their savings, generating capital they can invest in themselves, their families and communities. Since 2014, CARE International in Lao PDR has supported the creation of 19 VSLA groups with nearly 370 members in Mai, Samphan and Yod-ou districts in Phongsaly Province. VSLAs are expanding into CARE's programs in Sekong and Luang Namtha provinces. So far, 100 percent of members in the programme are female.

As a result of the joint Bank of Lao PDR and UNCDF programme on Making Access to Finance More Inclusive for Poor People, 17,214 additional users of financial services, 88 percent of them women, were recorded in 2017. 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 analysis on the social security fund being finalized in 2017 and contributing to the revision of the national Social Security Law.

Lao Business Women's Association established by LWU in 2004 has been dedicating to assembling Lao female entrepreneurs and businesswomen throughout the country. Since 2006, the association has been organizing the annual Lao Food Festival to promote the culinary skills of females through Lao cuisine. In May 2017, the association signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Small, Medium Enterprise (SME) of the Ministry of Commerce of the Kingdom of Thailand to promote skill training and exchange of business ideas, providing a platform to support the female business owners. In May 2018, 9 out of 65 awardees of the 4th ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network Forum 2018 are from Lao PDR, an award bestowed based on the outstanding contributions of females to the socio-economic development of their respective countries (LBWA, 2018).

Promoting SMEs will be especially beneficial for women. Women make up about half the owners of newly registered enterprises. From 2014 to 2018, the number of formal enterprises registered by MOIC was hovering around 5,000, which was about 48 percent of the total enterprises, with more than half of them in the wholesale and retail sector. As of 2017, around 31 percent of formal enterprises with more than five employees are owned by females in Lao PDR.

However, those firms owned by women are much smaller in terms of number of employees compared to firms owned by men. The legal framework for doing business does not have gender discriminatory elements, but in practice, household responsibilities and lack of mobility due to personal duties makes it more difficult to start a business. Female entrepreneurs in Lao PDR are also less likely to have a bank account or credit line.

2.2 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve access to social protection for women and girls?

A draft National Social Protection Strategy (2018 - 2025) 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 draft National Social Protection Strategy paves the way for providing all Lao citizens with a better life and increased social, economic, and human development prospects.

Lao PDR has five social health protection schemes, all of which seek to increase utilization of health-care services and provide financial protection to families. These are the State Authority for Social Security (SASS), the Social Security Office (SSO), Community-based Health Insurance (CBHI), Health Equity Funds (HEFs) and free maternal and child health services in selected provinces (WHO, 2018). The Lao Government has set up Health Equity Fund schemes aiming to help the poorest families who are unable to afford premium health insurance and providing alternative options for ensuring more

resources for healthcare. The Lao Government adopted the Convention of Rights of the Child by stating in the Labour Law and National Social Security Law to allow mothers, especially breastfed mothers, to take leave to attend to their children. In 2018, there were 9,605 mothers who exercised this right.

Furthermore, the Lao Government has adopted the National Plan of Action for Mother and Child 2016 – 2020 (NPAMC), which aims to increase the health care insurance to 80 percent. In an effort to achieve universal access to health care by 2025, World Health Organization (WHO) is supporting the Lao Government through implementing the Decree on National Health Insurance (No. 470/GO) by merging the four social health protection schemes (SASS, SSO, CBHI, HEF) and free maternal and child health services into the National Health Insurance Authority. Through this merger, the National Health Insurance Programme covers 91 percent of Lao citizens in 2017.

The Lao Government, in partnership with World Bank, is in the process of implementing various conditional cash transfer programmes targeting the most vulnerable age group and directing transfer to women as part of the poverty reduction.

2.3 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

MOH has adopted the Ethnic Group Development Plan under the Greater Mekong Sub-region Health Security in 2016 with loan of various currencies equivalent to two million eight hundred fifty-six thousand Special Drawing Rights (SDR2,856,000) and grant of US\$8,000,000 from ADB. This development plan will continue to benefit 1 million people from the ethnic groups across 36 targeted districts, with many beneficiaries being women and young girls.

According to LSIS (2016/2017), the average number of children per woman in Lao PDR has fallen from 3.2 in 2011 to 2.7 in 2017. The average adolescent birth rate has decreased from 94 to 83 per 1,000 between 2011 and 2017 with clear disparities between urban (42) and rural (136) areas, level of education (176 for no education/early childhood education compared to only 3 for higher level education). Among other factors, this generally demonstrates that families, especially in the urban area, have started to be more aware of family planning and concerned about quality child raising.

Lao PDR held its first-ever national family planning conference in May 2017 to address the importance of family planning in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the conference, the Lao Government has expressed its commitment in the financial contribution to the procurement of contraceptives. In 2016, the Lao Government contributed US\$40,000, and the amount was doubled in 2018. It has further shown its commitment by increasing the amount to be US\$150,000 in 2019. Under the support of FP2020, Lao PDR has made policy and political commitments, including the revision of the country's Reproductive Health Policy to promote an enabling environment for family planning and develop a national information, education and communication (IEC) and behavior change communication (BCC) strategy on family planning.

However, antenatal care in Lao PDR still requires great attention. According to LSIS (2016/2017), the percentage of women age 15-49 years with a live birth in the last two years who were attended during their last pregnancy that led to a live birth at least once, four times and eight times by a skilled health provider is 78.4 percent, 62.2 percent and 15.3 percent respectively. Among these females only 29.2 percent had their blood pressure measured and gave urine blood samples during that last pregnancy that led to a live birth. Data on antenatal care by ethnicity reviewed that ethnic groups received such a service varied vastly. For instance, approximately 90 percent of Lao ethnicity received antenatal care while Akha ethnicity was less than 30 percent.

Early marriage remains widely accepted, particularly in the rural areas, leading to high numbers of teenage pregnancies, which can delay the socio-economic development of Lao DPR in many aspects. As per the LSIS (2016/2017), 23.5 percent of girls aged 15-19 years are already married or in union. The proportion of girls in the same age group in rural areas who are already married is as high as 27.1 percent. The problems of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy are prioritized under the Noi approach and the Noi 2030 framework aims at monitoring the progress towards addressing. Addressing the problems of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy would require multi-sectoral, comprehensive and coordinated efforts.

2.4 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls?

During the MDG review, Lao PDR has reached gender equality at all levels of education. However, this parity is not reflected in the workplace, with women over-represented in lower skilled labour markets (71.8 percent of the workforce within the service sector and 63.6 percent within the retail sector). There is a reason for this as most of the courses in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are in favour of women such as tailoring, basic business administration and hospitality. Therefore, the Lao Government has revised TVET strategy to solve this issue.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) have been working with ADB to encourage young women to consider TVET courses once seen as the sole preserve of males under the ADB-assisted Strengthening TVET project since 2010. The project is now in its second phase, introducing a number of initiatives to address barriers to women's involvement in so-called "blue-collar" occupations. It is done through three key initiatives. The first was to set a 20 percent quota for female participants in courses covering priority skills for the Lao economy—construction, furniture making, and automotive and mechanical repairs. A second key measure was the introduction of a voucher assistance system to entice poorer students to take up short courses in priority skills areas. About 40 percent of the vouchers were allocated for females, while a quarter of the short-term training slots were reserved for women out of school. A third and equally crucial action was the construction of dormitories to encourage students from remote and poor rural areas to take up TVET education, with 50 percent 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 where family and cultural pressures have largely dissuaded girls from considering traditionally male vocational courses. This effort, among others, saw the increased number of female students at public TVET colleges, with women accounting for 43 percent of all students enrolled in the academic year 2016-2017 (ADB, 2017).

Skill training for women is part of the LWU's larger mandate. Apart from conducting TVET courses to women, LWU has been focusing on training women instructors and introducing practical courses to the TVET curricula to train women across all provinces. In 2018, LWU conducted 10-day training of trainer courses to 54 instructors to ensure that the instructors' skills are relevant. After the training, instructors from 6 provinces conducted similar training courses to 692 participants (women:660; men:32) in their respective provinces. Besides, LWU conducted short-term courses to 558 participants over the past three years (2016 – 2018).

Under the Education Sector Development Plan 2016 – 2020 (ESDP) of MOES, implementation of school meals, clean water, sanitation and safe facilities for disadvantaged school children, especially young girls, and those living in food insecure districts in order to increase enrolments and retention, is one of the strategies to encourage girls to go to school.

Over the past five years, many civil society organizations (CSOs) in partnership with MOES have been carrying education projects to promote gender equality. For instance, Plan International Japan, a non-profit organization, received funding of about US\$430,000 in November 2017 from the Government of Japan for constructing secondary school facilities and supporting gender education in across 10 secondary schools in Phaoudom district, which is one of the remotest and poorest districts in Bokeo province, Lao PDR. This project aims to create gender-sensitive school environment and develop the capacity of secondary school teachers, students and communities to promote gender equality to eliminate the traditional gender norms that girls are expected to engage in domestic work and get married early, which limits their access to secondary school.

To reach many adolescent girls and boys and equip them with the information they need to build their future, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) has been introduced and fully integrated into the national curriculum of primary school one level in 2017. It is expected to integrate CSE into primary school two level by early 2019. The integration of CSE in the lower and upper secondary school level is still under development. One-week in-depth CSE will also be integrated into TVET courses for adolescents to make healthy choices for their future; prevent early pregnancy and sexual transmitted infections and supporting them to have healthy relationships with their peers and parents.

The UNESCO International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) have launched a research project on basic and non-formal education for ethnic minority groups living in communities along the Mekong River. The launch took place at the

International Seminar on Education for Rural Community in Vientiane Capital in August 2018. Lao PDR will benefit from the findings, which will be published in 2019 to coincide with the International Year of Indigenous Languages, as many of the females from minority ethnic groups still obtain low education. The findings will serve as the basis for a series of recommendations on how to improve policies and approaches to promote cultural diversity and to support indigenous knowledge and its transmission.

3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

3.1 Over the last five years, which forms of violence against women and girls, and in which specific contexts or settings, have you prioritized for action?

The Lao population is composed of 50 ethnic groups which have different cultural traditions and practices, especially the ethnic groups that reside in remote areas with difficult access to education still practice their ancient local beliefs or customs that may put women's and children's rights at risks of violation. In this regard, the Lao Government attaches importance to combating violence against women and discouraging the negative attitudes and beliefs as an excuse for committing violence against women and children, eradicating the still somehow existing stereotypes and negative cultural practices that lead to violence against women and children.

To be specific, domestic violence, which is still rampant in Lao PDR, is one aspect of violence the Lao Government has prioritized for action. In Lao PDR, many cases of domestic violence go unreported.

Another critical concern is the force marriage. 32.7 percent of young women aged 20-24 were married before age 18 compared to 10.8 percent of men (LSIS, 2016/2017). Almost one in five girls (23.5 percent) in 15-19 aged group were already married or in-union (LSIS, 2016/2017). Higher rate of early marriage contributes to higher adolescent birth rate of 83 births per 1,000 girls 15-19 years, which is the highest in the South-East Asia region.

3.2 What actions has your country prioritized in the past five years to address violence against women and girls?

Conducting surveys to find out about the situations of violence against women and girls in the country as well as to obtain relevant baseline values for effective monitoring and evaluation has been the priority of the Lao Government in the past five years to address the issue of violence against women and girls.

To complement the Law on Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Children adopted by the National Assembly in December 2014, the Lao Government and UNFPA with the support from UN Women and the WHO conducted Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences in 2014, marking the country's first-ever national survey on violence against women. Based on nearly 3,000 interviews with women across the country, the survey reveals that one in seven women has experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners at least once in their lifetime. The majority of women, however, stated that they had experienced such violence multiple times.

Lao PDR conducted the Violence Against Children Survey in 2014, the first of its kind, with the survey showing results on physical, sexual and emotional violence against children disaggregated by genders. Following the adoption of the Law on Preventing and Combatting of Violence Against Women and Children in 2015, and the Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences in 2014, LSIS (2016/2017), for the first time, conducted survey on attitude towards domestic violence against women. The results from LSIS showed that 29.5 percent and 16.2 percent of women and men respectively felt that it was justified for husbands to hit or beat their wives. These figures are used as baseline for future monitoring and evaluation.

3.3 What strategies has your country used in the past five years to prevent violence against women and girls?

Legal framework and platform for mainstreaming action plans are essential to prevent violence against women and girls. The Lao Government issued the Decree No. 167/PMO, dated 15 May 2014 to endorse the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children (2014-2020), which was derived from the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Children. The Plan on Elimination of Child Labour in Lao PDR 2014-2020 was also adopted in 2014 to strengthen commitment of the Lao Government to combat violence in all forms.

Along with the national plan disapproving violence against women and girls, Lao PDR has adopted the Vision for Development of Lao Women 2030, Strategic Development Plan for Lao Women 2025 and the Five-Year Lao Women's Development Plan (2016-2020), which LWU has further divided into VIII Action Plans covering 34 Projects, out of which Action Plan V covering 6 Projects relating to the protection of rights and interests of women and children as follows:

- Project on Dissemination of the Constitution, Law and Treaties relating to the development and protection of rights and interests of women and children;
- Project on Improving and Expanding the Counseling and Protection Network for Women and Children;
- Project on Protection, Prevention and Combating Violence Against Women and Children;
- Project on Protection for Women and Children who are victims of violence and trafficking in persons;
- Project on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the policy, laws, legislations concerning the rights and interests of women and children and
- Project to amend, draft laws and legislations relating to the rights and interests of women and children.

Since its establishment in 2003, NCAWMC has been developing its organizational network from central to local levels, disseminated treaties and laws relating to the rights and interests of women in CEDAW, which is linked to some areas of critical concerns in BPfA. For instance, Article 57 in the Law on Combating and

Preventing Violence against Women and Children stipulates that claims or complaints concerning violence against women and children can be made in verbal or in writing to the investigation police authorities by the victims, representatives or the organization the victims affiliated with, parents or guardians of child victims, individuals, legal persons or organizations that saw or knew of the incident of violence, medical personnel, social workers, teachers, care-takers, police officers and other officials.

The Lao Government has put appropriate protection and responses in place. This can be seen in the increased number of offices for counselling units LWU has established. To date, there 16 offices for Counselling and Protection of Women and Children across 16 provinces and 1 in Vientiane Capital. These offices have the central role of providing psychological, legal, and health counselling for women and children who are victims of physical, sexual and other forms of violence. The Centre also provides temporary shelter, telephone hotline and subsistence for victims, facilitates legal actions against abusers, provides short-term skills training, and refers cases for further management and rehabilitation to appropriate institutions. MOJ has also been setting up 14 legal aid offices across 8 provinces to provide access to justice to the citizens free of charge.

Promoting primary prevention is also a key strategy the Lao Government has been focusing on to reduce violence against women. This is often carried through awareness raising. Therefore, as part of the awareness strategy, NCAWMC has disseminated information on BPfA, CEDAW and Law on Combating and Preventing Violence against Women and Children among police officers, military officers, members of the National Assembly, judges, prosecutors, officials of the justice departments of various provinces. Lao PDR has continued to celebrate the International Women's Day on different themes to raise awareness on gender equality and important roles women play in society. At the same time, Lao PDR, in collaboration with UN Women and development partners, has also continued to embrace the 16 Days of Activism for Ending Violence against Women and Girls under Orange the World Programme #HearMeToo to raise awareness on stopping violence against women.

Apart from the efforts by the Lao Government, CSOs have also played a critical role in preventing violence against women and girls. For instance, the Association for Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE) established a Legal Aid Committee for Vulnerable Women and Children (LACVWC) on 5 July 2015 in collaboration and partnership with the Vientiane Capital Sub-committee for Advancement of Women, Vientiane Capital Judicial Department and Public People Prosecution Office. It provides the counselling services to the 15 target villages in Vientiane Capital to get access to justice with lawyers accompanying the victims to the court when necessary. CARE International in Lao PDR, with collaboration with LWU and LaoPha, a non-profit association, has been working to facilitate discussions and campaigns at the national and community levels to challenge social norms and raise awareness about violence against women by supporting Lao men and women to actively take a stand against violence. In the first iteration of "Stand Up and Speak Out" (SUSO) in 2016, events featured prominent male celebrities spreading awareness about violence against women on Facebook, and male cyclists who further disseminated the campaign's messages during a race, spurred conversations on social media, mostly directed at a social media savvy urban population. By inspiring the public to reflect on gender, power, and privilege, the 2016

SUSO aimed to mobilise key male figures to influence their communities to reduce violent behaviors and push for gender equality.

3.4 What actions has your country taken in the past five years to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls facilitated by technology (online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate imaged)?

The Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime adopted by the National Assembly in 2015 forms an important piece of document to protect women and girls from being the victims in the cyber space. The law treats dissemination of pornography, prostitute and prostitution trafficking as an offence.

To raise awareness on the law, Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) has organized workshops and events with participants from both public and private sectors. For instance, the training course on Data Network Fabric Configuration and Security Analytics Configuration was held on 25-28 April 2017, and the seminar on Cyber Security and Practical Threat Intelligence was organized on 21-22 August 2017 in Vientiane. Apart from that, incident reports on cyber security were published in 2016 and 2017. The 2017 report showed that there were 8 incidents of cyber harassment, which was about 6 percent of all the incidents.

LWU at the Vientiane Capital unit has established hotline for citizens to call to enquire and seek counselling advice on violence against women and girls since 2001. The number of callers has increased over the years. At the same time, Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union has its own radio channel to promote issues related to youth, including violence against women and girls.

3.5 What actions has your country taken in the past five years to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media?

The Law on the Media of Lao PDR amended in 2016 states the role of the press in promoting the gender equality and protection of young girls and children. The Law prohibits the media to report on biased and raw information including sexual and unethical contents that negatively affect women and children.

Generally, the image of Lao women in the country is relatively well portrayed through the media. Women in Lao PDR play an important role in the nation's political life and this has been covered by the pressed, showing the significant contributions Lao women have on the national development. 41 women were elected as members of the National Assembly 8th Legislature accounting for about 27.5 percent of the total 149 Assembly members, an increase of 2.5 percent compared to the figure of the 7th Legislature. In 2018, 5 out of 68 ministers, mayors and equivalent are women. 24 out 190 deputy ministers, deputy mayors and equivalent are women. The Lao Government has continued to put in place policy and work plans to ensure Lao women to participate in the political life and decision making positions. NCAWMC has created the Five-Year National Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2016-2020 which includes a target for each sector to have women in leadership and decision making positions at least 15-20 percent.

The National Assembly Women's Caucus, which has been established since 2010 as a legislative mechanism in the National Assembly with the duty to promote gender equality, women's advancement,

health promotion for mothers and children, is an instrumental arm to promote women's representation in the National Assembly.

So far, the Lao Government has employed all possible measures to encourage ethnic communities to discontinue their stereotypes, negative ancient beliefs and practices. This includes the Community Radio under the Community Participation and Community Support Programme, implemented by MOICT and UNDP with support from Oxfam, broadcasting in eight ethnic dialects on issues related to gender equality and cultural norms to the most disadvantaged groups and women across five provinces. In 2017, MOICT conducted capacity building sessions on gender equality to news reporters and radio personnel at the central level and four southern provinces namely, Salavanh, Sekong, Champasack and Attapeu. MOICT also mobilized media as a tool to raise awareness on unacceptable practices related to tourism such as sex industry. In fact, MOICT has integrated the Five-Year National Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2016-2020 into their sectoral plans. Media contents pertinent to recommendations of CEDAW-CRC were produced to raise awareness related to gender based violence, human trafficking, poverty and school dropouts were reported widely by the media to raise awareness and find ways to put an end to them. The past five years have seen the increasing role of Lao women from private sector in the media and social events such as the Lao Fashion Week showcasing the designing and business acumen of Lao women and the participation of Lao women in the pageant contests in domestic, regional and international stage. Interest groups such as Women Mentorship organized by YSEALI programme, Women in Leadership Conference organized by the Australian Embassy in Laos, Women's Entrepreneurial Center set up by World Education Laos and many others have raised the profiles of females in Lao PDR in recent years.

3.6 Has your country taken any action in the last five years specifically tailored to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination?

Lao PDR has law to protect all citizens facing various forms of discrimination. Article 177 in the Penal Law of Lao PDR states that any person who discriminates against [any woman], or who keeps [any woman] separate from, or prevents or restricts the participation of any woman in, any political, economic, socio-cultural or family activity, based on gender reasons, shall be punished by imprisonment from one year to three years and shall be fined from 1,000,000 Kip to 3,000,000 Kip.

In the Penal Code 2017, forcible sexual intercourse with wife or with a woman is defined as a criminal offence. Particularly, Article 252 of the Penal Code states that any person who has sexual intercourse with his wife or a woman by using force, coercion, threat against her will or when his wife or a woman is not ready to have sexual intercourse will be punished by imprisonment of three months to one year or re-educated without deprivation of liberty and fined. Where such an offence causing serious injury, the offender shall be punished from one to five years and shall be fined.

4. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

4.1 What actions and measures has your country taken over the past five years to promote women's participation in the public life and decision-making?

To increase the participation of women in the public life and decision-making process, the 8th NSEDP has stated clearly under the cross-cutting outcome that by 2020, Lao DPR is to:

- Increase the proportion of LWU members who are educated in political theory, constitutions, laws, treaties, international agreements relating to the development and protection of women, gender equality, and national traditions and culture, to 80 percent;
- Increase LWU membership to 70 percent of women of 15 years of age and older; expand a LWU committee network to cover 20 percent of all business units in the private sector;
- Encourage the LWU to conduct a campaign on “three goods” linking with the 3-builds directive implementation; promote women to take up 20 percent of leading management-level positions (at village level, 10 percent; at district level, 20 percent; at provincial and capital level, 20 percent);
- Encourage women to take up to 30 percent of the management-level positions at central level, especially in the organizations where women officials account for more than half of all officials;
- Increase the proportion of female members of the 8th National Assembly to 30 percent;
- Increase the proportion of female students graduating from secondary school to 85 percent;
- Achieve gender equality in services such as education, health and social welfare;
- Increase the proportion of poor women with vocational education, skills and stable employment to generate income;
- Develop the LWU Fund for women's development and family support;
- Create opportunities for women and children to access the legal system more widely

Lao PDR attaches importance to the promotion of women's representation in the National Assembly. As of 2018, 41 women were elected as members of the National Assembly 8th Legislature accounting for about 27.5 percent of the total 149 Assembly members, an increase of 2.5 percent compared to the figure of the 7th Legislature, ranking 2nd in ASEAN to the Philippines' top spot and ranking 58th among all 193 Parliaments in the world. In the People's Provincial Assemblies across the nation, there are a total of 360 seats, of which 116 of them are occupied by women, amounting to 32 percent of the total number of seats.

Many of female members of the National Assembly hold decision making positions, such as the current president of the National Assembly, one vice-president of the National Assembly, two Committee Chairs, five Committee Vice-Chairs and the Secretary General of the National Assembly are all women.

4.2 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to increase women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

To date, there is no specific platform through information and communication technologies (ICT) for women catered to only increase women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media. However, the existing platforms are catered to all genders. Realizing this limitation, UN Women in partnership with LWU organized a workshop in November 2018 to 16 Lao journalists from 16 media, including prominent ones like Vientiane Times and Lao National Television on how they could be more sensitive when producing and reporting news about violence against women, gender-based violence and gender issues.

The hotline operated by the National Assembly since 2014 is one of the formal channels for Lao citizens, including males and females to express their opinions and concerns to matters affecting them. In 2015, a telephone call to the National Assembly’s hotline allowed the 66 families of Lamong village in southern Lao PDR to receive the compensation they were entitled to by law. Gradually, many line ministries have also opened their own hotline facilities to allow citizens to call in to voice their concerns.

Apart from this, there are also hotlines provided by LWU at Vientiane Capital unit for all genders to seek assistance in issues related to reproductive health, family planning, relationship, drug abuse and violence, encouraging them to make informed decisions. Number of hotline users has increased by 90 percent from 2,735 in 2010 to 5,209 in 2017.

5. Peaceful and inclusive societies

5.1 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

Lao PDR has signed the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Gender Perspective and ASEAN Women’s Partnership for Environmental Sustainability, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children, ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection to provide conducive environment for the implementation of action plans related to the advancement of women’s rights.

The Lao Government has always attached importance to the involvement of INGOs and local CSOs on supporting of gender equality. The Lao Government has issued regulations as reference for their activities, namely, Decree 115/PMO dated 29 April 2009, and Decree 238/Gov dated on 8 September 2016, on Non-Profit Associations which prescribes principles and regulations on establishment, activities and

management of associations, which are legal persons in Lao PDR. To increase the access to justice, the Lao Government has worked with CSOs such as ADWLE in consultation with The Law and Development for Partnership (LDP), a law firm, to produce manual of gender-based violence, and train paralegals and law enforcement officers on the manual. At the present, there are 33 paralegals, out of which 17 are women.

To increase the participation of CSOs in building and promoting a peaceful and inclusive society, the Lao Government has been accommodative and open of participation of CSOs that can bring positive impact to the development of the country. As such, Proud to Be Us, the first CSO advocating for the greater well-being of LGBTI people in Lao PDR, was formed in 2012. Apart from that, ADWLE, Gender Development Association and Lao Women Disabled Center together with the Lao Government attended the 71st session of CEDAW report at the UN House in Geneva in November 2018.

The Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons was adopted by the National Assembly in 2015 and promulgated in 2016 by the Lao Government. The law defines the principles, rules and measures regarding the administration, monitoring, supervision, inspection of anti-trafficking in persons activities in order for them to be systematic and effective with a view to protect the rights, interests, lives, health, dignity, freedom of the citizens and fine national traditions and customs aiming at keeping the society safe and secure, in good orders and contributing to the national development and protection.

MOJ, in partnership with UN Women, included the gender perspective into its Mediators' Manual and Training of Trainers Manual on Village Mediation Skills, covering content on applying a survival-centred approach when Village Mediators are approached by women who have experienced violence. Till February 2019, 64 trainers from MOJ, 13 prosecutors, 13 police officers, 13 court officers, 13 LWU's staff and 150 village mediators learnt about violence against women, its consequences and how to apply survival-centred approach when mediating cases related violence against women. The Lao Government attaches importance to the promotion and protection of human rights of the Lao multi-ethnic people, especially the women living in rural and remote areas, particularly to better the understanding of their legal rights and obligations, including access to justice. The People's Supreme Court has, therefore, published a book entitled "How to Access to Justice" in a total of 3,000 copies to distribute to the people free of charge.

5.2 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to increase the leadership representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peace-building, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?

In 2017, Lao PDR has reaffirmed further their commitments to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Declaration on Violence Against Women (Vienna Declaration), the Beijing Platform of Action and its Outcome Document, and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Even though Lao PDR did not engage in any domestic or external conflicts in the past five years, Lao PDR has always placed emphasis on the importance of peace-building. The representation of women in the

leadership level is crucial to the process of peace-building. In 2015, there were 79,662 government officials, who are women, covering 44.8 percent of the total 177,626 officials. has created the Five-Year National Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2016-2020 which includes a target for each sector to have women in leadership and decision making positions at least 15-20 percent.

All along women have been working closely with the male counterparts to engage in humanitarian actions to respond to disasters and crisis. The representation and participation of women in such an event was shown clearly in the widespread flooding due to a tropical storm that caused unprecedented damages to houses, land and people in 2018. Many sectors were mobilized to support affected population, especially in Attapeu province, which was adversely affected by the collapse of dam saddle. LWU was one key agency that worked tirelessly to support women and children. Women-friendly spaces were set up to provide counselling on health, psychological and legal issues from trained LWU and health sector staff. To accelerate the relief efforts, LWU collaborated with the local health departments to conduct awareness sessions on mother and child health, family planning, gender-based violence and legal issues as well as distribution of information education and communications materials with key messages on gender-based violence prevention and family planning to the survivals.

5.3 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?

Lao PDR has enhanced its judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response through enacting its own laws and adoption of international treaties. The Constitution of Lao PDR reflects key provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that the country has adopted. The domestic laws of the country, including the Penal law, Law on Media, Law on the Election of the National Assembly, Law on Civil Servant, Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, among others, also reflect provisions of ICCPR. In case provisions of national legislation are inconsistent with provisions of treaties to which the Lao PDR is a party, provisions of ICCPR prevail.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), with the support of the development partners through different initiatives over the past years, such as the International Law Project (ILP), the Support Project for Implementation of the Legal Sector Master Plan (SPLSMP), projects under the Lao PDR-EU Human Rights Dialogue and Lao PDR-Australia Human Rights Dialogue, has organized many workshops, seminars, lectures, training courses on international law and human rights for government officials, members of the National Assembly and Provincial People's Assemblies, the judiciary, members of the Lao Bar Association, law school teachers and students in order to promote awareness and understanding of international and human rights obligations of Lao PDR, including obligations under ICCPR, CEDAW and BPfA.

Since 2014, Lao PDR, being a member state of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), has organized workshops and seminars for line ministries on humanitarian actions. For instance, in 2018, AICHR Workshop on the Thematic Study on the Right to Peace was held in Vientiane Capital to allow participants to discuss on a topic related to Gender Sensitive Crisis Response. In April 2019, Lao PDR took part in the regional seminar discussing on the unexploded ordnance and remains under the topic of the International Legal Framework Regulating Weapons that Keep on Killing and Victim Assistance.

Furthermore, MOFA has published a compilation of Human Rights Conventions to which Lao PDR is a party to serve as the basis of reporting to BPfA and other related conventions. Officials of MOFA also gave lectures to judicial institutions, and Lao Bar Association on the human rights conventions, which is indirectly linked to many critical areas of concerns in BPfA to enhance non-judicial accountability of human rights law.

5.4 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child?

Prohibition of discrimination based on race, color, sex, political and other opinion are enshrined in the Constitution and laws of Lao PDR including the Constitution, Penal Law, Law on Criminal Procedure, Law on Development and Protection of Women, Law on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Children, Law on Women Union, Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, among others.

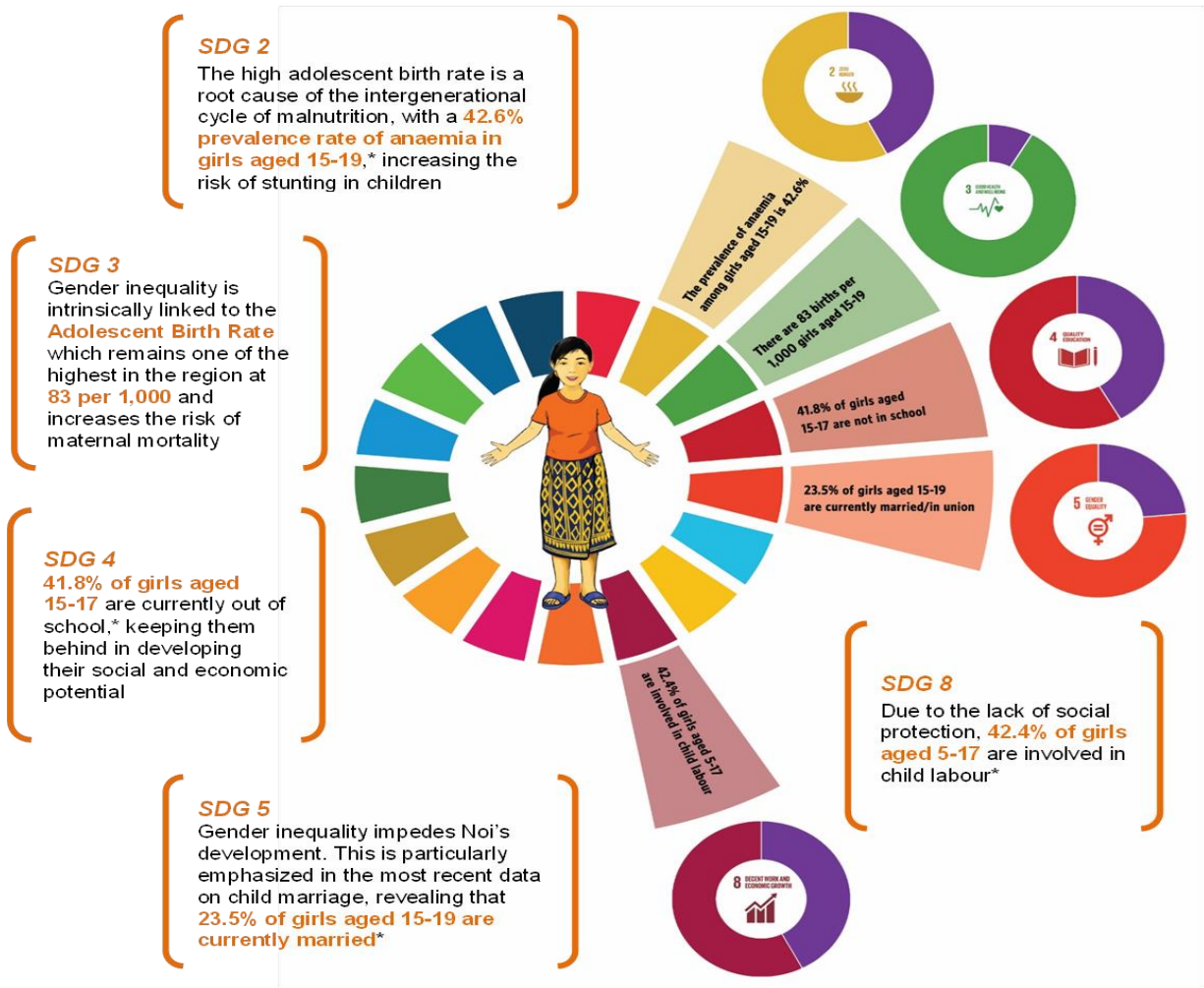
Lao PDR is in the process of drafting a Law on Gender Equality which would define principles, regulations, measures to achieve gender equality in all sectors, including political, administration, economy, education and sport, public health, labour and social welfare, science and technology, information, family affairs, national security, national defense, equality in filing complaints, self-reliance, elimination of discrimination, division and restriction or denial of gender equality in all areas, creating opportunities for both genders to enjoy their rights in all areas.

Specifically to address the rights of the girl child, Lao PDR launched Noi Approach in 2016 for achieving gender equality and empowerment of adolescent girls which is a holistic approach. It aims at addressing the obstacles faced by adolescent girls and accelerating the progress towards achieving SDGs. Noi approach is developed to raise awareness, build partnerships and increase investments in adolescent girl that enable them to achieve their full potential. Noi's progress is closely monitored through 5 indicators included in the Noi 2030 framework aligned with the global SDG framework to be achieved by 2030.

The Noi 2030 Framework – Achieving Gender Equality & Empowerment of Adolescent Girls

Noi represents all 700,230 adolescent girls aged 10-19 in Lao PDR.** The unfinished MDG agenda has proven that adolescent girls have been left behind. The SDGs aim to reach those left furthest behind.

Noi was created as an advocacy tool to raise awareness, build partnerships and increase investments in adolescent girls that enable them to achieve their full potential. Noi was launched on the International Day of the Girl Child in 2016.



Noi's progress is closely monitored through 5 indicators aligned with the global SDG framework until 2030 when she turns 25, using the available disaggregated data on adolescents generated by the Lao Social Indicator Survey every 5 years.

A holistic approach to addressing Noi's obstacles accelerates the progress towards the SDGs, inducing a virtuous circle with a poverty reduction outcome, benefiting Noi, her community and the nation.

6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

6.1 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies?

In the compensation and resettlement policy framework by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) adopted in 2018, women is regarded as the vulnerable group that enjoy the full extent of compensation possible. The framework also recognizes that certain social groups, which women is included, may be less able to restore their living conditions, livelihoods and income level; therefore, are at greater risk of impoverishment when their land and other assets are affected.

In the Policy Brief on National Green Growth Strategy, which is still in the drafting process by the Lao Government, it is recommended that gender should be included as basis of the strategy as improving gender equality can have a profound effect on economic growth and integral to maximizing green growth.

With the support from UN Environment, UN Women and other development partners, Lao PDR has continued to mainstream gender in the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAP) and aligned its key actions with SDGs. Lao PDR believes that through the linkages between gender relationships and environment, it will help to achieve a better analysis of patterns of use, knowledge and skills regarding conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the country, which is in line with the national target of achieving national goal of 70 percent forest cover of the total national area by 2020, among others. To strengthen this initiative, a workshop on Elaboration of the Gender Roadmap for Laos NBSAP was held on 4-5 September 2018 in Vientiane Capital with representatives from LWU, NCAWMC and others to discuss in details on the links between gender and biodiversity.

Females are usually doing the house chores and involved in unpaid care. To date, there is no figure on the percentage of households using woods and coals as the source of energy in Lao DPR. However, it can be derived that the percentage of using wood and coals as the source of energy can be high given the low the percentage of household members with primary reliance on clean fuels and technologies for cooking, space heating and lighting being 0.2 percent (LSIS, 2016/2017). Therefore, chances of women inflicted with respiratory related disease can be high.

6.2 What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation?

In the last five years, the Lao Government has continued to implement its Strategic Plan for Disaster Risk Management and a current Action Plan (2010 – 2020). To complement this strategic plan, the Lao Government has adopted the recent Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030, in which the framework requires the Lao Government to collect the number of deaths, injured or ill people attributed to disasters disaggregated by sex. To guide in the implementation of the disaster management, the Lao Government has published Disaster Management Reference Handbook in November 2017.

The recent nationwide flooding in 2018 has prompted many policy makers to consider effective climate resilience and mitigation programmes in the disaster recovery framework to support the vulnerable groups, including the old, females and children, which is expected to be ready by early 2019. The immediate response to the collapse of the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy dam saddle, one of the factors that caused flooding in Attapeu province in 2018, was to set up six Child Friendly Spaces and two Women Friendly Spaces by the UN Humanitarian Country Team in coordination with LWU to provide a safe place for women and girls to access information and reproductive health services.

To continue the response and recovery strategy, a number of immediate, short-term and long-term recovery needs, including for the establishment and/or restoration of mechanisms that meet the specific needs of women, children, and people with disabilities are recommended in Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) 2018.

III. Section 3: National Institutions and Processes

3.1 What is your country's current national machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women? Please name it and describe its location within Government.

There are three pillars of institution that implement and monitor the policies for the advancement of women in Lao DPR. First, the Lao Women's Union (LWU), established in 1955, is mandated to represent women of all ethnic groups, to protect women's rights and benefits. LWU is guided by the principle of *Gender Equality for National Development*. It has three campaigns: "Good Citizen, Good Development, and Good Family." and reaches out to women from the national, provincial, district and village levels. Its status is now the equivalent to that of a Ministry. LWU has its representative in all the ministries and equivalent as well as the local governments, making the coordination and dissemination of information related to the implementation of BPfA relatively smooth.

Second, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC), established since 2003, is mandated to define national policies, strategies, and programmes for the development and promotion of women. It is also responsible for implementing national policy for the advancement of women as well as mainstreaming gender in all sectors. To ensure the effective implementation of BPfA and issues related to gender equality, NCAWMC has established sub-CAW to be placed in almost all of the governmental institutions in both central and local governments. Since 2018, NCAWMC Secretariat has relocated its office to LWU to ensure the effective resource utilization and strengthen the implementation of national policies for the advancement of women.

Third, the National Assembly Women's Caucus was established by the National Assembly in 2010 to be an organization of female members of the National Assembly under the supervision of the National Assembly Standing Committee. The National Assembly Women's Caucus focuses on mainstreaming gender equality into law making process, the exercising oversight over the implementation of the Constitution, laws and policies concerning gender equality, women's advancement and mother and child issues, promote the development and protection of women and children.

To ensure the coherence and seamless coordination between the central and local units as well as effective utilization of resources, the National Assembly Women's Caucus issued a decree No.013/NAWC dated on 02 February 2017 stating that the machinery for the National Assembly Women's Caucus to coordinate with the Provincial Assembly Women's Caucus is through the local units of LWU and NCAWMC that already have presence across the country. This platform also tasks the local units of LWU and NCAWMC to conduct capacity building to the members of the Provincial Assembly Women's Caucus.

3.2 Is the head of the national machinery a member of the institutional process for SDG implementation?

LWU is the head of the national machinery in monitoring the progress of BPfA. Even though, the implementation and progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is monitored by the National SDG Secretariat comprising Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Planning and Investment, LWU is

one SDG reporting owner or the focal point as well as the SDG implementation owner of “SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls”. The role of the SDG reporting owner is to gather relevant data on the progress of the assigned SDG to report to the National SDG Secretariat on a regular basis while the role of SDG implementation owner is to work closely with relevant stakeholders in implementing the localized SDG indicators.

The National SDG Secretariat will report to the National SDG Steering Committee on the SDG implementation of Lao PDR. Apart from that, the SDG related discussion topics will also feed into the agenda of the annual Round Table Meeting, a national platform for the Lao Government to discuss with development partners on development issues pertinent to Lao PDR. Therefore, in short, the implementation of SDG 5 is synonymous to implementing the action plans of BPfA.

3.3 Are there formal mechanisms in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The Lao Government sees the value in the consultation with different stakeholders in order to achieve a fruitful development result. There has not been any stakeholder engagement to specifically carry out to merely suit the needs of BPfA, but stakeholder engagement has been carrying in different forms by different ministries on agendas, directly and indirectly, related to the 12 critical areas of concern in BPfA. LWU is the secretariat of BPfA coordinating with both government and non-government stakeholders to gather input to the progress of BPfA.

Prior to submitting this review (BPfA+25), consultations with different sectors including governmental bodies, development partners and CSOs were organized to gather comments on the review. Additional efforts were put in by LWU to reach out to sectors that were not present during the official consultations via both offline and online communications to gather their comments to ensure the review is as inclusive and objective as possible.

While adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Lao Government is committed in the principle of leaving no one behind. Therefore, the first Voluntary National Review for Sustainable Development (VNR) submitted in 2018 was developed based on that principle in the spirit of inclusiveness, participation and transparency, whereby the Lao Government inviting stakeholders from government sector, private sector, UN agencies, INGOs, CSOs, academia and development partners to contribute their ideas to the first VNR.

The National SDG Secretariat located at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also assigned the SDG reporting owners on all the SDGs to various line ministries and equivalent to oversee the progress of the Agenda. Stakeholders can approach the line ministries of the National SDG Secretariat directly for any concern.

3.4 Is gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls included as a key priority in the national plan/ strategy for SDG implementation?

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is included as a key priority in the national plan through the 8th NSEDP and the localization of SDG, especially on SDG 5 and other SDGs with data on disaggregation by gender. Meanwhile, different ministries also incorporate gender equality into their own sectoral strategies.

IV. Section 4: Data and Statistics

4.1 What are the top three areas in which your country has made most progress in the last five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

Developing a good, efficient and effective national statistical system is necessary and crucially important for Lao PDR to improve the quality of official statistics according to statistical scientific approaches and methodologies with the appropriate production and dissemination processes. In the last five years, the top three areas which Lao PDR has made progress on the gender statistics include (1) commitment from the top leaders on data production (2) the formulation of statistics strategy to support national statistical system, which extends its coverage to gender specific data, and (3) incorporating gender specific data in national surveys.

4.1.1 Commitment from top leaders on data production

Leaders in the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), especially from the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), have consistently provided guidelines and directions on the operations of national statistical work and attached importance to the localization and mainstreaming BPfA to the national and sectoral data collection strategies. Under the leadership of MPI, LSB has performed a central role in collecting, summarizing, analyzing and disseminating official statistics which are used to support socioeconomic development planning of the government and for general domestic and international users. With the resolute tone from the top and the concerted efforts, the progress on gender statistics is significant in recent years as testified in the many studies and surveys commissioned and produced by the Lao Government as well as development partners such UNFPA, UN Women, ADB, World Bank and CSOs.

4.1.2 Formulation of statistics law and strategy

LSB takes lead to be the national data provider, and the statistic law was officially issued on 30 June 2010 to gather feedback from relevant stakeholders, and finally approved by National Assembly on 11 May 2017. Building on the approved law, LSB has come out with impressive Strategy for the Sustainable Development of National Statistical System (2016 -2025) and Vision toward 2030 to support the monitoring and evaluation of localized SDG indicators with many directly and indirectly linking to BPfA. Under this strategy, it is promising that there will be robust data system to support national development needs.

4.1.3 Incorporation of gender specific data

Following the decree from the Prime Minister's Office dated in January 2000 and January 2005 mentioning the need for gender disaggregation data, the recent LSIS (2016/2017) and LFS (2016/2017) produced by LSB incorporate many indicators targeting at gender equality in their surveys.

It is also the first time that a national survey LSIS (2016/2017) has included and provided important data on abortion among women of the reproductive age (15-49 years of age). The results show that, on average, 6.1 percent of women have experienced at least one induced abortion in their lifetime, with a pronounced difference between provinces, ranging from 1 percent in Saravane province up to 15.1 percent in Vientiane

province. 1.48 percent of these women are adolescents aged 15-19. Furthermore, the data reveals that only 50 percent of women who have experienced complications from an induced abortion during the last 5 years have sought health care (87 percent of 15-19 year olds have sought health care for abortion-related complications compared to only 25.4 percent of 20-24 year olds).

4.1.4 Challenges

Despite the progress, the data to support some of BPfA's critical areas of concern provided by LSB is still limited due to the mismatch of cyclical data and shortage of resources to conduct surveys specifically just to support the needs of BPfA, especially disaggregated data on sex, ethnicity and disability. The latest national data from LSB to support the BPfA and many other conventions are Lao Expenditure Consumption (LEC) 2015, Population Household Census (PHC) 2015, Lao Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2017 and Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) 2017 as well as the national survey of Women's Health and Life Experiences 2014, Violence Against Children 2014 and national survey on education (LESMIS). The next Economic Census and Agriculture Census should be ready by 2020, which can further provide important insights to the progress of BPfA's critical areas of concerns.

Furthermore, the survey information still cannot respond to the monitoring and evaluation needs in a timely fashion. Some of the data, especially not in the national priorities, may not get produced, which to a large extent hinders the comprehensive analysis of the progress and challenges of BPfA. LSB is currently reviewing the data cycle of all surveys under its leadership to map out the data gaps so that resources can be utilized effectively to respond to the needs of national and sectoral development plans.

4.2 Out of the following which are your country's top three priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years?

The top three priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years include (1) harmonization of administrative data on disaggregated data by gender to ensure consistency and accuracy in the data, (2) sourcing for funding to carry out disaggregated data on gender to feature on the dashboard to keep progress on the data in a timeline manner and (3) conducting capacity building to LSB staff and line ministries on the data methodology to ensure a robust data system.

4.2.1 Harmonization of data

As Lao PDR moves forward with the BPfA and SDGs, and implements its national development plans (NSED and sectoral plans), enhanced support is needed to strengthen the information systems of ministries, particularly in the areas where these cannot yet produce robust and disaggregated data to support the needs of BPfA and on the localized SDG indicators. This is also crucial as Lao PDR is continuing to produce different types of surveys to suit the national and international needs with data on gender. Surveys to be produced in the next five years include Agriculture Census III in 2019, Lao Labour Force Survey III in 2020, Lao Social Indicator Survey III in 2020, Economics Census IV in 2020 and others. To achieve this, among other factors, it requires capacity building for the officials, awareness raising on the importance of

reliable data and the adoption of advanced information technology that can be employed in statistical production and dissemination to reduce numbers of staff and increase effectiveness.

4.2.2 Sources of funding

To build a robust national statistics system that can support the needs of development, especially on the disaggregated data on gender and age, it requires significant funding, which reliance on the state's budget alone might not be sufficient. Therefore, LSB will continue to mobilize resources and take leading role in attracting assistance, adequate domestic and international sources of funding to make available sufficient budget to support statistical activities at central and local levels.

4.2.3 Capacity building

LSB has organized annual meetings on official statistics, which serve as annual statistical meetings as well as forum for statistics producers and users to meet, discuss and plan statistical activities together. The coordination has gradually improved through mechanisms such as data collection, dissemination and annual meetings as well as various surveys in each period. Nevertheless, the levels of data expertise and skills among the officials, especially at the local levels, are still limited and will need further enhancement.

In this regard, LSB will continue to partner with development partners to leverage on their expertise and technical support to train the Lao statistics officials to gather specific data in line with proven methodologies to support the needs of BPfA, SDGs and other conventions that the Lao Government has committed to push forward.

4.3 Have you defined a national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs?

The National SDG Secretariat has been taking lead in SDG localization since late 2016 with the adoption of one national SDG on SDG 18: Lives Safe from UXO. Each localized SDG indicator will accompany with a set of national metadata to guide the line ministries in implementing SDGs. The official set of localized SDG indicators is expected to be completed and approved by mid-2019.

The final set of localized SDG indicators will also inform the establishment of SDG dashboard to keep track of the progress on the SDGs in a transparent and timely manner. The localized SDG indicators will also continue to be mainstreamed into the 9th and 10th NSEDP and sectoral strategies to ensure effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4.4 Has data collection and compilation on the SDG 5 indicators and on the gender-specific indicators under SDGs begun?

The recent national survey in LSIS (2016/2017) and LFS (2016/2017) have already included some indicators on SDG 5 with disaggregated data on gender. At the same time, the administrative data collected by LWU, NCAWMC, line ministries and development partners have also begun, with data on many newly adopted indicators forming baseline values for further monitoring and evaluation.

The data collected from both government and non-government sectors feed into the first VNR that Lao PDR presented at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2018.

4.5 Which of the following disaggregation is routinely provided by major surveys in your country?

LSB, being the lead of the national data provider, publishes the following data on a routine basis:

Table 1: Data Frequency by Lao Statistics Bureau

Data	Frequency
Enterprise Survey	Quarterly
Annual House Census	Every 1 year
Lao Social Indicator Survey	Every 5 years
Labour Force Survey	Every 5 years
Population and Housing Census	Every 5 years
Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey	Every 5 years
Village Statistics and Poverty	Every 5 years
Civil Registration and Vital Registration	Every 5 years
Population Count	Every 5 years
Economic Census	Every 10 years
Agriculture Census	Every 10 years

This data, to a large extent, attempts to include disaggregated data by gender in line with the decree from the Prime Minister’s Office dated in January 2000 and January 2005. Apart from the above-mentioned data, there is also administrative data being published on both regular and ad-hoc basis by line ministries. For instance, with the modern systems such as LESMIS adopted by MOES and DHIS2 adopted by MOH, a more timely and accurate set of disaggregated data by sex can be obtained to provide a more holistic data analysis to the implementation of BPfA.

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